

Self-Assessment

Abid Ahmad

ENGL 21007
Instructor Thomas Barber
December 19, 2018

This is a self-assessment of my work from the class of Writing for Engineers instructed by Thomas Barber. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate how effectively I attained the course learning outcomes of the semester. This paper was also assigned by Instructor Barber as the final for the course. Throughout this course I have come to the conclusion that although this class has taught me a vast amount, I still have much to learn in regards to general writing and research skills. In regards to rhetorical sensibility, I found that my writing overvalues specificity and sacrifices the core focus of the paper. I have improved much throughout this class in my writing's ease of understanding, due to the assignments placing a stress on thorough explanation. When writing these assignments, I fully exercised my capabilities in editing and revising my work. My efforts in this aspect of the writing process was bolstered by my peers through peer editing and collaboration. This peer editing not only allowed me to clean up the mistakes found within my writing, but also allowed me to implement new writing techniques discovered when revising the work of my colleagues. As such, the writing process became more of a team effort in the technical writing assigned by Instructor Barber. Due to the focus on technical writing for the class, I was not able to significantly expand my scope of genre sensibility through the course of the semester. However, my writing goals and audience expectations were very focused and accurate for all of my writing due to the increased overlap of audience between writing assignments of this course. My perception of writing in engineering before coming into this class was that we as engineers need to document our data so that we can effectively build upon research. I now realize that all of these assignments had specific audiences and the papers attempted to convey arguments that are supported by the facts and research. Of course, this meant that the assignments required much research and sourcing in order to maintain credibility. I consistently used the CCNY databases so that I may find sources that were both accredited and

illuminating. These sources were effectively integrated into my writing so that my stance was bolstered by the sources, instead of the sources dominating the paper.

In previous classes, I was conditioned to heighten my diction because teachers looked amicably towards sophisticated language. This class has taught me that overly sophisticated verbiage in technical writing has the ability to diminish value within the paper because it has the ability to limit the scope of the audience. I have shown flaws in this aspect of my writing as shown in my lab report where I used overly complex diction. For example, when giving instructions for the procedure I typed “Draw two lines on either side of the glass cylinder from the base to the top of the cylinder. These lines should be diametrically opposed to one another.” Rather than writing “diametrically opposed” better verbiage would involve more common phrases such as “opposite” or “across”. These phrases strike a better balance of accurate conveyance of information while allowing a broader audience to access the information. However, in cases where the format of the essay is specific to simplicity and ease of access, I am relatively effective in relaying information. A great example of this is the resume, where a prominent feature of a resume is its organization and its concise phrasing. In this assignment, I excelled because the importance of simplicity was overtly clear. As such, I show great potential in being able to simplify my writing in order to appeal to a broader audience. Most of this improvement is attained during the editing phase.

Making multiple revisions of the same assignment has remarkable effects on the quality of the paper in my experience. The difference between the first and second drafts of the resume are vast and very important. The format is much more standardized and making divisions within the paper create a structure to the paper that previously wasn't present. This is possible because the first draft has all of the content already, so the second draft is utilized to focus more on the

cosmetics of the assignment. It's extremely difficult to be able to structure and organize a paper perfectly, include all of the content, all while maintaining proper grammar convention on the first try. This is why multiple rounds of editing are crucial in putting forth the best product when it is due. Ideally, this editing process is done with multiple people involved though.

Instructor Barber did a great job in encouraging interaction within the classroom in order to create a "writing community" while completing the given assignments. He gave the class ample time to peer review each other's drafts so that multiple perspectives could be used in evaluating the students' papers before they were graded. The previous criticisms given of my lab report and its complex verbiage were also echoed by Richard Ngai, a colleague of mine who sits adjacent to me.

Work with my peers was bolstered further during the Proposal. This assignment required the class to split into groups, giving us the opportunity to delegate tasks to our partners. In my experience, the delegation of tasks in between Lea, Richard, and I went very smoothly. The roles assumed by each member were very applicable to a real-world scenario. Lea was in charge of the introduction, qualifications, and reference list. She also oversaw our work and kept us on task throughout the making of the paper. Richard on the other hand was in charge of the timeline and plan of work, while I was in charge of the budget and the abstract. In this manner, our roles were divided into the managerial, technological, and financial aspect of the assignment.

Consultation was also sought outside of class as well. For the cover letter, much of the differences found between the first draft and the second draft were made under the supervision of the Writing Center in City College. As a result, phrases such as "I do not hesitate in saying" were erased in order to further condense the letter. Their advisement also was instrumental in giving my letter a certain structure that was absent before-hand. The final product clearly lays out all of

my skills before delving into them in the primary graph, similar to an introduction of any standard essay. This was very significant, because with this particular assignment I was struggling in formatting the letter into a more organized document.

Overtime, the structuring of assignments became easy enough for me to attempt on my own. This class has taught me that although technical writing is presumed to be dry and objective, it has very important purposes. For example, lab reports completed under PHYS-207 by me were simply written for the sake of documenting my results. However, the lab report completed as an assignment for this class had the acute argument that showed the relationship between the height of a fire tornado and the amount of airflow allowed to travel through it. Not only does this argument breed a purpose throughout the paper, it also allows for the reader to find interest behind the new-found meaning of the writing. Without it, it is abundantly clear that technical writing just becomes a set of data that was found throughout the course of experiments chosen by arbitrary means. The goal behind the lab report was very similar to the goals behind all of the other assignments throughout the course of this class. Almost every assignment required me to convince a well-informed audience of certain facts that concluded an argument regarding a particular subject. For example, whereas the lab report involved convincing the audience of findings involving vortices, the process description attempted to convince the audience of the mechanics behind headphones. The assignments only differ in the subject matter and context of which they are being presented. However, as both papers were written with a scholarly audience in mind, both papers focused on being thorough and insightful through the duration of the paper, while maintaining an informative tone.

