

A low-angle photograph of a grand, classical building facade, likely a library or academic building at the University of Michigan. The image features a series of tall, fluted columns supporting a heavy entablature. The sky is visible in the upper left corner, and some greenery is on the far left. The text is overlaid on the image.

University of Michigan

Excellence in First-Year Writing 2010

The English Department
Writing Program and
The Gayle Morris Sweetland
Center for Writing

Excellence in First-Year Writing 2010

The English Department Writing Program

And

The Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing

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Excellence in First-Year Writing 2010

*Publication Edited by Chris Gerben, English Department Writing Program
and Matthew Kelley, Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing*

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EDWP Prizes

Winner:

Michael Flood
Chong Guo
Erin Piell

Instructor:

Julie Babcock
Sara Schaff
Sara Schaff

SCW Prizes

Portfolio Winner:

Alexander Liberman
Thomas Yeh

Instructor:

Jennifer Metsker
Christine Modey

Honorable Mention:

Lim Wei
Christie Toth

First-Year Writing Winner: Instructor:

Kathleen Telfer
Alexandra Park
Catalina Pereda
Basak Candar

Nominees 2010

EDWP Excellence in First-Year Writing

Nominee

Instructor

Emily Abrash
Leonard Agranat
Carmen Allen
Heather Bicknell
Jenna Chai
Ashley Cicalo
Colleen Dennison
Wade Henney
Katelyn Hummer &
Austin Hoeltzel
Alexis Jensen
Christopher Kao
Matt Kastellec
Daniel Keith
Caitlin Kiesel
Amanda Kleinert
Elizabeth Lalley
Hailey Landis
Michelle Landis
Robert Lott
Amre Metwally
Amber Miller
Amy Navvab
David Noble
Danielle Pellman
Dana Pennington
Melissa Range

Wendy Michael
Elisa McCool
Hanna Pylvainen
Jessica Young
Margot Finn
Sara Schaff
Hanna Pylvainen
Christie Toth
Rachel Feder

LaMont Egle
Sara Schaff
LaMont Egle
Mikey Rinaldo
Andrew Bozio
Joseph Tyler
Kelly E. Allen
Alice Keane
Jessica Young
Sara Talpos
Heather Thompson-Bunn
Katherine Jaeger
Mikey Rinaldo
Katherine Jaeger
Darrel Holnes
Darrel Holnes
Meg Ahern

Ryan Rivamonte
Elana Rofel
Josh Rosen
Chiara Seward
Olivia Sieracki
Shreya Singh
Nick Stabler
Hannah Stocker
Hannah Tenison
Catherine Vatsis
Kyle Vesevick
Monica Walls
Lin Zhuang

Lowen Liu
Joanna Lin Want
Michael Hinken
Carolyn Dekker
Joanna Lin Want
Meg Ahern
Margot Finn
Richard Pierre
Joseph Tyler
Julie Babcock
Michael Hinken
Elisa McCool
Lowen Liu

SCW Outstanding Portfolio Writing

Nominee

Matthew Alessi
Shawna Drake
Betsy Garter
Jade Hanson
Abigail Hawley
Clarence Ho
Alyssa Kirsch
Grace Kiyonaga
Lesley Kucharski
Jake Maier
Mallory Malaney
Anthony Mann
Lynsey Marchwinski
Kyle Ottenheimer
Nicole Pumarada
Anthony Sanna
Alexander Shek
Titan Shih
Stephanie Speierman
Tyler Suomala
Samantha Trochio
Mesha Walker
Meng Wang
Shawna Hong Wei
Don Wilkerson
Weiwei Wu

Instructor

Christopher Schmidt
Kelly E. Allen
George Cooper
Christopher Schmidt
Charlotte Boulay
Christine Modey
Christopher Schmidt
Matthew Kelley
Gina Brandolino
Delia DeCourcy
Jennifer Metsker
Gina Brandolino
Gina Brandolino
Charlotte Boulay
Christine Modey
Danielle Lavaque-Manty
Gina Brandolino
Christine Modey
Elizabeth Hutton
Charlotte Boulay
Kelly E. Allen Allen
Kelly Allen
Alex Ralph
George Cooper
Elizabeth Hutton
Christopher Schmidt

SCW Excellence in First-Year Writing

Nominee

Lauren Barris
Vivian Burgett
Eun Ji Choi
Anna Frick
Colin Fulton
Jake Fromm

Instructor

Jeffrey Evans, Residential College
Lolita Hernandez, Residential College
Melinda Matice, ELI
Catalina Pereda, Comp. Lit.
Megan Raphoon, History
Basak Candar, Comp. Lit.

Nicholas Gann
Hayley Goldenthal
Piper Keyes
Lucas LaFreniere
Jessica Lannen
Emily Lichko
Colleen Macke
Devin Parsons
Udae Singh Sandhu
Christine Santourian
Paul Schreiber
Benjamin Trout
Ran Xu
Mary Walle
Weichao Wang

Lolita Hernandez, Residential College
Emily Holt, Great Books
Stephanie Bolz, Great Books
Colleen Theisen, Great Books
Megan Raphoon, History
Julia Shapiro, Great Books
Julia Shapiro, Great Books
Helen Fox, Residential College
Maria Hadjipolycarpou, Comp. Lit.
Harriet Fertik, Classical Civ.
Helen Fox, Residential College
Harriet Fertik, Classical Civ.
Melinda Matice, ELI
Stephanie Bolz, Great Books
Melinda Matice, ELI

Introduction

You hold in your hands the inaugural volume of prize-winning writing produced by students in first-year writing courses at the University of Michigan. It showcases the impressive range and quality of writing that students from across the university achieve in first-year writing courses. We believe it is important to display the work of these students because writing is such a fundamental part of the Michigan education, from the moment that students arrive on campus. Writing during the first year begins a process that extends throughout the undergraduate experience, continually pushing students to develop their skills as writers in their chosen disciplines.

In academia, our main currency is language, and the ability to express our ideas effectively in writing is central to the entire enterprise. Through writing, we publish our discoveries to share them with the world; we hone our and others' arguments to advance the scholarly conversation; and we create teaching resources to allow students to enter our fields and make new discoveries of their own. For this reason, the University of Michigan makes writing a centerpiece in students' educational experience, and graduates affirm the importance of their writing education as they head into a range of careers .

At the University of Michigan no student is exempted from the First Year Writing Requirement (FYWR). Of course some students bring more writing experience and ability than others, but all students can become better writers, and the courses offered to first-year students are designed to facilitate that development. In particular, all students can become more consciously aware of the demands of college writing in a range of disciplines as they sharpen their skills at meeting those various demands. Recognizing the range of backgrounds and interests that the over 5000 incoming first-year students bring to the University of Michigan, we offer a range of FYWR courses . The process of Directed Self-Placement, which requires new students to write an essay and answer questions about their writing, helps them select one of these courses.

Sweetland 100: Transition to College Writing helps students gain confidence and capacity for college writing by providing opportunities for intensive one-on-one conversations about writing with their instructors, along with an electronic portfolio in which they can reflect on their growth as writers. Students who have taken Sweetland 100 frequently report, as Alex Liberman does, that they feel well-prepared for a FYWR course *and* that they take a new pleasure in writing for its own sake.

The majority of students satisfy the First year Writing Requirement with English 125 (College Writing) or English 124 (Writing and Literature), but other courses also fulfill

the requirement. These include Classical Civilization 101, Comparative Literature 122, Great Books 191, History 195, Lloyd Hall Scholars Program 125, and Slavic 151. Each of these courses takes a slightly different approach with a different selection of readings, but all FYWR courses address these common goals for student writers: to produce well-supported academic arguments; to learn rhetorical strategies for multiple contexts and audiences; to develop effective ways of organizing, revising, editing and proofreading writing; and to set goals and devise plans for improving writing.

