Autoethnography:

A Study of Your Own Meaning-Making Practices

This assignment is based, in part, on the sample assignment "Autoethnography," in *Writing about Writing* (Wardle and Downs 243-246) as well as some activities in the article, "Writing One's Way into Reading" (Zamel 472-480).

Length requirements: At least 1000 words, which is about 4-5 double-spaced pages in a 12-point font (though feel free to utilize a different font and font size if appropriate).
Sample due dates, from a 15-week course (your syllabus has the dates for your class):
Rough draft due: Week 4: Friday by end-of-day (have access to your file during class for continuing writing or for workshop in groups).
Revision due: Week 5: 11:59pm Sunday.

Assignment Overview

After reading "Understanding Composing" (1980) and "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers" (1979), both articles by Sondra Perl, you will study your own reading, writing, and meaning-making processes that you've undergone during this writing course so far. You will collect your own data by taking inventory of any reading or writing reflections or writing practice you've done so far, do additional collection if needed, and can also draw upon your reading/writing habits (highlighting, summarizing, reflections, freewriting, note-taking, or others) from any other courses you have taken this semester. You will consider the technologies, tools, and contexts that influence your reading/writing and ultimately your own writing process. Then, you will write a 1000 word autoethnography paper discussing your findings: what you've learned about your process and ultimately what you've learned about how reading and writing work for you.

Collecting Your Data

You've read a number of readings in this course so far, and you may have taken notes in the following manner for them:

- annotations/highlights,
- double-entry reflections on specific sections,
- reflections on topics prior to reading the materials,
- and reflections after reading materials.

Gather them and begin to look over them. Use these materials as "samples" to show your meaning-making and reading habits.
Do the same for any drafts of your current paper or other papers you've written in the past. Ask yourself questions like:

- Do you remember what you did physically as you completed these drafts, notes, pieces?
- How long did they take?
- What were the circumstances around your space while completing them?
- Were there any particular successes or struggles?

Planning

You can also take it upon yourself to, prior to reading for an upcoming course reading (if this assignment is discussed early enough prior to reading assignments, like Perl's pieces) or writing for an upcoming assignment, plan to record yourself completing this work. You can also record yourself reading or working on an assignment for any course.

Make some decisions about how you will record yourself as you complete your chosen reflection method. You can:

- record yourself with video,
- record yourself with audio,
- or simply take notes about your habits in your notes alongside your notes on the reading materials.

The choice is yours. What's important is that you record a reading/writing session in its entirety in some way. It may feel awkward and strange, but this is real autoethnographic work, and the end product has the possibility of making it into an academic journal, especially one centered around undergraduate student academic writing (which actually exists).

Analyzing Your Data

Once you've gathered your data, you'll want to look at it to determine your "findings." You can discuss your findings similarly to Perl's discussions of students. What do your writing samples, notes, and recordings help you see about how you make meaning as you read and write? Do you find that you reread or rewrite previous sentences or words a lot? Do you anticipate what may come next in materials as you read? Do you find connections from your own life before, during, or after reading things? While writing, when do you start/stop/restart? Be specific in your paper.

Transcribing

After completing the recordings, you'll want to transcribe what you've said/what you hear into writing so that you can include it in your paper and discuss it. Don't forget to include notes about even the moments of silence, as Perl's work demonstrates. One option I recommend is Microsoft Teams: use it to record your screen if you're capturing writing activity, or to record yourself if you're capturing a session of reading aloud. Teams can give you an auto-generated transcription from the recording. Just be sure to double check the transcript, as the accuracy is sometimes a bit off.

Coding

If you find your terminology of your actions changing from sample-to-sample too frequently, consider a bit of light "coding," similar to Perl's methods, although you don't have to go as in-depth for this paper. Consider how you can describe similar activities with a singular label or description. For example, stopping writing due to the dog barking or pausing due to your roommates making noise could be labeled as "distracted." Perhaps you could mention what research influenced your decisions you "code" in this way?

Writing Your Paper

Your 1000 word double-spaced paper is how you will communicate your findings to me and the rest of the class. The most successful papers that will demonstrate best practices will consider questions like the following:

- Make sure it's double-spaced, that you use a sensible font face and size (12-point is traditional).
- While citations are not required for this paper, you should make it clear when you are discussing your primary data or using someone else's words. We will discuss, in class, some methods and discuss citations as practice.
- Make clear through quotations what you are including from your samples, your classmates' discussion board posts (if used), and quotes from the readings. How clear are the distinctions between what you say and what others have said?
- You should try to find some relevant credible materials that are secondary sources, and cite them correctly (differently than your primary data). This should include course reading materials.

- Your final paper should have a title, something additional to or other than "Paper 1" or "Autoethnography Paper." Though this may be a little scary, think about the possibility of your paper being published in an academic journal and a fellow student searching for certain criteria in the online library database. The title is the first thing they will see. What will they think your paper is about? What relevant topics will students find your paper useful for reading to help them with their own work?
- Your name should also be on the paper. Could you imagine your paper being found some day for someone's research and you not being able to get academic credit for the banger that it will be?
- Your final paper should clearly convey your insights and findings about your reading/writing habits, and ultimately, per our discussions as a class, make a connection to how these reading and/or writing habits also play into your writing habits, research habits, writing successes, or writing struggles.
- Did you come away with learning something interesting about your reading/writing this semester? If so, you will have engaged in meaningful work.

As always, you're free to reach out to me for assistance as needed, and you're free to continue revisions beyond the 1st revision due date for your final portfolios throughout the semester as needed up through the due date of the final portfolio at the end of the semester. For example, after the second unit–the multimodal unit–you may find yourself wishing you'd made different decisions about this paper or you may want to try communicating some of your findings differently.

Works Cited

Wardle, Elizabeth and Doug Downs. *Writing about Writing*, Fifth Edition, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2023.

Zamel, Vivian. "Writing One's Way into Reading." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1992, pp. 463-485.