

Author's Process Note & Red Pen Mentality

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Dear Reader,

I hope you realize how I have changed as a writer. I hope you understand what it took me to get me to the place I am in today. I hope you realized how all my teachers have impacted my writing journey. I hope you can see this “Red Pen Mentality” that has been silently created. I hope you can relate to my writing journey and connect with your Red Pen Mentality. I hope you understand why communication of ideas is particularly important and why the relationship between the author and the reader is important. I hope you understand my thought process through this reflective journey.

This assignment was a tricky assignment as I did not know where to start. At first glance, I felt I did not learn anything. I felt that I have learned random skills that do not connect to myself or my writing. It was hard for me to compare my writing over the course of this semester, but by broadening my writing to my whole life I could easily find changes in my writing process. The changes I found revolve around the comments and suggestions during revision stage. I decided to start there and see where that took me. When I finished writing my personal narrative reflection, I produced the term Red Pen Mentality, which refers to the negativity related to red ink corrections. I realized I wanted that to be the focus of my essay, so I went back and tied the Red Pen Mentality in throughout my writing. This was the part where I realized I made a mistake and needed to connect my reflection to a bigger point about writing. This is when I decided to add that writing is a way to connect to the reader and communicate the purpose. I tackled this assignment in a way that I have never done before, which makes me more nervous for this project.

Like I mentioned, I have been taking comments from workshops with an open mind. Coming into this essay, I had figured out my weaknesses and worked hard to not make the same mistakes. In this essay, I focused on having a centralized main point (by being able to do the broad things like communicate purpose, you eliminate some of the red pen marks, which makes corrections less daunting, therefore making the author more receptive and less intimidated). I also focused on balancing my personal narrative and my analysis. I struggled with this the most throughout this essay, because I added in the analysis and evidence (quotes) later, rather than starting with them. The hope is by focusing on these main corrections from previous workshops, I can prevent the same mistakes and learn from my previous writing.

I will end this letter with what I wish I had been taught at a younger age in the event you need to hear these lessons, too. (1) As a teacher, professor, or peer editor, it is important to include the good comments and not just the bad ones. (2) Teachers and professors want you to succeed, and their comments are to help you grow. (3) Do not take these corrections personally. Do not take

these comments as a dividing factor, they are giving you advice because they want you to be better. (4) You grow most when you are uncomfortable. These comments may be uncomfortable and make you feel ashamed, but it is in these moments that you will reflect on the most. (5) Have some confidence in yourself, you are still learning and that is okay. By telling you these lessons, I hope you can learn from my reflections.

Sincerely,

Olivia Colliton-Savina

Breaking the Red Pen Mentality

I entered this classroom as a stubborn writer, but I am leaving as a humbled, growing author. In the beginning of this class, I wrote how all I needed to learn was about different techniques and how to implement them in my writing. I quickly learned my writing struggles went beyond just techniques and skills. This semester, I finally broke away from fearing and being intimidated by corrections, or what I call the **Red Pen Mentality**. Red often symbolizes anger and can also be used to draw your attention to something (Stanton), hence corrections being written in red ink. **The Red Pen Mentality** is something that was instilled in me at an early age, and I am still working past it. Through this class, I realized before I tackled the specific details of writing, I must perfect the purpose of my writing. While it is important to understand the growth I went through in this class, I must acknowledge my writing journey is a process.

My writing journey started back in elementary school, where I loved writing and I felt so good about my writing. I used words like “therefore” and my teachers thought I was beyond my grade in writing. My teachers encouraged me to keep writing, and I did. Middle school, however, was vastly different as I do not remember writing that much. I do not recall receiving bad grades or feedback on my writing. Writing started feeling like a chore in middle school, because I was only writing because I had to. I was experiencing one of the pitfalls that "Why Blog? Searching for Writing on the Web" by Alex Reid explained in their article:

Unfortunately, often the trappings of school curriculum can interfere with our ability to connect writings to our own goals and interests. General education requirements, credits, grades, and other potential rewards and punishments of academic life can crowd out our ability to find some intrinsic motivation (Reid 303).

This was exactly what happened to me and most of my peers. We all lost our intrinsic motivation and were now playing the game of teacher-pleasing. High school was like middle school, but with subtle changes. My freshman year teacher told my class she was going to completely change the way we write. It felt very degrading and that we (meaning my whole class, but specifically myself because I took it personally at the time) did not know the right way to write essays. She destroyed my confidence around writing. I got a C on my midterm and felt so bad about myself. She would always mark our essays with a red pen. I became scared of the red ink on my paper. It was a symbol of embarrassment. The whole class could see the red ink from across

the room. Most times, I would not read my feedback. I would shove my essay into my folder so no one else could look at all the mistakes I made. My sophomore year teacher was also a red pen user. I was given feedback, but did not read it with an open mind. It was another year that the red pen was intimidating. Junior year English was irrelevant to my writing journey as my teacher did not give us feedback or even read our essays. I feel that my growth as a writer plateaued at this point, but my confidence skyrocketed because I was not given corrections or low grades.

