

Christopher Nazario

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English 21003

## **Self-Assessment Essay**

In its most rudimentary definition writing is a medium of communicating thoughts and ideas into a legible form using signs and symbols. This was my sole perception of writing before this semester. I dislodged this perception of writing from my mind after reading and writing a variety of scientific papers and learning critical writing skills from the textbook *Writing in the Life Sciences*. Currently, I perceive writing as a multifaceted form of communication, one that surpasses ink on paper but rather expands into generating thoughts and ideas that can be expressed orally and have the ability to save lives and drive cultures forward. When I think about what writing is now I think about news-casters reading written information from an anchoring script to verbally communicate that information to the public. This anchor script has to be written by a professional who can transform a research paper full of jargon into something a lay audience can understand. In this example, we see three words: reading, writing, and verbal communication. If I had to define what writing is I would say that writing is a medium of communication that is interconnected with reading and oral communication and aims to inform its readers in a clear, coherent, and convincing manner for a specific goal or purpose. It took me some time to grasp this concept and develop this perception. In this self-assessment essay, I use various examples of papers to show how my perception of what writing is and how it has evolved. I also show how I used the course learning objectives to help me improve my writing. I

intentionally list my texts in chronological order so that I may effortlessly display how my writing has improved over time.

## **Obesity and the Gut Microbiome: The Missing Link**

This text was one of the first of many texts that I have written for this class. Initially, one can see that when mentioning the title of a NY Times article I failed to italicize the title but instead wrote it in quotations. This minor mistake is something I was ignorant about and addressed as my writing improved. Although this may seem minor, I point this out because it is a weakness that has constantly appeared in my writing due to habit. I perceived strengths in my writing as it relates to content and clarity. In this text I clearly state what it is that I am writing about. Furthermore, when citing the research discussed in the article I make sure to clearly and concisely summarize research regarding the gut microbiome and its relation to obesity. I do this without the quandary of being too wordy or too vague. This is important because it provides readers with the right amount of information while still being able to get my ideas and opinions across. Imagine trying to read a news article about a new technology that uses artificial intelligence to speed up drug recovery and being bombarded with tons of jargon and mathematical equations. This will likely leave the reader confused or frustrated if they don't have the aptitude for this type of information. I end this paper with a conclusion that is the opposite of the strengths that were just mentioned. In my conclusion I failed to fully express my thoughts, concerns, and opinions regarding the article. This may have been partly due to the fact that I did not think critically about the scientific arguments cited in this article. Instead, I stated

what I thought was obvious and did not bother to challenge any outcomes of the studies mentioned. I now understand the importance of this and will continue to be more aware of this issue as a writer.

## **How a NY Times Article Convinced Me to Try CBD**

This text was inspired by the Trump whistleblower complaint document. This was a text that we analyzed in class and what stood out to me the most was how well the author delivered his message to the public. I learned that the author used a key strategy in this document known as the rhetorical goal. I attempted to mirror how the author used this strategy in my paper by using subtitles that allowed me to focus in on the message I wanted the reader to receive. Just as one highlights specific characteristics and experiences in an interview to get the desired job, one must similarly highlight anything that will get their overall message across to their target audience. In this text I summarize Dawn MacKeen's article on the NY Times about CBD. In using the strategy of developing a rhetorical goal I made sure to mention that I thought this article was exceptional and how the author provides its reader with the potential to make up their minds about this chemical and its efficacy. I constructed my rhetorical goal off of this and used subtitles to highlight parts of the article that I felt was suitable to accomplish what was mentioned in my introduction. First, I mentioned how MacKeen uses statistics to pull the reader in. The use of statistics is imperative in highlighting the importance of real world issues. Second, I mentioned how MacKeen uses subheadings to hone in on specific details about CBD and the research behind it. This use of subheadings is a very efficient strategy for implementing your

rhetorical goal which is why I used it in my text. Finally, I reference the stance she takes on the topic by highlighting the tone she uses in her article.

This text was special because it gave me a stereoscopic view of how to apply the rhetorical goal. It allowed me to apply this strategy while simultaneously analyzing an article in which the author implemented this same strategy. Furthermore, it led me to understand how developing a rhetorical goal in your writing is paramount to getting your message across to your specific audience. This further reinforces my current perception of writing which has to do with informing readers in a clear and concise fashion to get a specific message across. In my previous paper I mentioned that one of my strengths were how I got my message across to my audience. I believe that the Trump whistleblower article, NY Times article, and the text I am referring to helped me to build on this strength by giving me insight into different ways to apply the rhetorical goal. I am slowly becoming a better writer and my perception of writing is evolving.