The prize-winning selections included here demonstrate, in the view of both instructors and contest judges, how first-year students enact common goals for writing at the University. Thomas Yeh reflects on five of his own essays to consider the ways he developed as a writer in Sweetland 100, contrasting his work in this course with his writing in high school. Alex Liberman's electronic portfolio displays an array of his work, and he uses metaphor to describe his new understanding of the importance of revising and reshaping his writing.

Kathleen Telfer's essay, written in Great Books 191, considers Mark Rothko's non-representational work in light of Aristotle's theory of art, demonstrating how rhetorical strategies of irony and humor can effectively engage readers. Alexandra Park probes the nature of memory by comparing the story of a man who can't forget anything with a film about a man who can't remember anything, using textual evidence to make a convincing argument.

The three essays from English 125 demonstrate the range of genres in which students write. Chong Guo writes a highly evocative descriptive essay about his experience as a young painter growing up in China, in which he argues for the importance of memory. Erin Piell's persuasive essay brings together a range of sources on animal rights and animal experimentation to advance a compelling case for not changing the Animal Welfare Act. Michael Flood turns his attention to the Palestinian/Israeli debate here on campus and provides a rich analysis of how newspaper coverage of the debate compares with the experience of students involved in the debate.

This collection owes its existence to the hard work of many people, beginning with the students whose work it includes. In addition to producing writing that impressed a range of instructors looking for excellence, both those who knew them personally and those who did not, the students represented here added further polish in preparing their work for publication. The prize competition itself would not have been possible without the instructors who facilitated students' development as writers and put time and energy into identifying and nominating promising candidates. The competition relied on two panels of judges: for the Sweetland Center for Writing, Peer Tutors Lauren Dreifus, Nicole Premo, Shoaib Rasheed, and Shauna Russell along with Sweetland Instructors Danielle Lavaque-

Manty, Raymond McDaniel, Naomi Silver, and Carol Tell, all chaired by Matthew Kelley; and for the English Department Writing Program, Anne Curzan, Bethany Davila, Elizabeth Divis, Mark Koch, Kate Levin, Danielle Lillge, Randall Pinder, Sara Talpos, and Christie Toth, chaired by Chris Gerben. Both panels had to make very difficult decisions to select these winning essays from the many excellent submissions. We are very grateful to everyone involved.

Anne Curzan, Director, English Department Writing Program

Anne Ruggles Gere, Director, Sweetland Center for Writing

The 2010 English Department
Writing Program Prizes

The title for the collection of essays you hold in your hands was deliberately chosen to describe the quality of the students' writing as decided by their nominating instructors and prize committees. The writing celebrated here is excellent; each piece communicates clear and convincing ideas through a strong voice and persuasive appeal to audience, both immediate and invoked. The reason this title was chosen, and the reason readers should take note, is because it does not celebrate necessarily the "best writing." Though these essays may be personal bests for these student authors, there are many other "bests" continually developing in each of our writing classrooms, by hundreds of students in hundreds of essays that will only be read by a few people. Most of the "best" writing taking place in the English Department Writing Program is shared only by the students and their instructors, in small communities that value collaboration, revision, and personal evaluation above any broader recognition.

Still, this inaugural prize is significant in that, for the first time, the EDWP is able to publically recognize the devotion our instructors have toward our students, and some exceptional instances of when our students have risen to the challenge of crafting polished prose that is instantly and universally accepted as an excellent example of the great work happening everyday in our classrooms and offices. As a result, we hope to highlight these three essays not as the best examples of the writing we do, but as representative of the tireless efforts and constant drive towards excellence that binds all of us together across our many first-year writing courses.

Over two months, our completely volunteer writing prize committee poured over the 40+ nominated essays from dozens of instructors who had taught either English 124 or English 125 in fall 2009. The committee—including Anne Curzan, Mark Koch, Randall Pinder, Bethany Davila, Elizabeth Divis, Christie Toth, Danielle Lillge, Sara Talpos, Kate Levin, and me—worked in pairs through three rounds of scoring to narrow our field down to just three final essays. The task was made incredibly difficult by the fact that every single nominated essay was a strong example of first-year writing that probably earned a high grade, and high praise, from the nominating instructor. However, by the final round, our committee made the fortunate discovery that we had reached near-unanimous consensus in the three essays you see in this collection.

In these three essays you find different styles and different modes, ranging from personal narrative to research-based argument. What unifies them, though, as clear examples of excellence, is their shared risk-taking and creative efforts to convey very individual ideas to a larger audience. Though that audience was initially only a small group, we now invite you to share in their courage and success. What excites us the most in offering this prize this year, is that the excellence displayed here will challenge future instructors and students to strive for even greater writing achievement in years to come. Until then, we invite you to join us in admiring how high the bar has already been set.

Chris Gerben, EDWP Writing Prize Chair
Graduate Student Mentor, English Department Writing Program

The theme for this course was What is College Writing?: An Introduction to Inquiry. Assignments throughout the semester asked students to choose a University of Michigan related topic of interest to them and to pose good academic questions about the topic. Students had the opportunity to do both archival and field research and to record their research in an annotated bibliography. The final project was a 10-12 page researched argument based on this preliminary work. Successful papers demonstrated that an academic research paper draws on a combination of personal, creative, and academic rigor. Successful papers added to important conversations about the world in which we live.

Michael Flood's paper is a wonderful example of this dynamic writing process. In the first few weeks of the course, Michael posed the following question: What is the relationship between Israeli and Palestinian groups on the University of Michigan campus? He posed this question out of a desire to know, and he answered this question by collecting a wonderfully diverse set of research sources that included interviews with both Israeli and Palestinian club leaders, newspaper articles, and University of Michigan's statement on diversity for faculty. My favorite part of the paper is his trenchant reading of a photograph that appeared on the front page of The Michigan Daily. Originally, Michael wrestled with what he thought was a limited question. He did not want to limit himself to speaking only about the campus groups. However, as he continued his research, he discovered how complicated his seemingly small question was. Other people have written about Israeli and Palestinian relations, but no one else has covered the topic in the way Michael has here. In this way, Michael has established some genuinely important things to consider about our approach to diversity and our approach to each other.

*Julie Babcock, Instructor, English 125
English Department Writing Program*

Bridging the Gap: An Exploration into the Nature of the Palestinian/Israeli Debate at the University of Michigan and What Diversity Has Done to Change it

Michael Flood

The University of Michigan prides itself on its long-established tradition of diversity, citing it as integral to the creation and dissemination of rational and proactive thought. The faculty handbook states that:

Not only does the education of students from diverse backgrounds itself address societal problems, but collaborative efforts within the University among persons with diverse points of view can facilitate the development of new ideas in our intellectual enterprise and help us to formulate creative solutions to societal problems.

From the perspective of this vision of diversity, everyone gains a more insightful outlook on matters when they are exposed to a variety of different viewpoints. Solutions on the other hand, do not come about in the same passive manner. Instead, they are the result of cooperative efforts between unique individuals who, though calling from many different backgrounds and environments, share the same unifying sense of purpose. However, if this is truly the case, then what sort of impact can diversity have upon two groups that lack any semblance of a common goal? Would any rational person really expect a group of white supremacists to be capable of cooperating and working together with a group of African Americans, knowing how each faction feels about the other? Even at the University, the administration's call for collaboration sometimes simply isn't loud enough to overcome the entrenched biases among antithetic parties.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict incites powerful emotions in people the world over, dividing them largely into two camps: pro-Israel advocates and pro-Palestinian advocates. At the University of Michigan, many students choose to identify themselves with one of these camps, providing the perfect situation on campus in which the powerful force of diversity, at least in an ideal situation, could and should manifest itself. According to the University's ascribed wishes, this manifestation should result in the bringing-together of and cooperation between these two parties as they work towards the common goal of peace, by formulating new ideas and solutions through collaboration. However, to anyone who has spent even a brief amount of time studying this conflict in effect, even on many college campuses across the country, it is quite clear that this isn't the case. Traditionally existing as some of the United States' epicenters of diversity, university campuses have often played host to large amounts of Arab-Jewish antagonism, and as some relatively recent incidents indicate, they still do. The University of Colorado-Boulder witnessed many such instances in 2002. In one case, student activists wrote "Zionazis" in chalk on numerous sidewalks and confronted a group of Jewish counter-protestors at an anti-Israel presentation with shouts of "Nazis!" and other verbal insults ("ADL and Hillel"). A more inflammatory incident occurred at the University of Berkley in 2002. On April 9, a group of Jewish students gathered in Sproul plaza to commemorate holocaust remembrance day. Concurrently, a group of pro-Palestinians held a rally in Sproul plaza to remember the 1948 Deir Yassin massacre of more than 100 Palestinians. The two groups exchanged insults and slurs for the rest of the day, separated by a ring of uniformed police officers ("Anti-

Semitic/Anti-Israel"). In light of these incidents and others like them, the question arises: is the University's vision of productive collaboration between a diverse yet unified community realistically attainable? By answering this question, a better understanding of diversity's role in affecting the thoughts, beliefs, and relationships of University of Michigan students can be gained.

