

Myself as a Writer

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Course: English 101

Instructor: Dr. Beth Calloway

Assignment: Problem and Solution Essay

Sometimes we catch ourselves expecting to be perfect in all areas of life. When mistakes or difficulties occur, we often become frustrated and yearn to give up yet, whether the task is driving a standard vehicle, solving a frictional torque equation, pitching a baseball, or sewing a prom dress, it is never too late to learn. Writing is not an exception. Just as Rome was not built in a day, writing in its entirety cannot be learned in an hour. However, by identifying particular problems when writing, the process can gradually be learned. The invention of a paper, the effective citation of sources, and the correct use of commas, are my major dilemmas when writing; each yields an efficient solution that will aid me in becoming an improved writer.

As I hop out of a blistering shower, the brainstorm session is completed. Every closet, cabinet, and corridor of my mind is filled with amazing ideas. A senses-triggering introduction, a terrific thesis, never-ending supporting details, and a touching conclusion, are joyfully singing and dancing around in my head, anxious to be written. It is 11:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 10th. I have yet to start a four-page English paper due Wednesday, October 11th, at precisely 8:00 a.m. Lethargically, I begin to apply lotion to my newly-shaven skin, dreading the self-driven “all-nighter” that lies ahead. Ideas still spinning and chanting, I continue to procrastinate by exfoliating my face, whitening my teeth, and plucking my obnoxious eyebrows. At approximately midnight, I finally decide it is time to get down to business. After twenty minutes of organizing my writing materials, I pick up a pen. Suddenly, the treasure chest of remarkable ideas has disappeared. What now? Where do I begin? As the minutes soar by, I grow

increasingly anxious. It is now 12:43 a.m. With a blank mind, I glance at a stack of books buried underneath shopping bags filled with the afternoon's purchases. My mother is always buying pointless books that I never use. However, one catches my eye. With nothing better to do, I begin flipping through the book. I believe I have just found the answer to my prayers! According to *Universal Keys for Writers: A Reference Guide for College Students*, freewriting is a great way to attack a paper (Raimes and Jerskey 29). But what is freewriting? When freewriting, "you let one idea lead to another in free association" (29). This exercise would serve as a magnificent tool in relocating my treasure chest of ideas. When preparing to freewrite, Raimes and Jerskey suggest setting a timer for five to ten minutes. In those minutes, write incessantly. Using slang and abbreviations works remarkably for this technique (29). When the alarm sounds, *Roots to Branches: An Ecology of Writing and Reading* advises that reading over the material and highlighting the best thought that surfaced and then focusing on that thought will assist vastly in attacking the paper (Wiemelt, Slawson, and Whitton 334). I take this advice seriously and scurry to find a highlighter.

As I continue to skim *Universal Keys for Writers: A Reference Guide for College Students*, I come across another invention technique known as mapping (29). Mapping is a "visual way of brainstorming and connecting ideas" (Raimes and Jerskey 32). The book states that jotting the topic in the center of the paper is the first step in mapping. When associated ideas are thought of, scribbling them around the topic is the second step. Drawing circles around each individual idea and connecting them to the topic with lines provide graphic organization. Finally, when details are discovered, adding them to the map is easy and keeps them orderly (33). This process of invention seems ideal for me because organization is my specialty.

In addition, I stumble upon a method to overcome procrastination. Raimes and Jerskey propose that creating a development schedule by working backwards from the deadline will prevent another outrageous all-nighter (26). The plan indicates that breaking down the assignment into individual parts, such as narrowing the topic or editing the rough draft, and completing each task on separate days will eliminate feelings of stress and apprehension. This system will significantly benefit me when writing future papers.

With the assistance of invention methods, my paper is finally coming together. I begin to feel a sense of relief. My uneasy mind-set has settled, and I am incredibly focused. While reading over the developing paper, I notice a major problem. Parenthetical citations are completely absent from my account. Exhausted and overwhelmed, I begin to tear up in frustration. All hope is lost. I don't even know *what* to cite, much less how. In fury, I slam my pen on the desk. The stack of useless books falls to the floor with an intolerable thump, scaring me silly. After all, it is 4:00 in the morning. With watery eyes, I notice a different book. Once again, I begin skimming through, praying for answers. Sure enough, Robert A. Harris informs me that "if the information came from outside your own head, cite the source" (16). I now understand that any new information acquired from a source, other than yourself, must be documented. His principal rule in citing sources is "if in doubt, cite it" (19). I agree with this rule, recognizing that it is better to be safe than sorry. Memorizing these catchy phrases is a wonderful way to grasp when a citation is needed. Harris also gives examples of sources that always need citations; among these are words that are quoted, words that are summarized, words that are paraphrased, a drawing, and an example (19).

Finally, after incorporating the normally mystifying parenthetical citations, I conclude my paper. I begin to somewhat relax. I glance at the clock, 5:04 a.m. I may even have time for a

fifteen minute nap before I attend class! My spirits rise, but not for long. During my revision, I spot the infinite use of commas. My eyes are on fire from gawking at the computer screen; my fingers are cramping from typing, and I am beat. I instantly curse myself for encountering another problem. However, this time, I head straight for a book in the disorganized stack. James M. McCrimmon, the author of *Writing With A Purpose*, states that a comma splice is “the use of a comma, instead of a period or semicolon, between two main clauses not joined by a connective,” such as: “This is the best book I have ever read, it kept me up all night” (427). From McCrimmon, I learn that one way to adjust this comma splice is to replace the comma with a period or semicolon. A second way to correct a comma splice is to supply a coordinating connective, such as but, between the two main clauses. The last way to revise a comma splice is to subordinate one main clause to the other clause. Therefore, the comma splice “It is a beautiful day, the park will be crowded.” becomes “Because it is a beautiful day, the park will be crowded” (Harris 428). Thankful that my dreaded comma drama is solved, I utilize the rules in my paper, applying a unique approach for each faulty comma.

At last, my paper is complete. It is now 6:12 a.m. A great sense of accomplishment fills my heart. I am proud of my paper, and I actually like what I wrote, which is an all-time first. I am so excited to turn it in that the fifteen minute nap that sounded like heaven an hour ago now sounds crazy. Besides, there is no way I can sleep with a giant smile on my face. Although the invention of a paper, the effective citation of sources, and the correct use of commas are my main dilemmas when writing, these innovative solutions have already begun to improve me as a writer. My writing is probably still not perfect; however, I am eager to learn even more tactics that will assist me in gradually becoming a successful writer. After all, writing in its entirety cannot be learned in an hour, just as Rome was not built in a day!

Works Cited

Harris, Robert A. Using Sources Effectively. Glendale, CA: Pyczak, 2005.

McCrimmon, James M. Writing with a Purpose. Boston: Houghton, 1957.

Raimes, Ann, and Maria Jerskey. Universal Keys for Writers: A Reference Guide for College Students. Boston: Houghton, 2008.

Wiemelt, Jeff, Jayetta Slawson, and Natasha Whitton, eds. Roots to Branches: An Ecology of Writing and Reading. New York: Pearson, 2007.

Dr. Calloway's Comments: *Hillary's essay demonstrates the power of finding one's "voice" in order to make a writing assignment informative and engaging. Several outstanding essays were submitted for this assignment, but Hillary's is exceptional due to her voice and writing style.*