In improv, actors must be able to come up with an idea on the spot, and then develop it with the other actors on stage. The same is true with writing – the writer must come up with some idea and expand upon it until the paper comes to a natural close. But it can be tricky both in improv and in writing to come up with an idea or topic, and sometimes it’s even harder to develop the idea logically and sufficiently. So what do we do?

For starters, just start! If there’s one thing I have learned from my improv class this semester, it’s not to hold back but instead to let the ideas flow. This has actually helped me in my writing; if I feel stuck coming up with an idea, I just start writing about the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the course or assignment. This process can take a while to reach the “aha!” moment, just like long improv scenes, but it’s worth the wait. So don’t hold back – grab a pen, or your keyboard, and let your writerly self take care of the rest.

A very essential component of a successful improv scene is the capability of actors to say “Yes, and…” This means that actors must not only agree with an idea presented, but they must also contribute something. But the new idea should but just that – new. If nothing new is presented, then the scene can’t move forward. This notion of contribution is also essential in academic writing. While you certainly want to make sure to draw attention to what others have said on the topic through quotations, it is important that you do not allow your quotations to speak for you. Make sure that you bring your new and fresh ideas to the table.

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Remember Your Audience: the Media and Writing

By Sarah Zabel

Writing consists of language to which both the writer and the reader assign meaning, two interpretations that at times do not match. As a communications major, many of my classes involve media analysis, which helps to reveal techniques commonly used to connect with intended audience members and achieve a specific purpose. Every day, I attend classes that highlight the manipulation and unimaginable amount of thought that precedes every media product, and I’m fairly sure I’m developing paranoia. Flipping through a magazine turns into a reminder of gender inequalities and advertising as a “consciousness industry,” which not only instills material want in consumers but also establishes social values and political opinions. Media not only persuades for or against these positions; it also creates these positions.

If you manage to retain your sanity after these realizations, this understanding of the media construction process is extremely applicable to any form of writing. Communicating meaning requires an extensive knowledge of one’s audience. No writing should even begin before a purpose is established and the audience is evaluated. My media classes stress the importance of social realities that establish multiple connotations of a single denotation. For instance, a Superbad reference would fly directly over my mother’s head. However, my audience for this article is thankfully not my mother. When you gain consciousness into your emotional response to a piece of writing or a form of visual media, you start to pick out the elements that caused that response. Studying others’ writing translates into a better understanding of how other will receive your own writing.

Connecting Writing to Song

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For the world, songwriting can serve as a garden where the seeds of social change and authentic human community take root.”

We all know that feeling. A new song pops on our Pandora station, and we are frozen. For reasons that are often impossible to explain, our hearts begin to ache. After weeks, months, years of unwittingly longing for a way to express our deepest selves, some songwriter (often unknown to the general public) has put it perfectly. They just get us. When asked why she writes songs, Robertson explained, “Someone once told me that once I perform a song, it is no longer mine. Each listener has taken it in and made it her own. And when I play for a group of friends who unabashedly sing along to the lyrics I’ve written, I know that we are each singing our own song. Through songwriting, I not only break free of my own emotional gridlock, but I also offer others the gift of considering their own gridlocks from a different perspective.” Songwriting, and all writing, in a sense, is about freedom – liberating ourselves and others from what might otherwise crush us.

Although most of us will never turn out to be the Bob Dylans, John Lenmons, or even Adeles of our age, songwriting and poetry in general is not reserved for the famous, the lovesick, and the brokenhearted. A set of lyrics will never cry, “Don’t write me! You’re not talented enough!” The trickiest part of writing lyrics and poetry for me, aside from my general lack of musical capabilities, is finding my muse. Robertson’s own inspirations may serve as a starting point for some of us, though: “My inspiration is the primordial longing I feel to express, to create, to connect, and to delight. More concretely, my inspirations are every theology professor I have had at Xavier, my friends around the world who sing along, the authors on my bookshelf, the living things outside of my window, and my family who have made me who I am.”

There are words in all of us, waiting to be written. Scribble them down. Pick a tune. Liberate them.
Take the Stage

Continued from page 1

and respond to the quotations that you have incorporated. Just as the audience at an improv show wants to know what will happen next, your readers want to hear your voice and what you have to say. Each paragraph should also contain an idea that is different from the ideas in other paragraphs, yet is relevant to the thesis or theme. This helps move your paper forward to a sufficient conclusion.