During the early stages of my research, I came across a series of articles in *The Michigan Daily* that dealt with some aspect of the relations between the Israeli-Palestinian groups on campus. After browsing through them, it quickly became clear that the relationship these articles presented was one filled with tension and mutual resentment. This was perfectly fine, since the gist of these stories completely supported my original hypothesis: Diversity at the University of Michigan is not having any tangible effect upon the relations between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli student groups. Furthermore, I was filled with a sense of vindication, knowing that my initial speculation had been correct. I was on track to write an easily researched, cut-and-dry paper before I had conducted even a single interview.

In attempting to understand the relationship between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli advocacy groups on campus, *The Michigan Daily* proved to be useful for two major reasons. In the first place, it provided the context in which I was able to frame the early part of my research. More importantly, *The Michigan Daily*, because it serves as the primary source of campus news for the majority of the student body, provides views on the pro-Palestinian/pro-Israeli relationship on campus that are generally representative of those shared by the Michigan community. These views

are made fairly clear in a series of articles that were run from January 14-15, 2009, dealing with a surge in Israeli-Palestinian advocacy activity in response to the then-recent incursion into the Gaza strip by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces). While comprising the events of only a single date, these articles are pivotal to understanding the larger community's perspective on the Palestinian/Israeli debate on campus and how its continued vitality relates to them.

On the night of January 14, 2009, opposition rallies were held at the Michigan Union and the Diag. In the preceding weeks, thousands of Palestinians and several Israelis had been killed in a bloody series of engagements after the IDF had initiated its invasion of the Gaza Strip. Additionally, tens of thousands of Palestinians had been left homeless. After being away from school for two weeks as the University transitioned from one semester to the next, student activists felt a strong need to quickly mobilize and show support for their respective sides after getting back to campus.

At the Union, Palestinian supporters gathered to protest the Israeli invasion of the Gaza and demanded both an immediate cessation of U.S. aid to Israel and a general boycott of all goods produced in the country. However, several of the protestors lent a controversial charge to the event when they showed up waving Hamas flags, offending many random passers-by. Ben Kaminsky, the chair of Israel IDEA (, who was quoted on the subject. "You have people waving Hamas flags. Hamas is a terrorist organization. It's absolutely outrageous that these things can go on," (Aber). Back on the Diag, pro-Israel constituents were showing their support for

the IDF's actions, citing Israel's right to defend itself. Ari Parritz, president of the Interfraternity Council, was quoted as saying that, "Israel as a state will continue to exist forever. Any person or government who wishes to extinguish this reality will surely do so at their own peril" (Muslow). It's plain to see that from reading these articles, one would readily view these two anti-polar rallies as proof of a bitter, or at the very least tense, relationship existing between pro-Israel groups and SAFE (Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, the main pro-Palestinian group on campus). A picture included in the article "Two campus events, two points of view" only serves to exacerbate the image of the SAFE/Israel activist relationship in the eyes of anyone who sees it. In the picture, two pro-Palestinian protestors are shown wearing head coverings reminiscent of those worn by militants Jihadists in the Middle East. One of the Palestinian flags that they're waving, emblazoned with the Dome of the Rock as well as some Arabic script, appears menacing simply due to the unknown: the average person has no idea what it says, and ignorance breeds fear.



The colors in the picture make the whole scene a bit more unnerving as well. The orange glow emanating from the Michigan Union bathes the protestors in a sinister, ominous light, resulting in a nightmarish tone. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the photo is the angle from which it is shot. The camera's low elevation in relation to that of the figure in the foreground lends an air of intimidation; his eyes seem to glare at the viewer. Regardless of the message that the protestors may be trying to send, this image conveys to the viewer the idea that the SAFE rally being conducted in the picture is organized and run by radicals: the kind of people usually seen on television burning flags and firing weapons into the air. In this way, the reader assumes that there must be tension between SAFE and IDEA, as there seems to be no way that any of the pro-Israeli groups could get along with SAFE if these two protestors are representative of the typical SAFE constituent.

At the same time, the same *Daily* article presents a conflict on principle between three of the main pro-Israel groups on campus: IDEA, UPZ (The Union of Progressive Zionists), and AMI (The American Movement for Israel). Earlier in the day on January 14, these three groups had collaborated to organize a Blue-Out, an event which encouraged kids around campus to wear a blue shirt on that day to show their own, personal support for Israel. The disagreement between the groups allegedly occurred in regard to the motivation for holding the blue-out on that specific day. Bria Gray, chair of UPZ said that while the SAFE demonstration was not the only reason they chose Wednesday for the Blue Out, it was definitely part of the motivation. However, Rachel Goldstein and Ben Kaminsky, chairs of AMI and IDEA respectively, maintained that the Blue Out was not intentionally scheduled for the

same day as the SAFE demonstration. Goldstein was quoted as saying that, “We do not want to react against the feelings of other student organizations, but rather unite the pro-Israel community,” (Aber). This example serves to highlight the lack of cohesiveness between the different Israel groups, even when collaborating on the same project. It paints the picture of a very divided pro-Israel community on campus. At the same time, a more belligerent and reactionary side of the pro-Israel community is shown, adding more weight to the idea that radicals on both sides control the debate on campus.

In essence then, this series of *Daily* articles presents the relationship on campus between these two parties as being a relatively antagonistic one: terribly impervious to the effects of diversity and dominated by divisiveness, even among those who occupy the same half of the conflict’s spectrum. In light of this view, it would be easy to conclude that diversity is having a minimal effect on these two parties’ inter-group relations. However, as is often the case with newspapers, normally unimpressive news can be manipulated by reporters to seem as sensational, or as volatile, as possible. The truth behind the supposedly “tense” interactions displayed in these articles between the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli groups is that they are actually much less charged than they are made to appear.

The main source of conflict presented in the articles had to do with the pro-Palestinian protestors who accosted passers-by with offensive comments and racial slurs. However, while the *Daily* presents these ne’er-do-wells as student members of SAFE, it turns out that they were actually members from the

surrounding community of Ann Arbor proper (Goldstein). Thus, the main source of confrontation that these stories were built around came from an outside source: one not under the influence of the University's policies. The picture of the Palestinian protests, though very effective in its purpose, is also misleading. The protestors in the photo are completely bundled up, showing only their eyes to the camera. While this makes them appear threatening, it can be explained by the fact that the temperature was well below zero the night of the rallies. Also, there is no evidence that the students pictured were some of the troublemakers. All the rest of the negative traits of the picture can be traced to linguistic ignorance and the artificial viewpoint selected by the photographer. Lastly, Bria Gray's comment about the motivation behind the blue-out serves as the chief source of pro-Israeli antagonism in these articles. According to Gray, her quote in the *Daily* was taken out of context, and was not intended in any way as a challenge to the pro-Palestinians on campus. In this specific case then, the general view disseminated by the *Daily* proved to be largely exaggerated and inaccurate.

