The Final Draft Isn’t Always So Final

By Meredith Francis

As students, it’s tempting to think that, once your paper is printed and turned in, the writing process is over. But after dozens of research papers and creative pieces, I’ve learned that the “final” draft does not necessarily mean that the work is done.

During my freshman year at Xavier, my Rhetoric professor informed the class that we could make changes to our final draft in pencil even up until the second before we turned it in. This was surprising to most students, as many of us operated on the assumption that “final” implied “finished.” I found it to be a little relieving, as finding that typo right before you turn in a paper is always an unpleasant feeling. But my professor said something that has replayed in my mind every time I turn in a paper: “There is always room for improvement.”

The best writers – professionals, even – still critique their writing after being published. There is always some phrase that could be improved upon or a sentence that still doesn’t sound just quite right. Sure, that overlooked typo is a quick fix, but continuing to revise is not limited to the small fixes.

For example, if you’re writing a literary analysis for Literature and the Moral Imagination, there may be some nuance to a character that you could add to your analysis. Maybe you could say something with fewer words, or perhaps you could add more. My point in saying this is not to diminish your confidence in your final draft, but rather to illustrate that no matter how good of a writer you are, no piece of writing is ever going to be perfect. I actually think that this is freeing, as it relieves you from the pressure of perfection.

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The Importance of Citation

By Mark Anliker

MLA. APA. Chicago. Footnotes. Endnotes. Bibliography. What? With all of the things to remember when writing a paper, citation sometimes seems tedious and unnecessary to students. But it’s important to remember that the point of citation is not merely to stave off plagiarism or to keep students honest about their sources. Actually, citation is primarily a tool, an instrument of human expression, that facilitates communication among scholars and civilians alike. Citations can be used to point an audience in the direction of further reading.

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Writing Centers: Not Just for First-Years

By Sarah Nimmo

If you’ve taken either Composition or Rhetoric at Xavier, chances are you’ve had a visit from a Writing Center staff member. Some of you may remember this visit (I’m hoping those of you in this year’s English classes do), but you also may be thinking, wait—the Writing Center has never come to any of my other classes. What gives?

It’s true; the Writing Center staff only visits Composition and Rhetoric, in which the majority of the students are first-years. Making the transition from high school to college is tough, especially where writing is concerned. The stakes are higher, the papers are longer, and A’s are tougher to achieve. That’s why we want to make sure people know, as early as possible, that the Writing Center can help ease that transition and help you improve as a writer.

For many people, the purpose of the Writing Center stops there. But what may surprise you is that writing centers are not just for first-year students struggling to keep up with the new demands of college writing. The Writing Center at Xavier serves all kinds of student populations, and lately we’ve been taking a close look at how we can better serve those whom we call non-traditional students: students who don’t fit the typical first-year-in-a-Comp-class mold. These could be students who are returning to school after many years to complete their degree, or students who never went to college when they were eighteen. Although serving these different populations can make a writing center more versatile, problems can arise.

One problem is ageism, or discrimination against individuals because of their age. When adult students come to a writing center, tutors (who are often undergraduates) may be unsure of how to properly assist them, and as a result can end up unintentionally making the student uncomfortable or unwilling to seek help from a writing center. The issue of ageism is one that we at Xavier’s Writing Center are hoping to address in the coming months.

On March 29, I and the two graduate assistants here at the Writing Center will be presenting a panel at a conference held by the East Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA). (Yes, there are conferences specifically for writing centers—who knew?) Our panel is called “Bridging the Gap: Welcoming Non-traditional Students and Preventing Ageism in Writing Centers.” Our two graduate assistants, Cate and Rachael, will present research on the problem of ageism in writing centers and offer suggestions on how to fix and further prevent this problem, while I will be offering an undergraduate’s perspective on working with non-traditional students. We are hoping that our panel will raise awareness about the variety of student populations that a writing center serves and educate ourselves and others on how to work with non-traditional students in a more respectful and supportive way.

The importance of writing, and the Writing Center, is not limited to your freshman year Composition class, and we want to make sure that every student feels comfortable coming to the Writing Center. Hopefully, addressing the problem of ageism will encourage people to seek help from the Writing Center, regardless of where they are in their college career. We work with you, the students, in mind; by taking steps such as presenting at the ECWCA conference, we are better equipping ourselves to serve the needs of as many students as we can.