Speaking of conclusions, improv endings can sometimes be awkward if a scene doesn’t reach a natural resolution and instead just cuts off. Papers should avoid this awkwardness too by wrapping up all of the earlier “Yes, and…” ideas in a succinct form. A lot of visitors to the writing center ask about what to put in their conclusions, and a simple answer to that is to not put any new ideas in a conclusion. This is the one exception to the “Yes, and…” rule. A good improv scene will feel resolved, and a good conclusion should make reading a paper feel the same way.

That’s enough for the musings on improv and writing. Anyone up for “Whose Line is it Anyway?”

Why Writing Matters

By Tom Richmond

How many of your friends hate writing papers for school? That’s pretty common, but do any of them say they just hate writing? Everything about it? Now that’s just ridiculous. A world without writing would be a bleak world indeed. Or worse, imagine if everyone admitted that writing mattered, but nobody bothered to do it well anyway.

You like TV, don’t you? I’m sure you do. Would you still like it as much as you do now if every show had writing like, for the sake of argument, CSI: Miami? Sure, we would still have all the funky graphics and special effects to drool over, and the explosion-to-episode ratio would never be higher, but would you want to live in a world where all of television was about style over substance? A world where TV was only as nuanced as the size of the explosions?

For every well-written TV show, there are already plenty of badly-written ones, and the same goes for movies, no? A Michael Bay Transformers movie can have all the eye-popping explosions and cutting-edge special effects that it wants, but if the characters don’t talk like real people, it’s tough to enjoy, isn’t it?

Now take that principle and apply it to your future career. You may think learning to write well seems pointless now, but in the future when your job requires you to write up an important memo for the whole company, or you have to write that e-mail to your boss, you’re going to want to know how to write it correctly, no? You wouldn’t want your boss to read your writing and think it sounds like dialogue from a Michael Bay movie, would you?

Next time you watch a movie and notice how terrible the dialogue is, remember, it could have been saved with better writing. And next time someone you know is struggling at work because the boss can’t put up with the badly-written e-mails? It could’ve been saved with better writing. Next time you can’t understand the instructions on some frozen food and your microwave burns your house down...? Okay, that might be a bit too dramatic, but you get the idea.
Writing as Navigation

By Rachael Benedict

When you learn about writing pedagogy, you discover that there are numerous schools of thought when it comes to deciding upon the best way to teach writing. Ideas range from writing as social change to writing as process. One school of thought, which I find myself particularly drawn to, is Romantic Rhetoric. Romantic Rhetoric recognizes writing as a means for us to explore our feelings and discover who we are. It’s this idea that we tapped into when producing this edition of our newsletter. We wanted to show the role of writing in our lives and discover how everything from our interests, to our classes, to bad television impacted the role of writing in our lives and the attitude we took toward it.

Writing holds a special place in my life in particular. I’ve been doing creative writing since I was little. My first story, entitled “The Hill” and written when I was six, is the tale of a hot day and my family desperately trying to escape the heat. Spoiler alert: we sit under a shady tree on a hill. However, I’ve come far since those days, and writing has evolved into a way for me to navigate what is going on in my life and try to make sense of it through the characters I create and the situations they find themselves in.

This same thought process can extend to academic writing. While getting those paper assignments can seem daunting and tedious, we can look at them as a way to explore and better understand the texts we read and study. As we brainstorm, outline, and take notes, we begin to delve into what the text is really saying. As we pull out quotations, we analyze what specific passages are trying to show us. And as we sit down to actually write and organize our paper, we are hopefully making valuable connections between what we want to say, what the text is saying, and what this teaches us about our own lives. Writing in the academic arena not only gives us valuable insight into the topic we are studying, but it can be a means to navigate what is going on in our world. We just have to give it a chance.

“You can make anything by writing.”
~C.S. Lewis

COMING SOON!

We at the W.C. are very excited to announce that, soon, we will be launching our brand new website! Not only will the updated website have info on how to contact us and what to expect from an appointment, it will also have a wide variety of resources, including references for MLA and APA citation, how to best integrate quotations, tips for proofreading, and more. We will also have copies of our newsletter available online. We hope that the website will serve you as a great resource to draw on as you begin to work on your papers or a guide for those tiny details as you finish up your paper once you’ve come in for a session.

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