In reality, the relationships between SAFE, AMI, IDEA, and UPZ have never been better. In the past couple of years, SAFE and UPZ have collaborated with each other to sponsor several events, including movie showings, and a dialogue at the Social Justice Conference last year. AMI, UPZ, and SAFE also cooperated with each other last year in bringing in The Parents' Circle Families Forum, an Israeli-Palestinian grievance/dialogue group (Gray). Goldstein expressed her excitement in participating:

They bring people from both Palestinians and Israelis together to talk about suffering and looking more at the human side of the conflict. UPZ organized this event and asked AMI and SAFE to cosponsor the event. So, we all collaborated it was very interesting. We don't get to work together that often because we're not often bringing in the same people. So it was a really good experience. We definitely got to know each other on a better level than we had before.

Bria Gray, chair of UPZ spoke about more of the organizations and events that UPZ has been part of in the past. She mentioned a Palestinian group called 'Bridging the Gap' (No longer in existence) with which she and other members created a coexistence mosaic. She also mentioned UPZ's involvement in an interfaith dialogue with some religiously-oriented groups on campus. "We are in the process of collaborating with the Muslim Student Assembly (MSA) and the Muslim-Jewish group, or MuJew, to discuss the role of interfaith – more specifically Jews and Muslims – dialogue on campus."

Relations among the different pro-Israeli groups have been fairly good as well. On February 11th, 2009, AMI and Israel IDEA both worked together to bring an Israeli-Arab journalist to speak at the Michigan League about his experiences in and opinions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Muslow). Even when they're not collaborating on an event, members of AMI and Israel IDEA make an effort to go to each other's events in order to show their support, even if they may disagree somewhat with their methods. Goldstein showed up at the January 14 rally even

though she wasn't thrilled at the idea. "I went to the pro-Israel rally. However, I was not a part of it, in the organizing of it. I do see that as a little bit too responsive for my liking... I thought that holding a counter-rally was a bit like, 'We can do it too!' I don't think that's really how it should be." If there's one flashpoint in these relationships, it consists of the exchanges between Israel IDEA and UPZ, whose ideological differences have caused them to clash in the past. However, Bria Gray, as well as Lizzy Loring, her predecessor, has worked to foster new relations with Israel IDEA by reaching out to them with various proposals for co-sponsored events. Though the two groups may still not be on the best of terms (According to Gray the UPZ's advances have been largely unreciprocated by Israel IDEA), at least the sparks of reconciliation are visible (Gray).

The good relations between the groups can be traced to the friendly air that dominates the interactions between students occupying leadership positions. The most striking example of this is the fact that Gray and Goldstein are currently roommates, and good friends. Their relationship over the past two years has really cemented the bonds between AMI and UPZ. Commenting on the overall relationship between the pro-Israel groups, Goldstein had this to say, "Sometimes I'll be grilled up with something that UPZ has done, and IDEA won't be happy with something that AMI has done, but ultimately we all like each other, and get along pretty well, and I have a lot of respect for their organizations." Goldstein also shared some details about her relationship with the ex-chair of SAFE, whose seat is now occupied by Dalack. "As far as SAFE goes, last year we had very good relations. I knew the chair; the chair knew me. We would sit and talk, we'd learn from each other, and we had a

very positive relationship. He was chair for a really long time, but that let him get a better handle on what he was doing and how to be a great leader. I have a lot of really glowing things to say about him.”

Aside from one-on-one interactions, the relatively good relationships have been influenced by the moderate views shared by the leadership as well. Ben Kaminsky is taking an active role in collaboration by participating in the IGR (Program on Intergroup-Relations)-sponsored dialogue on the Arab-Israeli conflict, begun this very year (2009). He has stated his views in the past on the need for mutual cooperation between the two sides of this struggle. “If there ever is going to be a solution to this conflict, pragmatists need to come together to find solutions” (Muslow). At the January 14th Union rally, Andrew Dalack shared his frustration at the lack of restraint that some of the protestors displayed. “I was disappointed by the ignorance some people displayed in their language, signage and behavior to onlookers as well.” Although most of the perpetrators were private residents of Ann Arbor, and not students in SAFE, Dalack still felt that their actions reflected poorly on SAFE and the pro-Palestinian community, and hoped that “the inappropriate behavior by some community members does not reflect on the community as a whole, as they are supportive, rational and of high moral caliber” (Aber). Bria Gray was also frustrated over the issue that popped up on January 14th, regarding her quote in the Daily about the motivation behind the AMI/IDEA/UPZ – organized Blue-Out. “My quote from the daily was taken out of context to make it look way more controversial than it ever really was. I would say that the most confrontation we (UPZ) have had with SAFE is now, when we are trying to figure out how to

collaborate. And there aren't even harsh feelings."

If this is the truth about the relationships between on-campus Israeli/Palestinian advocacy groups, that they're not really at odds with one another but are actually united in purpose, then why did the *Michigan Daily* present such a different view to its audience? The easy answer (And one previously mentioned) is that the reporters at the *Daily* simply manipulated their stories to create the semblance of discord. Conflict is far more interesting than collaboration, and even "pro-bono" reporters like those at the *Daily* want their pieces to be read. While this is certainly a possibility, I believe that the real answer is more complex than that. Just as popular opinion reflects the views disseminated by newspapers, the views that a newspaper chooses to express are often indicative of those widely held by society. Reporters are not above the influence of social pressures; they are integrated into society just as police officers and mailmen are. The two groups constantly feed off of each other in a never-ending oscillation of collective opinion. Thus, the *Daily's* overwhelmingly negative view of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship on campus is an indicator that the student body itself views this relationship as such. This pessimistic impression is glaringly present even in my own original hypothesis. Only after meeting and conversing with people who were actively involved in the issue did I gain a more accurate understanding of what these group dynamics were really like.

Among whom then, do the entrenched biases in this situation really exist: the two advocacy factions, or the unaffiliated masses? Diversity seems to be working to

bridge the gaps between the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian parties, but is failing to affect new insight in the majority of us as students. Instead, we are subscribing to more traditional, one-dimensional outlooks when confronted by issues that we don't really know anything about. It boils down to a question of culpability: Is the university flawed in its implementation of diversity on campus, or has the student body as a whole simply failed to take on an active role in the exchange of new ideas and the progression of thought?

Ultimately, the relationships between on-campus Palestinian/Israeli groups have improved over the last several years, due both to friendly interactions between opposition leaders, as well as to their shared purpose in working towards peace for the Middle East. This advancement in their relations demonstrates that diversity is indeed having an influence on this historically untenable situation at the University. However, limits on the extent of diversity's effects are plainly visible as well. Those who were not deeply involved in this issue maintained a relatively ignorant view on the true nature of the debate on campus. This implies that in order for diversity to affect real change, each individual needs to proactively interact with others who possess ideas that conflict with his or her own. As the University of Michigan's handbook states, "For the University to excel in reaching these goals, the rich diversity of contemporary society is a resource that needs to be *tapped*" (University Policies). Thus, diversity is not a passive force that can be pressed onto others, but is an invaluable tool that requires the personal motivation and drive of each student to utilize it. In and of itself, it is simply a state of existence: no more or less meaningful than the interactions between different strains of bacteria living in the same Petri

dish. However, when an individual take that step beyond mere interactions, when he decides to dive into the multifarious world around him with an open and inquiring mind, then diversity is transformed into a way of life: one that is ultimately more fulfilling, and harmonious with a moral vision of our collective futures.

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Good writers pay attention. They do lots of other things, too of course—choose the right words, craft lovely sentences, build strong and complex arguments, establish credibility with their audience—but if they're not keen observers of the world they live in, it's unlikely that the words on the page will feel entirely convincing, and it's even more unlikely that readers will be interested in what the writers have to say. Chong and Erin's essays are impressive in many respects, but it is this curiosity and attention to detail that makes them truly exceptional examples of freshman composition.

Chong's essay is a coming-of-age story of sorts, a response to an assignment that asked students to reflect on an evocative space from their childhood or recent past. I wanted students to examine complexities about the space and their relationship with it and to consider the larger conclusions they might come to about this place and themselves. Chong's writing here is mature and often poetic, an impressive balance between the concrete and the conceptual. He first turns his attention to an art studio in Beijing, meditating on the objects and the people that populated the years he spent not just drawing, but learning to see. Then his gaze expands outward: he moves us from the studio to the world after the studio—to another art class and to the present moment. Ultimately, the space that Chong is most interested in is the internal one, the revelations we experience when we learn to look very carefully.

