

## Narrative Essay

As a child, I was always told that I needed to improve my handwriting; and while it was legible, it was sloppy. Looking back on this, it is clear that I was focused more on what I was writing than the aesthetic appeal of my handwriting. I grew up in the early 2000s when the education system was not yet technology based, so handwriting was emphasized. By the time I reached high school, we were all given personal computers and almost everything was done through technology. Handwriting was no longer a struggle for me and I was able to write without the worry that my work would be dismissed as messy. My increased love for writing over the years and self-discovery lead me to pursue my degree in Professional Writing, and it is one of the best decisions I have ever made.

The first memory I have of writing in an academic setting is in my first grade class. We were given pieces of thickly lined paper to map out how tall and wide our letters should be. This was also during a time where children were taught how to write in cursive, which added another difficult layer to learning how to write. At the same time, we were also learning how to spell and read. Looking back from an adult perspective, I see that first grade is an incredible formative and educational year. I tried my best to excel in all of these skills, but whenever I got a writing assignment back, it would be marked “check spelling” or “neater please!”. I am a naturally creative and right-brained person, so the technical parts of writing did not appeal to me. I just wanted to write freely; but my first-grade self did not realize that in order to write freely, I must write thoughtfully as well. After getting past the first few years of elementary school, my handwriting and spelling improved and it was no longer a concern for my teachers or myself. By the time I got to middle school, technology was being increasingly incorporated into the classroom, but pen and paper were still the standard for writing. I realized that I had a new factor that got in the way of how I enjoyed writing, and that was the physical act of writing. More than anything, it was a sensory issue for me. I hated the way my hand would ache after writing for a long time and I hated the way the pen or pencil would rub off on the side of my hand. I would get so frustrated and as a middle schooler, I didn’t know how to pace myself or methodically break up my work yet. However, I still did my work and made the work itself as thought provoking and cohesive as a middle schooler could.

High school was a big turning point for the way I approached writing. My inner child who loathed physical writing smiled widely at the fact that classrooms were technology-heavy and most lengthy writing assignments were typed rather than handwritten. In my sophomore year, I was taught by the teacher who would end up having the greatest impact on my writing and my educational mindset. The average high school student would describe her as extremely strict and rigid; however, her strictness is a manifestation of her love for English, teaching, and watching her students grow. In her class, I learned specific parts of speech and grammar that would transform my writing forever such as active and passive voice, coordinating conjunctions, and the PPEPE (point, proof, explain, proof, explain) method of essay writing. We would start each class with a warm up in our journal that if we forgot to bring, would be an issue. To this day, I still have my journal with each warm-up lesson that highlights all of these topics. It was also in this class that I learned how to seamlessly work direct quotations into my writing, which is something that I use in almost every essay I write. Throughout my college career, this is a skill that I have been frequently complimented on and I think the seamless integration of quotes into

my papers makes them stand out. From the beginning of my sophomore year to the end, that teacher was able to help me find my voice, improve my technical skills, and truly spark my passion for writing and reading. The next year, I decided to take AP English 11 and further strengthen my critical thinking skills while hopefully improving my writing as well. While AP English was more heavy on reading and discussion, I had the writing skills from my previous class under my belt that would end up helping me in key assignments and eventually, the AP exam. While I ended up getting a 3 on the exam and receiving college credit for it, my junior year of high school was an extremely difficult one for me as I was struggling with depression and severe anxiety. In effect, I did not go on to take AP English 12 the next year because of how hard it was for me to push through the previous year. The standard senior English class that I was put in was such a change of pace from the rigorous English classes that I had been taking for the past two years. I felt that the class did not give me the opportunity to use the skills that I had put so much practice towards and I was almost bored in the class. It felt too easy compared to the previous years, but I still felt that my decision to not continue with AP English 12 was the best decision for me at the time. This change in pace ended up shifting my academic interests, and I became more passionate about foreign languages. I had taken Spanish for my first three years of high school and took Japanese for my senior year. When it was time to apply to college, I applied to schools with the hope of majoring in International Studies or World Cultural Studies. I committed to ODU with a major in World Languages and Cultures, and decided I wanted to be an ESL teacher. While my parents were happy and excited for me, they worked for the school system and knew that I would struggle teaching ESL there.

I only got through three quarters of my freshman year at ODU before Covid struck and I was no longer on campus anymore. This continued on into my sophomore and junior years, but I was still enjoying my courses and was on track to complete my World Languages and Cultures degree. When the time came that we were able to return to campus, I found myself struggling with my anxiety disorder again. I decided that I should continue taking virtual classes in order to balance my education and my mental health. While it was not intended, this sparked a conversation with my parents about my degree, as many of the courses required for my World Languages and Cultures major were not offered online. My parents reminded me of my writing skills and how I was able to excel in writing even while struggling in high school. I was reminded of my 10th grade English teacher and how much of a positive impact she had on my view and experience of writing. My parents and I decided that the switch to the Professional Writing degree would not only fit my interests, passions, and strengths, but would also end up being a strong degree to have career wise. This switch has ended up being one of the best decisions I have ever made and I have enjoyed getting to explore multiple disciplines through writing and learning more about a wider range of topics. I am now excited for my future rather than nervous and I now have an entire portfolio of artifacts that reflect how this change has blossomed my passion for academics again.