
Writer's Statement about "Navigating Authority in Coursework and Life: An Unofficial Guide for Fellow Students"

WILLA MADDOX

If I were not given limits or constraints or timeframes, I would keep writing forever. I would edit and add, place in new meanings and tricks, search for more information and consider other viewpoints as I grew and as the world changed. I would be specific and subtle on one occasion and then in the next make philosophical claims so remarkable and challenging I would have to re-convince even myself that they may be possible if further work were done to establish a basis or reinforce the connection. Then I could keep writing; I could keep making it better. But I am not quite that available as far as the free time, and college coursework and life in general commonly resist such boundless fancies. There are rules by which we must live, but writing in college tolerates some bends in its conformities. And there are necessary channels for any gain or accomplishment, but writing in college accesses these authorities.

To begin this piece on authority and coursework, it was stated in my ENC 1101 class that we would be composing a work presented as advice for incoming freshmen students in the first-year writing curriculum. Reflecting back on the process as a whole, I would like to believe that a sigh of disdain escaped my lips as my forehead crinkled in despair and my arms folded tightly to my chest to display my despise for the entire assignment. This was probably not how it actually played out. No, I most likely just internalized my thoughts regarding writing to students, of which I generally displace as not my audience, and I do not typically write in the less formal style that an essay-style genre calls for. Through my lament, I began to construct my work, and though I knew this would be the most difficult paper for me in this course, I recognized others in my class would find it less problematic. And there was my solace—I was writing for others and to others, and, in this sense, the very resources and test subjects were all around me.

While composing through various aspects and components, I crafted as though it were a question and answer session, and although only one "voice" in the conversation is provided, I imagined it as if each answer reveals in the mind of the observer and speaker a subsequent place to deliver or detail a follow-up question and response. Maybe in this sense what I am truly doing is asking repeated rhetorical questions that were not necessarily asked, but will be given an answer regardless. With that structure in place, the background research of scholars and linguists enter the discussion as the subject area experts, the people in the white lab coats who insert their knowledge

with opportune timing. To ensure others would decipher my intentions, I asked the opinions of my classmates. Did they understand my references to Good Will Hunting? What short-hand codes were popular and in use in social media? I also compelled the audience by placing common occurrences found in college life: speech class, dinner with friends, mingling into conversations, thoughts of career prospects, reminiscing to high school, television watching, considerations toward new insights or knowledge, challenging societies' structures, dating. This not only offers referable examples, but places them into a position of the student mind frame of listener, a place they know all too well, and whether this is recognized or not, they may begin to pay attention by way of association. My peers became integral, supportive assets as both inspirations and consorts.

This particular piece gave me freedoms not so readily afforded in other college work. Per Professor Ringfield's instructions, I was given the liberty to utilize any genre I deemed fit. This autonomy allowed me to integrate what I usually leave out of my written work: me. The stuffy genres leave little room for self-inclusion, which I typically enjoy omitting. However, given the audience, and a choice to deviate from my normal modes, I chose an informal essay as it best permits a dialogue between speaker and listener and across lines of inquiry. And though I chose to maintain my standard of not writing in first person, I see myself peek out from behind the lines of my text: I am a Public Administration major, I love using repetition, I was able to use huge run-on sentences (though they were technically correct) which for some reason I find enticing, I want to challenge others to think about societal pressures, I also enjoy having dinner, and I was able to use some form or amount of humor (right?).

This piece allowed to me to counter issues faced by so many college students—writing and utilizing authority both within academic studies and life. What is college if it is not an orientation into life, the exposure and the examination toward self-discovery and knowledge of our world, and the navigational tools that come from such processes? To circle back to the prompt given in my ENC 1101 class, it was stated that it would be an advice piece for other students. But now when I think of it in this moment, who or what freshmen were going to read my work, where were they—I never met them? And then it becomes apparent. I was that student and my classmates that reviewed my work were the freshmen. Clever little trick. We were learning through doing, discovering while writing. We were gaining authority by studying its applications and mechanisms, and we were being given the ownership of our own education and construction of knowledge. Quite, quite clever. Well, maybe now others will be able to read it!