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The Studio

Chong Guo

Throughout my youth I had struggled to understand why, out of all the places in this world, I found peace and refuge in that dark and dusty room called the studio. All year round, the smell of linseed oil and turpentine brush cleaner permeated the studio. The studio was old. Occasionally, when it rained in the spring, water seeped in through a crack on the ceiling and temporarily washed away the heavy aroma of the oil paint we used. Thinking back, it must have been the spring of 1996 when I took up those drawing lessons, for I clearly remember inhaling that magical smell of rainwater the first time I walked into the studio. I was six when I met my first instructor, a fragile-looking Chinese lady in her late 40's. Back then, my classmates and I secretly nicknamed her The Owl. There were two reasons for the children's mischievous name-calling: first, she wore thick-framed glasses, which looked rather disproportionate on her face; second, she was clearly a nocturnal species based on the fact that our studio was constantly bathed in darkness. The Owl did not hate light per se, just to clarify. She was only slightly more sensitive to light than the rest of us. For you must know, that even in the enclosed space where The Owl resided, there was light, minimal and artificial, radiating from an antique studio lamp.

Our lamp arrived to the studio on the day of fall equinox, 1986. Since then it had stayed and dominated the center of the room for over a decade. This particular lamp that my instructor purchased used a 50-watt full spectrum incandescent light bulb. It mimicked the warmth and intensity of natural light. The lamp itself was made of black coated metal. It also had knobs for height and angle adjustments. A plastic cord emerged from the bottom of the stand and stretched itself across to the other end of the room. In any art studio, a

decent lamp is an indispensable property, especially when its necessity is accentuated by inadequate room conditions. Due to a lack of planning during construction, our studio had windows that faced west instead of north. The problem with our westward facing windows was a lack of stable natural light during the day. So to compensate for that, The Owl installed two layers of thick black curtains, a low cost correction, also one that caused us great agony during the summer when the dark curtains occasionally cooked our room to a suffocating temperature.

Aside from these unintended deficiencies, the room was well suited for drawing in every other respect. In the southeast corner of the studio there was a collection of clay vessels for drawing practices. They came in all shapes and sizes, some slightly more interesting than the others. The purpose of drawing these dull and uninspiring vessels was a bit unclear to me at that time. However many years later, at a life drawing class I took in downtown Toronto, I encountered a diagram of the female body simplified as a water vessel. Only then did I realize that the shape of those vessels we drew in the studio were in perfect synchrony with the curvatures of the female body. How subtly and ingeniously did The Owl exhibit the sensual beauty in the body of the opposite sex without exposing to us the nervous flesh of a nude model.

Human bodies weren't the only things that were barred from the studio. For a long time, we kept any organic or living things away as well. In just a few days, the over-heated room would turn bananas into little sticks, oranges into green puffballs, and eggs into the most lethal stink bombs one could ever imagine. The metamorphosis that took place around us in the studio could be quite extraordinary. Like The Owl said, "Thou shalt not bring any living things to the studio except thyself!" Upon the realization of this simple law

that governed the studio, we swiftly adapted to drawing wax fruits, stuffed animals and plaster sculptures. Eggs were still allowed in the studio, except on hot summer days.

Inside a dark green cabinet that rested side to side with the clay vessels, our instructor kept a collection of plaster-cast Platonic solids and other geometric shapes. Drawing these was once standard practice for me as a beginner, the most important reason being that they were white. Though this might sound absurd, it is extremely difficult for untrained eyes to distinguish dark from light colors. French Ultramarine (outside the studio we call it blue) and Carmine (red) for example, will look identical if you attempt to portray their subtle nuances using a black graphite pencil. In the studio, we were forced to see things in black and white before we saw them in colors. In addition to their monochrome nature, the Platonic solids were perfect and static objects. The simplicity of their geometry existed nowhere else but in the studio. A sphere was a sphere, a cube was a cube, and icosahedrons were icosahedrons. The students could stare at the solids for as long as they wanted, but the Platonic solids are static entities, indifferent to time and their curious observers.

Being the only living things, those of us in the studio kept each other company. The Owl loved to tell us stories. One of her old time stories that I can still remember was called “Da Vinci drawing eggs.” According to some unknown sources, Da Vinci was punished to draw baskets worth of eggs in his youth because he had offended his master Andrea del Verrocchio by saying that, “Eggs are not interesting.” With rare patience, the young Renaissance master observed and drew each egg such that when Verrocchio returned to check on his disciple, Da Vinci was able to identify any egg that Verrocchio picked out from the basket on his own sketch. To this day, I remain skeptical of the validity of the story. It

seems more reasonable to believe that Da Vinci had lied to his master and got away with it because Verrocchio wasn't able to tell apart the eggs himself and was ashamed of admitting it to his disciple. As improbable as it may sound, The Owl had no trouble believing the story. Consequently, a fair proportion of my earlier training was filled with repetitive exercises that tested the boundaries of my patience.

Many times my classmates and I found ourselves staring at the boring wine bottles we drew in various positions over the year: standing, lying horizontally, lying at an angle, filled with water, half-filled with water, hanging down from the ceiling or just leaning against another identical-looking wine bottle. At the end of the day, we all cursed and lamented the loss of our free time to drawing, once a source of inspiration, now the source of our aesthetic fatigue. Routinely, distressed pupils retreated to dark corners and vanished, never to return to the studio. Afraid of the abyss, I kept myself safe by staying closer to the center stage light. Soon enough, The Owl started using various combinations of objects, which made her lessons slightly more interesting. By the time I blew the candles for my tenth birthday, we had already started drawing stuffed animals, tree roots, plastic flowers, and then eventually, plaster cast sculptures.

The practice of drawing plaster cast originated during the Renaissance. Along with the invention of the printing press, it fueled the spread of art and knowledge in fifteenth century Europe. Da Vinci's master Verrocchio, for example, made plaster casts of body parts so that he and his disciples could study the human body by having the plaster casts continually before their eyes. During the late Renaissance period, artists across Europe kept casts of famous statues like Moses, Apollo and Winged Victory in their workshops for teaching purposes. Nowadays, little changes are made regarding the method of training a

youth apprentice who chooses to follow the traditional discipline. Out of all the sculptures in our studio, we esteemed the bust of Michelangelo's David as the ultimate challenge. At the time, The Owl granted no one the permission to draw David. We'd been told over and over again, "You are not ready," every time we asked. The gratification of drawing David remained a subject of speculation, but the waiting fueled our fantasies. It was only recently did I get the chance to do a detailed sketch of David. This was many years later of course, and I'd already left my birthplace and the old studio in China by then. The graphite sketch took me almost three month to finish, no doubt one of the hardest pieces I had ever encountered. I was eighteen. At the age when David beheaded Goliath, I dethroned David, with much pleasure and gratification.

My dad used to tell me, "There are only a handful of things that a man could possibly love. Once you've found them, overcome your doubts and frustrations. Then love them more." For a long time, I was sure that the studio meant to me what love might have meant for everyone else. As a child, I was often preoccupied with my own thoughts, never paying much attention to the omnipresent chattering of the world. Looking back, I realized how shielded my childhood was, not only due to my psychological eccentricities but also my uncommon upbringing in the studio. In 2004, my family moved to Toronto and I started working in a new studio room, bigger, brighter and properly ventilated compared to the one I grew up in. It was a pleasant change of place, but who would have guessed that two years later in this very studio, I would encounter a person who profoundly impacted every aspect of my life, including my perception of the world.

