

May 9, 2015

Dear Portfolio Committee:

My name is Shelby MacMillan, and I am a first-year student in the nursing program. My wish is to become an RN and dedicate my life to helping others get well. When I entered Composition 101 in September, I had little foundational knowledge about writing and argumentation. My high school did not have AP English classes or even an English class that focused on writing. Instead, we read short stories and completed grammar worksheets. I've always liked to write reflections and creative pieces for personal enjoyment, but more formal, purposeful types of writing intimidated me. Week one of Composition 101 was extremely overwhelming, as even the basic lingo—words like rhetoric, *ethos*, and *pathos*—was entirely new to me, which is why it makes me proud to say that this semester I have met the general education requirement of completing Composition 101. Furthermore, in the process, I gained some beneficial academic writing skills. I learned to perform solid academic research to support my ideas, learned to combine my thoughts with the works and opinions of others, and received further education on developing a better writing process. I also learned to use many elements fundamental to strong academic writing, such as thesis statements, topic sentences, and quotations. The things I learned in Composition 101 have helped me to develop into a stronger, more flexible writer.

In this electronic portfolio, you will find three essays, including images of sample draft materials, to exemplify the skills I have learned in Composition 101. The first essay we wrote was a persuasive argument on language discrimination. For this essay, the articles we used were assigned to us, and from those sources we were to take a position on whether or not language discrimination occurs and, if it does, what the effects might be on the person who experienced the discrimination. The second essay was a research argument for which we had to pick a topic and perform scholarly research on our own. I chose to research the psychological effects of child beauty pageants on the young participants, and argued that these competitions negatively impact self-esteem and may place children at risk of exploitation. The third essay was an in-depth rhetorical analysis of an article on the new iPad. Our professor assigned the article, and we were to examine its argumentative components in order to gauge its effectiveness.

Upon completion of Composition 101, students are supposed to understand how to perform and document scholarly research. This means that we should know how to locate academic articles using reliable resources. Furthermore, it means that we leave the course knowing how to smoothly incorporate the articles we find into an argument and cite them correctly. Essay two most clearly demonstrates my work in this area. During the process of writing my second essay, I learned to use Academic Search Premier and other library resources to locate peer-reviewed, academic materials on the exploitation of children through child beauty pageants. After finding numerous articles, I read and annotated the key information before creating a written map linking the various articles together. I then used my findings to create a thesis and support for my

argument. My thesis ended up being, “Beauty pageants are not a healthy activity for children, because they force young girls to act like little adults, exhibit age-inappropriate sexuality, and have negative body image and mental health problems later in their lives” (Macmillan 3). To support this position, I used articles from scholarly journals such as the *Kenyon Review*, *Eating Disorders*, and the *Journal of American History*. Throughout the essay, I paraphrased or quoted from these sources as needed and documented them with MLA in-text citations and an MLA works cited page. Knowing how to perform proper academic research has made my writing stronger by giving me the fundamental tools I need to locate sources that are more reliable than your average internet article.



Another goal of Composition 101 was to teach us to combine our thoughts and opinions with the thoughts, opinions, and works of others. This means being able to interpret what another person is arguing and either using it to support our ideas, or disputing it based on its weaknesses. My work on all three of the essays met this goal. For each of the three essays we were required to read the works of others and interpret them in order to form an original argument. One example is when we learned to plant naysayers. In this practice, we take an opinion that we do not agree with, and we refute it using stronger facts and thoughts that we found in our research. In the essay on beauty pageants, I included arguments from proponents of beauty pageants, as when I write, “Pageant parents and other advocates of child pageants argue that these pageants are way for their children to get ahead in life. They say that pageants are a great way for their children to pursue modeling careers or win money for college (Giroux 41)” (MacMillan 5). After exploring this alternative position, I ask my readers if these perceived benefits outweigh the serious risks I mentioned earlier in the paper. Both the naysayer and the information I used to refute it are the voices of other people combined with my take on the situation. This has strengthened my writing by teaching me to look for both the strengths and weaknesses in an argument and to use them to express what I think. It has taught me to see both sides of the issue when I’m reading.

Composition 101 was also designed to give us more practice with use of the writing process. The writing process is defined as the steps taken to produce a strong written work, though these steps do not have to be chronological. These steps can include research, notes, prewriting, drafting, peer revision, and reflection. This goal was also met by all three essay assignments. I began by analyzing the written works of others and writing notes on them. Then, I used those notes to form an argument and a thesis. The next step was a prewriting assignment followed by a first draft. After the first draft was complete, I participated in peer review sessions and consultations with my professor. After some personal reflection, I reworked my draft according to their suggestions and my new ideas. Then, I repeated the review and drafting steps until I got to the final product. The writing process helps me produce stronger work because it requires me to constantly re-evaluate what I am doing. The steps give me multiple opportunities to fix mistakes and clean up my argument. If I tried to turn in my first draft as my final draft, I would lose out on those opportunities to rethink my work. The writing process is something I thoroughly enjoy about writing, and the only way to learn it is to practice it.



A fourth goal of Composition 101 was to help us understand how to write rhetorically and adjust our writing to different audiences. To help with this, our professor assigned different audiences for each of our essays. While our first and third essays were intended for an academic audience, our second essay assignment was written with an audience specific to our topic in mind. For my essay on beauty pageants, I targeted parents, as I felt they should be aware of some of the important issues surrounding these pageants. I learned to adjust my style to fit my audience, and I learned how to make content decisions based on my audience. For example, in my essay on beauty pageants, I wanted to make sure I found credible source material that would be convincing to parents. Having a thorough research process helped me with this, but I did have to make some rhetorical decisions about what went into my essay and what got left out. These rhetorical techniques are skills that I will take with me and use over the course of my academic life and future career.

In addition to other things, Composition 101 taught me perform solid research with reliable sources, blend my voice with the voice of others by analyzing their work, utilize the steps in the writing process to produce strong texts, and understand how rhetorical conventions can help me become a more effective—and more flexible—writer. I am now able to state my perspective more clearly and base it on a stronger foundation than I was able to do at the beginning of this course. While I still have a lot to learn about writing and the rhetorical flexibility it requires, I feel I have built a strong foundation for my writing skills. In future writing courses, I look forward to learning about discipline-specific styles of writing and developing longer, more complex arguments using the skills I've learned. I feel that I am now ready to progress to Advanced Composition and further improve my reading and writing there, and in viewing the samples in my electronic portfolio, I hope you will agree that I am ready to move on and further my skills as a writer.



Sincerely,

Shelby A. MacMillan