The focus on technical writing made it very difficult to expand upon different genres however. Being that the audience did not change significantly between assignments, most of the

writing completed in this class is not applicable to genres that heavily focus on pathos for example. Between the assignments, they were all limited by the shared informative tone and the professional atmosphere surrounding them. However, this was not a fault on Instructor Barber as the class was made specific to writing as it pertains to engineers. However, the differences between the papers were very significant in regards to their context. For example, the resume and process description both are being presented in a professional manner to a sophisticated audience. However, the resume is being presented in the context of a job application while the process description was being presented as an article delving into certain technology. The content only changes in regards to the subject matter, but the structure of these two assignments varied enormously. The resume was presented as a list in order to increase efficiency for the reader, as hundreds of resumes may be sent to be reviewed at a time. As such, there was an increased focus on efficacy and accessibility. The process description was being viewed in a setting where more time is present in order to fully construct the stance. As such, the process description was written as a much more comprehensive document written with much more depth and thorough explanation.

Without this focus on rigor and minute detail, the argument presented by the process description would have been left null and void. Every assignment completed through the duration of this class had acute focus on the argument being presented. For most of the assignments, this meant thorough research and also explanation of all relevant information surrounding the topic. This also would not be complete without the content and structure of the essay. All assignments followed the general structure of any document: An introduction, body, and conclusion. With all assignments, I begun by explaining what argument I was presenting, continued onto the body where I laid out my argument with concision and accuracy in mind, and

concluding the points in a conclusion that would integrate all of the aforementioned points made in the body. An unlikely example of this would be the cover letter, where I previously assumed this document to be relatively simple. With help from the Writing Center however, I constructed an argument showing my skills as a worker in a very organized manner. It was important to first lay out who I was and what my message was regarding as concisely as possible. Accordingly, the document was properly headered with all relevant contact information at the top and I immediately wrote of why I was writing the letter. Afterwards, I wrote of the skills relevant to the job I was applying for in the same order found within the body paragraphs. I finally concluded with the argument put forth by the facts laid out by the previous paragraphs and thanked the employer for her time.

More complicated pieces of documents have the added task of research and sourcing so as to lay the argument on a solid foundation of information and intellect. This aspect of writing is incredibly important, both because of the ethics involved with using someone else's work, as well as showing the reader your data and relevant facts are corroborated by credible sources. In order to complete this task, I primarily used the CCNY database to ensure credibility within the used articles and also to increase the information found from each document. Certain challenges were presented however by using these databases. For example, there were a significant number of documents found on the database that I could not use because the information present was more relevant to people with higher stature of education than that of myself. In order to combat this problem, I also used databases that held more general and broad information. For this, Google Scholars was very helpful in finding documents focused on audiences with a level of education similar to mine. In order to find documents with increased accreditation however, info.gov was also utilized in order to find documents with government backing. Information

from this website was used for my lab report in order to begin the introduction. In this manner, the audience finds interest through an alarming fact, while maintaining the foundation needed in sourcing.

Just as important as finding proper sources is how these sources are integrated into the document. In this manner, I kept in mind the flow of the paper and attempting to keep the references as seamless as possible. IEEE format is helpful in this endeavor, as the source is shown through a number, which is relatively minimalistic. Also, it's important to shy away from simply quoting the referenced source and moving on. In order to keep the assignment as individual to me as possible, I tend to avoid directly quoting the sources. Rather, putting the information in my own words and citing where I got the information allows for more flexibility within the provided information. This technique was employed in the lab report, where in the introduction I explained the phenomenon that drives vortices in the atmosphere. In this context, quoting the text is difficult because the source was referenced for background information. As such, quoting the source is a slippery slope where it is possible to directly quote a majority of the text, taking the work out of my hands in a sense. After citing it, this text still must be expanded upon as well. In the lab report, after explaining the concepts that drive vortices it was necessary that I relate all of the natural vortices found on our atmosphere to that concept. This would then allow me to transition into specifically fire tornadoes, which was what the lab was focusing on. Other times it makes more sense to directly quote the source however. If there is a plethora of conclusions that can be taken away from the source, directly quoting it contributes to the professional tone attempted throughout the document. This strategy was employed in the process description, where the name of the author, Chris Woodford, was written out along with what

topic he was going to expand upon. Afterwards, I explained how his information related specifically to the range found within headphones.

It's important to always remain cognizant in regards to how much I can improve. This class has very much taught me how to balance detail in the paper with simplicity and ease of understanding. In order to keep everyone's rhetorical range into consideration, thoroughly explaining every step is necessary within technical writing. Constant revision occurred during the course of this class and made sure that I always put forth the best final product. This of course could not have been done without the help of my colleagues. They were instrumental in allowing me to employ different strategies when writing the paper, and also understanding the general structure of any document. New writing techniques discovered when revising the work of my colleagues. Although the scope of genre was quite limited during this class, it was important to keep in mind the differences between each assignment and their context. My perception of writing in engineering before coming into this class was that we as engineers need to document our data so that we can effectively build upon research. Rather, all of these assignments had specific audiences and the papers attempted to convey arguments that are supported by the facts and research. Accordingly, the writing as it pertains to engineering should not be diminished as unimportant, and I'm grateful for all of which that I have learned during this course.