Dear Professor McDonald,

Entering this class, I enjoyed reading and writing and always enjoyed the subject of English in high school. I looked forward to assignments and reading the material assigned. However, it was a it different than what I was used to and what I was comfortable with.

Critical reading was foreign to me, when reading an article, a poem or even a chapter in a textbook usually I’d read it only once, barely took notes and sometimes only skimmed through material to pull out what I needed. From your class I’ve learned that critical reading is really important because I’ve learned that not only do you learn and become more aware of the material on the page, but it also affects your writing and how you respond to what you have just read. So critical reading definitely helped my improve not only my reading and interpreting skills, but my writing skills as well.

Critical writing is also something I’ve learned in this course and that has influenced the way I lay out my papers. I could definitely say my writing has changed dramatically. Like I said, I have always enjoyed writing, but tis was all new to me. I was used to that “high school style” of writing. So coming into this class really sparked interest especially when learned and applying critical reading and writing. Although I haven’t so much ‘changed’ the way I write critical writing has influenced me to throw in more details, and stay away from focusing on the big picture and focus more on the smaller things in greater detail. Breaking something down into smaller ideas is what makes a paper so much more interesting and effective and this is what I mean when I say critical reading and writing have improved my writing dramatically. Rather then being vague, I’ve learned to be specific and back up my ideas with facts and evidence rather then throwing out a random statement and keeping the reader wondering.

I’d have to say that my weaknesses regarding writing while coming into this course was developing a strong thesis statement, using strong details and I make a lot of grammatical errors, which was so important when regarding major papers, like the research paper assignment. I can honestly say that I still struggle with developing a strong thesis, which is the most important part to an essay. I have improved however I still struggle frequently. Although my struggles with a thesis statement still remain, this course has helped me a lot when regarding detail and grammar. The diagnostics tests we’ve taken along with the learning plan has definitely helped me improve my grammar and has decreased the amount of grammatical mistakes I make in my papers.

I made tons of grammatical errors in the second essay, and after receiving back my first copy I was shocked to see how many errors there were. My problem was, was that while writing, I thought my sentences made sense and sounded grammatically correct. And it wasn’t until after I received back the first copy that I would notice my mistakes. I also mentioned before, critical reading has helped me with providing sufficient details in my papers and backing up statements with evidence to make my papers stronger. In essay one for example, I really struggled including details regarding Hirsch’s article because I never really had to refer to articles and quote exactly from journals and put them directly into my paper.

If I had to choose one paper that I thought I did my best on would be the first essay. I feel it’s an interesting choice on my part because, as I mentioned before, I really struggles with it and ironically enough, it was the first essay I’ve written for the class. I’m choosing this paper to share with you because even though I had a lot of weaknesses in this paper, it also brought out a lot of strengths in my writing. I feel that in my first essay I used direct quotes and then summarized them in my own words a lot better than I did in my other essays. Sometimes I overthink, and it messes up my writing, and I feel that in my first essay, that wasn’t the case at all. My writing process throughout essay one was a lot easier than the others also because there were fewer materials that had to be used within it. Even though it took me a lot longer to put together essay one then it did the others, it came a lot easier to me because I already had a sense of what I had to do and what had to be included for it to flow properly.

After receiving my first draft of essay one back, I realized I made a lot of grammatical error, and I saw that I struggled with the Hirsch quotes. And although those are weaknesses and that they are still mistakes it felt a lot better to see grammatical mistakes rather then content and actual writing mistakes. I think that my paper was a lot stronger and my information was definitely supported by direct quotes from the articles ‘How to Read a Poem”.

Writing the research paper was also based around racial identity. The process of writing the research paper wasn’t so bad, it was preparing to write the actual paper that was so stressful! I never had to do anything like that in high school so it was such a huge process for me. Researching using the databases made gathering sources a lot easier but putting together so many different ideas with different evidence was so hard for me. Also, paraphrasing and the annotated bibliography was also such a challenge for me. I hadn’t even heard of an annotated bibliography before this course and paraphrasing, I was aware of, however I never had to use it before. In the end, I think I did a good job, especially for the fact that it was my first real research paper.

Overall, my writing experience in this class was very positive. I’m so glad I took this class, not only because I enjoy writing, but also because it helped me improve my writing and reading skills so now I could enjoy it even more. I want to personally thank you for helping me with my weaknesses and making me a better writer each time we had a paper. I hope I can take some future courses with you and thank you so much, again.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Meduri