It was a typical breezy summer day in the studio when I laid eyes on the canvas of a girl whom I'd never met before. Her painting had a chromatic exuberance and an analytical

delicacy that were rare for her age. As I stood and marveled at her painting, she turned and met my stare. Silently, the studio dissolved and faded into the background. All I could see, for a brief moment in time, were her dark iris and the rosy flesh on her cheeks. Forget about David, forget about the Platonic solids and forget about the vessels. They all seemed pale in comparison to the beauty of the girl who stood in front of my eyes. I walked out the studio with her that day. For the first time in my life, I found peace and serenity in the world beyond the hyper-realistic realm the studio.

Yet sadly, as all stories of youthful infatuations go, our short-lived happiness was soon replaced with heartrending agony when I lost her to a prestigious art school in New York City and my artistic aspirations to life's prudence. I struggled greatly with her sudden departure, my lonesome existence and the somber realization that my studio days were finally over. Walking on a bright summer day in Ann Arbor, I feel, as F. Scott Fitzgerald puts it, "simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (30). The sun is simply too bright and the leaves are simply too green. The world changes constantly, so do we. Very few people linger around long enough for others to see or to remember. Looking up to the azure sky of August, I feel grief stricken and disillusioned at heart.

Slowly, I developed a strange habit of staring at things so I could picture them in my head with eyes closed. I discovered that memory is a transient thing: blooming like a rose, and withering away as quickly. It is a tragic existence – seeing the world we've struggled so much to love collapsing upon itself as we age and die. But I did not submit to this ancient imperfection of human consciousness. I rebelled. As means of self-preservation, I started carrying around a hardcover sketchbook. In it, I recorded the things I saw: a dove, a little girl in the subway car, an old man sleeping on a bench, a cat, a punk teenager, a tugboat and

empty wine bottles, which I had now begun to love. In this modern era, when instant gratifications and neon-bright distractions dominate our lives, our memories are atrophying at an amazing rate. This is the depravity of our age, the unwillingness to struggle with and to remember, against all odds, the things that define us, the things that drive us, and the things that liberate us. The studio is the vestige of a bygone past. But somewhere deep inside, there is a lamp that illuminates only the things that matter, even if it's just an empty glass bottle that waits to be filled.

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Erin's essay about scientific experimentation on animals was a response to our final assignment of the semester. Students had a lot of leeway to select a topic they found interesting, to craft an arguable statement about their topic, and to build their argument logically and reasonably. Erin's essay is well-researched and well-reasoned, but it is also a sophisticated and compelling combination of two genres: the personal essay and the research paper. With her own work in a U of M lab as the background for the rest of her writing, Erin is clear about her bias, but she's also a credible, reasonable source. She manages to be balanced and forthright, objective and emotionally evocative. Though written with poetic delicacy, the observations in her first paragraph are raw and uncomfortable—and also riveting. Because Erin is such a keen observer, her readers are persuaded to pay attention too.

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The Animal Welfare Act: Negative Effects of Expansion

Erin Piell

About half the size of my pinky, he squirms against my latex glove to escape the ethanol disinfectant. His translucent skin displays his internal organs; his body jolts with each heart beat. A pallid film covers his newborn eyes: black and beady without lids to close them. Ignited with morbid fascination, I must remind myself to work quickly. The aluminum foil, streaked with ethanol, becomes the gallows, and my scissors the guillotine. Wincing, I decapitate the “pup” or baby mouse, and discard the still flinching body. I snip mechanically between the eyes, following a path to the back of the head, and slide beneath the spongy, undeveloped skull. With a metallic spoon, I scoop the glossy brain, and place it in the culture media for dissection. Then using tweezers and a miniature knife, I remove the hippocampus, the portion of the brain now heavily researched due to its function in learning and memory. Since I joined the neuroscience research team, the work has become easier, but it will never be easy. I will always hate the sound of tissue squishing against my scissors, and the remnants of blood that stains them. However, I do it all in the name of science, and for the benefit of others, which is why the debate surrounding animal experimentation has sparked my interest.

Controversy concerning the use of animals for research purposes, originated in Great Britain, and in 1824 the foundation of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Animal Cruelty marked the beginning of the animal rights movement. The movement later spread to American soil, active through organizations such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and ALF (Animal Liberation Front), an organization commonly known for its violent and illegal protest methods. (Guither 2). Arguing the morality of animal experimentation, and the debate considering whether or not animals are entitled to individual rights is entirely philosophical, and essentially repetitive. Therefore, as I am not a philosopher, I do not intend to argue these issues directly. As background however, the moral debate was first presented by Peter Singer in 1976,

and later by Tom Regan in 1985 through his famous essay *The Case for Animal Rights*. Animal Rights Activists used these works to evidence their cause throughout the movement, and it obviously, has had significant effect on the treatment and care of animals in research.

Because of activist groups such as these, animals in research are heavily protected through universally accepted ethical and legal means. A set of principles named the 3 R's (replacement, reduction, refinement) guide researchers ethically in their experimentation (and in Great Britain, these 3 R's are embedded within the experimentation laws): *replacement* calls for the continual development of alternatives to animals in research, *reduction*, quite simply, asks researchers to reduce the number of animals used in experimentation, and *refinement* requests an increase in the value of the results obtained (Monamy 5).

Legal means also protect animals by imposing policies for researchers. In the United States the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) of 1966, amended numerous times, currently protects cats, dogs, and primates establishing, “standards for care and treatment of laboratory animals, excluding rats, mice, and birds,” (Paul 14). In addition to this law, a two person committee (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee or IACUC) dedicated to ensuring the safety of all experimental procedures must be established at each research institution. The Public Health Service, which provides the majority of funding for American research, also mandates a set of guidelines that all monetary recipients must obey. Other policies and organizations exist; however, these are the most relevant (Paul 14).

Of course, these laws and organizations are not unnecessary or excessive. Without these laws, animal suffering would likely increase. In the United Kingdom in 1997, for example, the research institution HLS (Huntington Life Sciences) was investigated and punished for the act of two lab technicians who were videotaped hitting puppies and yelling at them. The government properly enforced the law to ensure HLS's compliance with UK animal experimentation policy,

(Metcalfe 128). In this case and others similar, the work of animal rights activists is necessary.

Recently, however, animal rights activists are working toward a less righteous legal cause. The Animal Welfare Act concerns animal rights activists because it excludes mice, rats, and birds. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has considered altering the law, and abandoning the exemption of these species. In 2001 the American Anti-Vivisectionist Society nearly succeeded in this endeavor. However, the government put the litigation on hold, which could now potentially begin again (Fishbein 2). Despite my personal distaste of the dissection portion of my research position, the extension of the law tastes poisonously acrimonious. Though the law would not completely end experimentation on these animals, it would decrease the number of mice, rats, and birds used because of increased costs for laboratories and higher standards of care and record keeping. Because mice, rats, and birds compose 80 to 90 percent of current research, amending the AWA would essentially require a complete overhaul of the research community (Paul 10). Indeed, researchers would need to find alternatives to animal experimentation, which are often insufficient. In addition, the extension would lead to uncountable obstacles for researchers and virtually no additional benefits for the animals in question because they are already protected by numerous other laws and committees. Therefore any extension of the AWA would be deleterious to research because it would limit experimentation on the most vital animals (mice, rats, and birds), and biomedical research, both the past and present, depends on these animals for advancement.

Despite the fragmented scheme of the AWA, other laws weave it together thoroughly, filling in any gaps. Researchers already adhere to stringent requirements and legal procedures which protect mice, rats, and birds. For example, an Animal Welfare committee at each research institution approves all experimentation before it is carried out, and anything deemed too painful or cruel is not practiced. Additional legislation under the AWA is therefore excessive and

unnecessary. Supporters of expanding the AWA argue that, “if research institutions are already providing humane care to their mice, birds, and rats, application of the USDA regulations would not be burdensome” (Fishbein 2). This thought process that a law change would not negatively affect the researchers, is completely false because researchers would be inhibited immensely by these additional laws.

