
Writer's Statement about "Expanding Constraints"

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My goal with this paper was to give a narrative of my experiences with writing while I was growing up, explain where I saw myself as a writer up to that point, and consider where I thought I was headed in order to understand myself better as a writer and thus improve my writing. The actual class assignment was to pick between that or to do an autoethnography using several conditions that students would set up for themselves to see where, when, and with what their ideal writing conditions were. I did the experiments, but found that it was essentially pointless as I had already established what conditions were ideal for me as a writer before this even happened (which, if you're curious, is around nine in the morning on a laptop with my breakfast next to me [I knew you were curious]).

I wanted to write about something that I didn't already know about, so I figured I'd try my hand at the past. One of the hardest parts of writing this essay was just remembering everything that got me to this point. At first I focused on the big milestones. The ones I could easily think of and go, "Yeah, that was probably important." It was almost like looking back and studying history, just on a much more personal level (note: this is what I tell people to justify not doing actual book research). As I did my first draft, I began to remember specific, more interesting stories about my writing experiences, and that's where the Lewis and Clark story, and pretty much the entire basis for the essay, came from.

The other hurdle was how to go about linking all these events to the audience I was writing to and the problem I was trying to solve. I wrote all my essays in that class with other writing students and my teacher in mind. That's just who I thought about whenever I had to start writing a core essay. I tried to compare how I had grown as a writer to people we had learned about in class, but it ultimately felt forced. I talked to my professor about it and he told me some pretty solid advice, "If it doesn't relate back to the main topic somehow, it doesn't need to be there." I like to think that was kind of the main point of the class: That the ideal essay was concise, specific, and always related back to the problem that was originally addressed.

I decided against trying to relate my experiences to what we learned in class and just tell the story of how I got to this point, using constraints I had with my writing when I was younger as a consistent theme throughout the narrative to help explain why I write the way I do now. I figured if I was honest (and added just a hint of ambiguity), my intended audience would be able to take something away from the essay besides a story about some guy who thinks that writing is pretty great. And I'm hoping that the final product I made was able to accomplish that, because hey, somebody liked it.