Final Paper Checklist

Did I:

* Read my paper aloud to make sure nothing sounded awkward?
* Make sure my grammar was correct?
* Make sure all my sources are cited?
* Include a Works Cited/Reference page/Bibliography if it is needed?
* Make sure I followed the proper format and have everything required for that format?
* Put my name on the paper?
* Visit the Writing Center?
The Final Draft

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Of course, with the volume of papers we have in college, it is not exactly plausible to return to papers that have already been turned in and graded. The stream of work seemingly never ends, and papers become just another thing to check off the to-do list. However, if you find yourself submitting a creative piece to a literary journal or turning in a writing sample for a job or a scholarship, take a look at your final draft. I bet there is some way to make a great paper even better.

When Do I...
Use affect vs. effect?
Use affect when you need a verb. Use effect when you need a noun.

Citation

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They can be used to substantiate claims and strengthen arguments. Citations can even be used by an author to take a step back from their formal writing and add an aside to their piece. For example, if you were to cite a source concerning the domestic implications of the draft in World War I and wanted to explain that the author of the source actually had two sons who fought in the War (but didn’t necessarily want to interrupt your argument or budget in the words for it in your main essay), you could add a footnote about it. It's commonplace among academics to include information on the side like this in their scholarly works.

All things considered, it's probably best not to procrastinate on ironing out your final citations. While it might seem easiest to wait and do them all at the end, thinking about and incorporating your citations as you go can really improve your writing and help you yourself get a better grasp on what it is you’re trying to convey in your paper. Even just writing out a citation when you first read through a source can save you the hassle of backtracking to find the source’s publication information after the fact (and save you the risk of potentially getting that information mixed up or confused). Who knows, you might even notice that any given source can be a gateway to other sources; maybe you’ll find that the journal that an article was published in is actually full of relevant information for the topic you’re writing about.

Suffice to say, it's not a bad idea in general to be more mindful of your source citations. You can learn more about the context of your sources, more about the authors who wrote them, and more about your topic if you just pay a little bit of extra attention. Citations don’t just exist to make you mad. They’re there to help you say what you want to say, and what could be better in writing?

How To Cite an Article from a Database

In MLA:

In APA:

In Chicago:

*While some Chicago style papers require a bibliography, most often you will only need footnotes, which is the format demonstrated here.

The Gnome of Composition celebrates the coming of Spring

😊
Saying Goodbye

By Rachael Benedict

It seems hard to believe that just a year and a half ago I was starting my Master’s program and beginning work at the Writing Center. However, here I am in the last semester of my program and preparing to graduate. While I will miss many of the people and experiences I have had at Xavier, I will most miss my Writing Center family and experience.

At the end of each year, as we tutors say goodbye to our graduating seniors, we ask them to name their favorite Writing Center memory. Knowing that I will be leaving the Writing Center soon, I have begun to reflect upon what my personal favorite memory might be. Could it be the opportunity to work with several students throughout the course of the semester, watching them grow as writers? Could it be having the opportunity to present at a Writing Center conference, bringing awareness to the issue of ageism, one which I feel strongly about? Could it be getting to work with such a wide variety of Xavier students and learn about everything from Socrates’ view of justice to Montessori methods, all while working on becoming a better and better tutor? Or could it be the times before tutoring sessions when my fellow tutors and I laugh, vent, and joke about our lives and all the challenges that come with being a college student? Perhaps it is a combination of all of these things, one final product that makes up my Xavier experience, which has been challenging, fun, and rewarding.

Throughout these two years, I have had the opportunity to write several times about the role of writing in my life. It is something which I value greatly, and I know will always be important to me. And, luckily for me, it lends itself to some great graduation metaphors. So, just as we have discussed throughout this newsletter how important the tiny details are to the final draft of a paper, remember the tiny details in your college experience as well. Studying abroad or getting an awesome GPA are amazing body paragraphs, but it is the tiny things – pulling an all-nighter with your best friend, hanging out on the Green Space on the first warm day of spring, or indulging in a chocolate chip cookie after a hard week – that also make your college experience one you will never forget.