Senior year was different in some aspects, but in others it was very much the same. I took College Composition, where I did not learn a lot about writing, but I grew as a student. This was the first time I had a writing workshop and implemented the changes suggested. Peer editing is an effective way to help the writer see from the reader's perspective, to share what works and what does not, to work collaboratively, and to strengthen certain aspects (Cabrini University). My classmates edited my work, and no one used red ink. We had all have been traumatized by the daunting red ink. I did not realize this was a documented phenomenon until reading Karen Gross's article, "Send the Right Message: Abolish Red Pens for Correcting Papers." She acknowledges the exact same feeling I have when I see my papers marked in red,

The color itself blinds students to the teacher's mark-up; the student literally sees red and nothing else. Also, as colors go, red is not a positive color. It signals danger (like a hot fire) and stop and negativity. Why use a color to correct a paper that is so loaded with negative thoughts (Cross)?

In her article, she mentions letting the students chose what color they wanted to have their corrections in. With this class, there was no rhyme or reason for what they corrected my work in. Some chose sparkly pink, others chose black or blue ink. Any color they chose did not elicit the same reaction as red ink. Something clicked in my head; I was finally able to embrace my flaws with learning and accept advice. My second half of senior year, I took a public speaking class. It was mostly graded on aspects of speaking rather than content we were speaking about. I enjoyed this class as it helped me grow as a public speaker, but did not grow as a writer. Looking back at my writing journey up to this point, I rarely had opportunities to make changes after receiving feedback. I never connected with my teachers as I felt scared and overwhelmed by them. I did not see how much my writing could improve by talking to them. I did not realize how many questions I had regarding my corrections. After 12 years of a writing roller coaster, I entered Writing 101 arrogant and stubborn.

This semester in College Writing 101 has been very eye opening for me. I did not feel that College Composition prepared enough for this class. After receiving my grade on Assignment #1 and looking over the feedback, I realized that I was in more trouble than I expected. The corrections on Canvas were left in yellow and blue ink. The public embarrassment of red was not present in my grades. Yellow is often associated with optimism and happiness (GMU). The change of colors helped me be more open to reading my feedback with a positive outlook. This time I was prepared to face my fears of not being good enough. Flashback: During orientation, administration told us that we are here to learn, and it is okay to not be perfect on the first try. These words have stuck with me and remind me it is okay to fail, but to keep trying after that. I tackled these corrections and suggestions with an open mind. Compared to my previous writing classes, I feel I have done an amazing job at being involved and asking for help. I have made use of the Writing Center. Going to office hours was a little intimidating, but I got over that as soon as I realized how helpful

it can be. Not just in this class, but in others, I have done an excellent job in asking for more information and clarification. I have been able to see how making these small corrections can drastically impact my work. This class has also made me realize how I was wrong about what I needed to work on. I need to focus on the basics of writing before moving onto techniques. At the same time, however, techniques come with practice and the more I practice the more I will implement techniques without knowing.

I could study a dictionary of techniques and schemes, but that would not get me far if the purpose of my writing is unclear. I have struggled with figuring out why I am writing. Everything I write has a purpose and a reason. I know the reason I am writing, but I have struggled to put the reason into words. I have come short of communicating that reason to the reader. I am writing this reflection for multiple reasons. You might be wondering why there is an Author's Process Note before my essay starts. This was something I decided to try after reading *Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?* by Sanda L. Giles. In her book she acknowledges the relationship between reflection and purpose, "Reflection helps you to develop your intentions (purpose), figure out your relation to your audience, uncover possible problems with your individual writing processes, set goals for revision, make decisions about language and style, and the list goes on" (Lowe, Charles, et al. 193). I decided to try her technique out and see if it impacted my writing. The hope is that by explicitly stating my intentions in the beginning of my essay, the reader is aware of what they are getting into before reading. However, I feel by directly saying that it is too straight forward, but when I make it more stylistic and less direct, the message gets lost in translation. I understand my job as an author is to explain what is going through my mind. The reader would not know what is going on in my life that could impact my perspective in my writing. This is where I struggle with metacognition (my favorite word). I need to be deliberate and direct when drawing the connections between my thoughts. Writing is an insight to my life through my perspective. I cannot give the reader full insight when I am not open and direct about my reasoning. However, I cannot be too hard on myself.

I believe this class and this semester has broken down my stubbornness with my writing. I am ready to interact with my feedback and not shy away from my flaws. This semester has been a challenge, but also a reminder that I am still learning. My professors do not expect me to be perfect. Moving forward, I want to continue to interact with my feedback. I will self-edit my essays with yellow ink rather than red ink to remind me I am still progressing. I need to have those hard conversations and ask for clarification on corrections. I also hope to build on my skills of metacognition and answering the question of why. Writing workshops can help me with this because I can realize where the gaps in my writing are. I can also continue to ask myself why I am writing throughout my writing process. By writing this reflection, I hope you realize how important it is to balance the good with the bad comments. It is also just as important to remember that teachers and professors are not out to get you or insult you by pointing out what you need to work on. My journey as a writer is not over like I first thought it would be. I have a lot more to learn and I hope to continue being open to feedback and not afraid of corrections or suggestions.

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