Money is what everyone needs in research, yet there is very little of it. Hence, it would be unfair to tie a laboratory's research funding to adherence to laws protecting mice, rats, and birds. While interviewing for the research position, my supervisor gave me a tour of the laboratory where I would be working. At one point, he showed me a 1.5 million dollar microscope, which I recently realized I could pay for my college education approximately 75 times if tuition remains \$20,000 a year. The moral of the story: research is expensive. The majority of scientists receive government supplied grants, or grants from outside sources. Pharmaceutical companies pay millions to develop one drug, and with current economic standing, these millions are less available. Implementation of additional requirements would lead to enormous costs for researchers. For example, new legislation would demand recorded accounts of the numbers of mice, rats, and birds bred. This task is reasonable when studying primates, which produce only a few offspring at a time, but insurmountable when considering mice. Mice breed rapidly, and in 2001 the estimated number of mice used in laboratories was 25 million. The number has risen since due to the increased use of genetically modified mice (Fishbein 2). These new records would need to be kept organized, and would be taken frequently. Hence, funding would no longer be used for research itself but for useless record keeping, which benefits neither the researcher nor the animals. Therefore, because of the new standards under the AWA, increased funding for research projects would be necessary. Inevitably, certain research institutions would close due to lack of monetary resource.

Regardless of one's moral beliefs about animal experimentation, research has unarguably led to numerous medical discoveries, beneficial for man and animal alike. For example, vaccines owe their development to animal experimentation. The crippling disease, polio, affected hundreds of thousands of Americans, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Dr. Jonas Salk eventually developed the vaccine through experiments on kidney cells taken from monkeys and through testing on mice. In his book *The Case for Animal Experimentation*, Michael Allen Fox acknowledges the success of animal usage in the development of vaccines.

The central role of animal experiments in the discovery and development of immunizations against a wide spectrum of diseases has been highlighted frequently. Some of the most noteworthy landmarks in the history of preventative medicine can be included here, such as vaccines or antitoxins to combat rabies, cholera, diphtheria, tetanus, pneumonia, polio, measles and viral hepatitis (Fox 95).

In addition, pigeons allowed scientists to decipher the mosquito disease, malaria. Sleep disorders attribute their treatment to the dissection of rat brains and the discovery of the circuits controlling sleep. Using transgenic animals (most commonly mice), scientists may replicate genetic diseases, and study them without the use of humans. Sickle cell anemia, for example, is now studied intensely to find more effective treatment. (Cohen 90).

Humans are not the only beneficiaries; research helps animals as well. Veterinary medicine is a constantly expanding science due to research. Vaccines are now available for dogs with rabies. Hip and joint replacements are now commonly conducted. Cats also benefit. The life expectancy of domesticated cats has increased from 6 to 8 years since the 1970's (Paul 10). It is important to note also that the majority of the animals contributing to these advancements were mice, rats, and/birds. With increased legislation in the AWA, the research on these vital animals would decrease significantly.

Additionally, due to animal experimentation, the future looks promising for current, widespread maladies. Researchers are studying the AIDS virus, improving treatment, and developing potential vaccines. The, “cures for Alzheimer's disease, cystic fibrosis, cancer, Parkinson's disease, and countless other devastating conditions are the present targets of researchers, yet activists argue that animal research should be banned or so severely restricted that most experimentation would be brought to an end.” (Paul 9). Therefore, with every baby mouse, I remember those relying on research to improve their quality of life. In the Biomedical Science Research Building, across the street from Alice Lloyd Hall, I study the debilitating disorder epilepsy. Epilepsy, though rare has no definite cure. The hippocampus, however, holds secrets regarding the cure for the untreatable seizures.

Though the aforementioned types of advancements may be limited under the AWA, it is fallacious and melodramatic to assume that the constriction of experimentation under the augmented Animal Welfare Act will end research altogether. Biomedical research will continue with or without the use of animals. Opponents of animal experimentation even argue that the revised law facilitates alternative research methods. For example, scientists now frequently use tissue culture to study the effect of toxins, hormones, and other chemicals on cells in the body. The desired tissue of study is taken from a live animal, who feels little to no pain throughout the procedure, and the tissue is then grown *in vitro* literally meaning “in glass” (referring to the growth on cover glasses). The benefit to studying animals *in vitro* is the desired tissue may be inundated with potentially harmful medications, but the animal feels no pain because the drug or chemical is not introduced to the entire body system. Often times, the animal is killed to perform a cell culture; yet, the animal undergoes no unnecessary suffering. Researchers also use advanced computer technology to simulate animal experimentation. Hence, no animal is harmed or killed. In addition, animal activists have suggested using humans as test subjects. They argue that

animals are not representative models of humans, and therefore the research actually holds no relevance in human life. Currently it is illegal to test developing medications on humans without prior animal testing. However, activists are hopeful that the government will soon decide in their favor (Fox 181-182).

These substitutions, however, can never sufficiently replace animal usage (especially the research on mice, rats, and birds) because of its prevalence in research and its ability to predict future outcomes of developing drugs. Tissue culture, for example, can show the effects of a drug or chemical on one particular type of cell. On the other hand, it cannot show the drug's side-effects on different body systems. With the use of animals, the entire body is considered, and all possible side-effects are known. This knowledge is crucial within the field of pharmaceutical development. Even now, with the vast research and animal and clinical tests (tests on humans), some recipients of the drug are harmed or possibly killed by unforeseen side-effects. Without animals to act a buffer between humans and death, many others taking newly released medications would suffer or potentially die. Computers also present limitations. Though they are valuable in teaching fields, they are worthless in research settings. Computers are programmed with information already known by mankind. However, they are incapable of discovering something not previously known, for only humans possess the trait of inquiry. As for the use of humans in research, not only is it illegal, but it is unethical. Of course, the use of animals may be viewed as unethical as well, yet it seems strange that activists would rather protect a species different from their own. Regardless, the use of humans is also impractical. The study of the aging process, for example, is almost impossible to study in humans due to our relatively long life-span. Mice, on the other hand, are perfect for this type of research because they live only 2 to 3 years. Also, experiments must be repeated to be considered significant (Harnack 74-76). With current breeding techniques, researchers may perform a procedure numerous times on animals with

virtually identical genetic traits, a feat not possible with human subjects (though it was attempted with Dr. Mengele's experiments on twins during World War II).

The struggle to change the Animal Welfare Act is an ignoble cause, for it will fail to further improve the lives of research animals and will cause harm to the researchers. In my opinion, this is an insidious strategy used by animal extremists. Concealing their purposes behind legal standards, they are now not only appealing to the emotions of the public (a technique they used frequently in past through posters and protests depicting animals gruesomely killed in laboratories), but also their logic. Because the average American does not understand the intricate system already guarding the mice, rats, and birds, it seems logical and reasonable to expand the law to encompass these animals. Therefore, once the extreme activists receive public demand for law change, it is likely that the government (often run by popular mandate), will concede. The animal activists will appear heroic for their concern over the lesser known rodents, and the public will be unaware of the obstacles now facing the researcher, and the negative effects on those struggling with disease.

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The 2010 Prizes for
Excellence in First-Year Writing

We ask a lot of our first-year writers. We ask them to parse the language of our assignments, to participate actively and immediately in an unfamiliar discourse, to question certain assumptions and attitudes a long time in the making, and finally, in their first two years, we ask them to write across the disciplines in ways we never expect from them as upper-level writers or even of ourselves as specialists and “experts.” A first-year student might spend an afternoon writing a final draft for a History course before polishing a Biology lab report that night before waking up to a peer review exercise in English class followed by an essay exam in Political Science.

First-year writing is a mix of the reflective and the projective, a chance to try on new exciting voices afforded by the university and to try to hold on to a personal voice crafted and used comfortably in high school, among old friends and at home. To say that first-year writing is a period of transition is a grand understatement, but the position of a first-year writer is most certainly unique. It is through these writers that we can most palpably see major changes happening and from major changes, great things unfold.

