

Why I Write – Draft 1

It was the beginning of second semester of my freshman year at the University of Michigan. From the first hour of my first-year writing class, English 125, I knew I was facing a challenge to erase all the writing conventions I had practiced in high school. From simply reading through the syllabus I knew I was being asked to genuinely examine my writing, and to build my own set of rules.

I have never enjoyed making up my own rules; I prefer to follow somebody else's. Look both ways before you cross the street, color inside the lines, eat your vegetables. Graduate high school, go to college, get a job. Five paragraph essays were my preferred form of writing throughout high school. The structured style told me exactly where to place my ideas and how to formulate them into an organized argument. Rules make me feel comfortable. I can work with rules.

What I can't work with is disorder. I need time to process the chaos that goes on around me. I need to take a step back, reflect, and figure out a plan on how to move forward. Some might call this a condition of being an introvert. I call it writing.

That first day in English 125 we read Terry Tempest Williams' "Why I Write," a short essay where the author states, fairly simply and repetitively, all of the reasons why she writes. We read aloud, circulating Williams' ideas around the room. And as I made the author's words my own, I felt no connection to her exploration into why she writes. "I write because I believe in words. I write because I do not believe in words" (Williams 6). It sounded forced and artificial; as if Williams was trying to make some point her readers (or perhaps just myself as a reader) had

Marley Kalt 9/11/13 7:05 PM

**Comment [1]:** I originally had this section, and a few others later in the paper, in italics. I wanted to differentiate the lines that are more of an inner monologue from the primary narrative of the piece, but thought the italic style might take the reader's focus away from the content of my paper. As a reader, do you think several interjections in italics would enhance the flow of the piece? Or would it be too much of a distraction from my main ideas?

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**Comment [2]:** I'm unsure of my transitions between paragraphs. I want to try something different with this piece, but am concerned about clarity. Does the jumping back and forth between ideas make the piece seem sloppy or hard to understand?

no interest in understanding. So, one can imagine my unease when our first homework assignment was to create our own Why I Write piece, copying Williams' style.

A clear format to follow when organizing my paper? Great! Creating my own rules and reasons for why I write? I'd rather lose access to my sister's Netflix account.

When I face a lack of structure I can have a difficult time figuring out what to do. A jumble of ideas, complete lack of clarity on an assignment, confusion about a recent event or social interaction. In these cases, I turn to writing. I make lists. I take notes. I create a record of my opinions and feelings at a particular point in time. If I did not write, I would be lost.

Lost is an effective way to describe my feelings at the start of my English 125 "Why I Write" piece. I had no idea where to begin. I couldn't think of one good reason why I write, let alone 500 words worth. Luckily, I had a friend in the class dealing with similar writer's block. We sat together on the floor of her dorm room, listening to music, trying to come up with ideas. The Beatles' *Here Comes the Sun* plays on iTunes? Of course! I write because the sun is coming. The writing session continued this way, my open Word document chronicling whatever came to mind or entered my senses until my friend and I had both fulfilled the assignment's length requirement. At the end of that paper I was no closer to a deeper understanding of why I write, unless my reason for writing was to strive for all A's in my classes.

Looking back, I realize I was the one being artificial. I tried to avoid the true question of the assignment, and stopped myself from taking my writing seriously. However, I now understand that my English 125 essay truly did some good in helping me to explore my writing, if only through the actual experience of trying to decipher why I write. The end result, which I originally viewed as an odd collection of words and song lyrics is, in fact, a fairly accurate reflection of myself. I used writing to create organization out of my thoughts; I wrote to

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**Comment [3]:** Word choice. I want to convey that it was looking back at the writing process, not necessarily the Why I Write piece itself, that helped me learn why I enjoy writing, but I'm not sure of the correct words. Any suggestions?

comment on and clarify the world around me. And although I did not recognize it until much later, I realize that I made a mistake while writing. I had been searching for one good reason why I write. However, I didn't need to think of a *good* reason. It does not matter why or how I express myself, so long as I do what works for me. Throughout the process of writing that first English 125 paper I continued to make choices as a writer; I did not simply hand-in an essay with everything that popped into my head. I did, for the first time I can remember, use a form of essay or narrative writing to organize my thoughts and create a sense of clarity from all the ideas rolling around in my mind. Reflection, trying to create that clear picture from the blurs that pass me by in today's fast-paced world, is why I write. As Terry Tempest Williams might say:

I write to process.

I write to reveal my truth.

I write because after a cloudy day, the sun will always come.

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**Comment [4]:** I want it to be known that I'm using TTW's style, as I did in English 125, because I feel it brings the piece together. But, I want it to be known that the lines that follow are my own. Is that clear when I put TTW's name here? Should I add more about TTW's style earlier in the essay instead?