
Writer's Statement for "Essence of Technical Writing: Communication between Non-Experts and Experts in a Constrained Genre"

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To put it simply, this project was a marathon, not a sprint. It was the result of an immense amount of time, effort, and conflict resolutions. I was tasked with describing how writing does work in the world. The most difficult aspect of this marathon was establishing the niche, or the distinct area of research my essay would fulfill. My professor, Matthew Bryan, was crucial in helping me establish this niche so I could commit to an overall direction. Personally, as an engineer, I am naturally drawn to fixing things and striving to make the world a better place. Researching engineering in general is too large of a scope, and so I concentrated my research on how things get fixed in a public high school environment.

I understood the project as a chance to explore the environment around me and how technological issues actually were communicated in a work environment, and, more specifically, technical communication between non-experts and experts, teachers and tech support. As an engineer, I found the nuisances of this communication intriguing and I believed the experience would aid me in my future endeavors. Because of this, I never really thought of this project as a writing paper or school assignment; it was always something more. By removing the school project connotation, I could focus more on the project and ideas themselves as opposed to the execution (grammar, punctuation, and spelling). I learned how to improve my writing and thought processes, as well as learned important life lessons pertinent to my field of work.

The execution of this project was truly a marathon. Initially, students had to "train" for it by learning new tools and ideas such as genre theory, discourse communities, and Greene's concept of argument as conversation. These tools were needed to conduct useful research and form coherent arguments. Using these tools allowed me to develop more questions and truly dig deeper into the community I was analyzing.

This writing endeavor was made much easier due to my professor breaking it down into bite-sized pieces. As we completed each small task, we would go through a peer review process where writers collected critiques and ideas for improvement. They would then revise the piece prior to submission for a more professional critique from the professor. This helped me reduce the stakes and be more exploratory in my writing, trying new ideas and new methods. These feedback sessions really permitted me to focus my ideas and refine my niche.

Analyzing my hands-on research was truly an epiphany moment. I remember locking myself in my room for two days analyzing and categorizing my research. For the first day, I observed the six pages of spreadsheets across the table and thought to myself, "Now what?" I had no idea what I was looking at or how to proceed until I started utilizing the tools I learned in class. Once I applied the lens of a constrained genre to the tickets themselves, I could process the intent of the designers. It was a start. I could see that the tickets were there to initiate communication and to get the ball rolling between the teachers and technical support. After understanding the intent of the genre itself, I analyzed how each individual teacher went about completing it. From then on, the rest of the thoughts and ideas just flowed out. I could begin looking at the individual sections of the genre and take quantitative measurements such as word count, punctuation count, and tagging patterns. Then, I could begin making connections to secondary research and begin making my own assertions.

For me, getting started is always the hardest part to overcome. Finding the niche, the purpose of the essay, is my greatest struggle. But once this is discovered and identified I can go from there, and then the ideas just flow. To relate back to the marathon analogy, often the first few miles are the hardest: one is just trying to find their pace. Then, after a while, it becomes instinctive and the runner will find their rhythm.

Work Cited

Greene, Stuart. "Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs, 2nd ed., Bedford/St. Martins, 2014, pp. 28-38. Originally published in *The Subject is Research*, edited by Wendy Bishop and Pavel Zemliansky, Boynton/Cook, 2001, pp.145-64.