## **Technical Description: Mechanisms of Penicillin**

This text is one of my favorite texts for a variety of reasons. I was instructed to describe a device, process, or mechanism in which I had some fundamental knowledge of to a lay audience. For the first time I felt like the professional I mentioned above whose purpose is to transform research articles into texts that can be easily understood by the public. I chose to rely on my experience as a pre-med student and choose something that I had a concrete understanding about. I learned about penicillin in biochemistry but still needed to lean on a variety of research papers

to elucidate the mechanisms penicillin in the human body. I once again adopted the strategy of the rhetorical goal. Except, this time I used it during brainstorming. There were a list of topics I could have written about but I approached it with the purpose of choosing a topic that is of major importance to society. I chose penicillin because without this drug many of us would be dying from bacterial infections are common in our lifetime. Approaching my paper with this goal allowed me to focus in on writing a technical description on something that is important as opposed to discussing the mechanism of a seesaw which may not have any social significance. I now peeled a new layer of understanding and implementing the rhetorical goal. Now that I had my topic I needed to read articles that were relevant to the instructions given to me for this assignment. This taught me how to read skillfully and read for relevance. I was no longer depending on the CTRL + f keyboard feature to look up keywords that would lead me to specific information I was looking for in my reading. Instead, I was reading, synthesizing, and filtering information that was necessary for my goal. I got a better understanding of the interconnectedness between reading and writing while working on this paper.

## **Scientific Controversy Paper**

The purpose of this paper was to choose a scientific controversy within any scientific field and assess the strengths and weaknesses of opposing views, ultimately leading me to display my stance on this controversy. This was the first research paper that required me to search for peer-reviewed journal articles. It allowed me to practice using various library sources like pubmed and medline. I was fairly weak in this area due to not taking a writing intensive class in a long time. I also developed the habit of going directly to google scholar to search for

research articles. Similar to my previous paper, I decided to pick a topic that had social significance. I chose to write my scientific controversy paper on the mixed research on the relationship between milk and strong bones. I used pubmed to find articles on my topic that were published on journals that dealt with nutrition, orthopedic medicine, and public health. Having a better understanding of how to navigate through pubmed made finding research papers much easier. In my first paper I mentioned that I did not think critically about the article I read on obesity and gut bacteria. I managed to apply critical thinking in my scientific controversy paper by placing an emphasis on analyzing the methods that were used in each research study I mentioned. I noted how factors such as sample size and statistical analyses were congruent the strengths and weaknesses of each research study. With this being said, it is no surprise that I concluded my paper with a more extensive conclusion. However, I do need to work on mentioning further research studies that can be done as this allows me to take the skill of critical thinking one step further.

## **Endocrine Disruptors in PET Bottles**

This research paper was the last major assignment I submitted. My research paper was focused on endocrine disrupting chemicals in PET bottles and whether or not they have an effect on human health. I had to lean on many of the skills the class textbook teaches when writing this paper. I also got the chance to strengthen many of my writing goals while also exposing my weaknesses. However, this was a group project and I would like to highlight the strengths and weaknesses this paper had due to our overall efforts. The biggest weakness in this paper was that it included excessive references to the same citation within paragraphs. This is something that I

understood to be on the cusp of plagiarism even though those were not our intentions. I am aware that this mistake can be very costly if not eliminated. This is paramount to becoming a good writer and something that I would be much more conscious of as a writer.

We faced some challenges during the creation of our research paper. One of these challenges included making sure we included all of the instructions and directions given by the professor on writing the research paper. We first had to analyze the assignment then create an outline, making sure all instructions and guidelines were included in this outline. We created a manuscript and found that this process was extremely helpful in allowing us to put our ideas on paper. I decided to choose the topic because I recently learned that plastic water bottles had chemicals that may be harmful to human beings. I wanted to learn more about this topic and pitched it to my partners and gained their interest in the topic. The only knowledge I had on this topic was from the internet and a podcast I listened to relating to this topic. It was now time to dive deep and learn more about this. Similar to scientific controversy paper we used pubmed to find peer-reviewed articles. This was a much more effortless ordeal compared to the first time I had to do this in my previous paper. Our research paper hypothesized that drinking water bottled in PET plastic would cause negative health effects to humans. Unfortunately, we were unable to reach this conclusion because we did not find this in our research. We found that there are chemicals in PET bottles, these chemicals leach into the water by factors such as time and temperature, and that these chemicals do interact with receptors found in our cells. We made sure to not stick to what the research studies found and not lean on our own opinions or views. This is a powerful skill that a writer must have because it can result in proper information getting out.

## Conclusion

Today I can say that I am a much better writer than I was prior to starting this class. I mention both my strengths and weaknesses as a writer and how I progressed throughout time. In my first paper I struggled with simple grammatical issues and framing a conclusion that employs critical thinking of the topic at hand. I mention my strengths which include delivering a clear and concise message to my audience. I build upon this strength in the rest of my work as seen in my second and third paper where I employ the use of the rhetorical argument. I also formulate and articulate my stance on the topics I discussed in my second and third paper. I practice the use of using pubmed in my scientific controversy and research paper. This was a skill that I initially struggled with due to forgetting. I can say that I am much more comfortable finding peer reviewed articles online. In my last paper I mention how my group and I had issues paraphrasing and the importance of this. I also mention some social aspects of writing such as delivering news to the public and not letting your own opinions get into the way of interpreting data. I believe that I have fulfilled all of the 8 course learning objectives to the best of my ability. I also believe that I have evolved as a writer in ways I couldn't have imagined. My perception of writing is much more universal and suited to the continuation of information that must be well presented in order to keep science revolutionary and life changing.