So, to give prizes for excellent first-year writing, what were we looking for? Our solicitation ran like this: “The Sweetland Writing Center invites instructors of First-Year Writing Requirement courses to nominate student essays that are innovative, complex and respond thoughtfully to an assignment. Essays of 2,500 words or fewer for any 2009 course that fulfilled the LS&A First-Year Writing Requirement are eligible.” For our portfolio prizes we announced: “Instructors of SWC 100: Transition to College Writing are invited to nominate outstanding student portfolios from any SWC 100 course taught in 2009.” We announced the prizes in mid December with a deadline of mid January to receive the nominations.

Our expectation was that by asking instructors to nominate particularly strong student writers we would remove the possibility of receiving submissions directly from students fatigued by the end of term or who would turn in final papers simply as a matter of course. For the portfolio prize, we received over 30 nominations from 13 faculty members. For the first-year prize we received nearly 30 nominations from faculty representing 8 different departments.

Once the nominations were received, we notified the students directly with an invitation to submit the particular paper and with the opportunity to take a full month to revise the project. The act of strongly encouraging students to revise papers after the paper has not only been graded but identified as excellent must be a very interesting thing for students to process. Such a move certainly raised the expectations: these writing center folk weren’t just giving away money; they were serious people who demanded revision!

The revised papers and portfolios were judged with great care and circumspection by a panel consisting of seven current and former SWC 100 faculty all of whom have

considerable experience teaching courses at UM and elsewhere, and all of whom through service in our writing workshop see papers from all across the disciplines on a daily basis. A strong cohort of four peer tutors rounded out the panel and their input was crucial to determining the winners.

We simply looked for good writing, as we do hourly here. We looked for writing that was exciting and informed, new and interesting, full of life and care. And we found it.

Matthew Kelley, Prize Committee Chair
Faculty, Sweetland Center for Writing

The prompt for Kathleen Telfer's essay was the following: Using the Aristotelian theory of art as mimesis, analyze a work of art of your choice (preferably a movie or a painting) and explain how well this theory works (or fails to work) for that particular artistic medium.

I really liked Kathleen's paper because it wasn't merely an answer to the assignment, but a clever reformulation of it. It is a fresh, amusing, ironic and genuinely original essay that stands out not only for its good arguments but for its frank and playful tone that reveals that good writing can and should be fun.

*Catalina Pereda, Instructor, Great Books 191
Department of Comparative Literature*

Culture Clash: Aristotle and Visual Modernism and Postmodernism

Kathleen Telfer

My indoctrination into the world of contemporary art started early. I attended a performing arts preschool and from a young age I was taught that everything is equally art. My macaroni pieces hold places of honor in my family's art collection; hour long dance performances choreographed at the age of three were to be viewed with utmost seriousness; I knew the meaning of the word *pirouette* before I could write my name with all the letters facing the proper direction. Art needs no description, qualification or justification other than the intention of creation. If you stand on your head with the intention to create art, you succeed. Standing on your head to win a bet – not art. I recognize that I am a product of the post-Duchamp artistic worldview, where narrative and realistic renderings, the images upon which Aristotle focused his theory of art as *mimesis*, are less accepted by the art-viewing public. The movements toward art in found objects and those that distance themselves from distinctive form and representational work make Aristotle's theories on art no longer applicable, especially to visual art. Marcel Duchamp's controversial 1917 readymade *Fountain* with its extreme self-literality, a urinal only distinguished from other urinals by the signature "R. Mutt," rejects Aristotelian theory; later artists, particularly Mark Rothko, abandon *mimetic* theory all together.

Aristotle's theory of art as *mimesis* relies, as the name suggests, on the idea that art is *mimetic*, roughly translating to imitative or representative. Aristotle penned *Poetics*, in which this theory appears, as a rebuttal to Plato's critiques of art as dangerous and

destructive: an attempt to defend the pleasure of art, in particular that of poetry. He points to the childhood inclination toward imitative games as proof of the naturalness of *mimetic* art as well as the universality of pleasure taken from such representations. This pleasure he labels as one of understanding, writing, “what happens is that as they [human beings in general] view them (imitations) they come to understand and work out what each thing is” (48b). He repeats this idea of art as philosophical due to its *mimetic* qualities in chapter 5.5 – claiming poetry to be “more philosophical and serious than history” (51b). Poetry, according to Aristotle, uses higher levels of cognition in its contemplation of “what would happen” than history’s mere statement of “what has happened.” In such a way, Aristotle bases his entire defense of poetry on this theory of art as *mimesis*; so then, what happens to art analysis when the art world moves beyond *mimetic* art?

Duchamp’s *Fountain* rejects classification as imitation, merely by representing nothing more than itself. It does not seek to stand for anything other than its urinal-ness, it neither represents nor imitates and therefore defies even analysis by the theory of art as *mimesis*. The work of Mark Rothko, on the other hand, has the capability for some contrast with the Aristotelian theory. Rothko completely abandons representation, instead painting solid blocks of color, relying on the relationships between the colors rather than any form, recognizable or not, that he creates. His pieces, rather than imitating forms and thus transferring emotion from the form to the viewer through *katharsis* as Aristotle expects, use inherent human reaction to their colors to evoke the emotion in the viewer first hand. Rothko’s work has been said to elicit greater viewer reactions than any other work of art - those who view a Rothko interact with their raw emotions, unfiltered by the forms and stories of others. Interestingly enough, Aristotle writes, “if someone were to apply

exquisitely beautiful colours at random he would give less pleasure than if he had outlined an image in black and white” (50b). Aristotle’s idea of pleasure from understanding does not allow for any understanding beyond the rational, an understanding available without *mimesis*.

Rothko, by abandoning all Aristotelian tactics, accomplishes one of the philosopher’s established central goals of art, namely “effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions” (49b). Emotions have the power to teach – through empathy we learn how to react properly and moderately. Aristotle recognizes the importance of evoking emotion: he writes, “the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, anyone who hears the events which occur shudders and feels pity at what happens” (53b). Rothko establishes these same emotions, connecting inherent reactions to colors to the human psyche; Duchamp, however, does not elicit any emotional response. His work is intended to shock - a goal well accomplished - paving the way the way for other modern and postmodern artists to move beyond art as *mimesis*. Although Aristotle’s theory of art as *mimesis* is largely unable to strictly analyze our popular contemporary visual art, it nonetheless addresses an intention for art that continues to be used today, whether for a Pollock or a narrative finger painting.

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Alexandra Park's paper "Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget" answers a prompt asking students to write a comparative analysis of two works we had discussed in class. The theme of this Comparative Literature course was Memory and we had been thinking about depictions of memory disorders in literature and film, focusing especially on what memory disorders reveal about the connection between memory and identity. Alex's paper compares individuals with "opposite" memory disorders: a man who cannot make new memories and a man who cannot forget anything he sees.

Apart from the obvious eloquence and lucidity of the paper, I was especially impressed by how well Alex introduced and concluded her analysis, emphasizing the importance of the comparison in understanding the role of memory. She demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between memory and forgetting, and offers an original analysis of each work. Perhaps most importantly, Alex remains aware of the complexities of memory, and of the nuances between each character's condition.

*Basak Candar, Instructor Comparative Literature 122
Department of Comparative Literature*

**Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: an Analysis of
Hyperthymesia and Anterograde Amnesia in “Funes, His Memory” and
*Memento***

Alexandra Park

From a psychological standpoint, memory is often regarded as the basis of all perception. Without a sense of who one is and from whence one came, it is impossible to construct any kind of understanding of the outside world and its accompanying experiences. Thus a condition like anterograde amnesia, or the inability to construct new memories, (Myers 366) can affect one’s capacity to make sense of the world. Without new memories, people like Leonard from Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* are forever caught in a limbo of perception, aware that time is passing, but unaware of what has happened since the trauma that caused their disorder. On the other hand, hyperthymesia, or a plethora of memory, (“Hyperthymesia”) is just as obstructive, though in much less obvious ways. Funes, from Jorge Luis Borges’s “Funes, His Memory,” is a perfect example of this—he cannot forget anything that has ever happened to him and thus becomes overwhelmed with a surfeit of knowledge. Despite opposite impairments, Funes and Leonard share a struggle to incorporate and process new memories, demonstrating how utterly any alteration of memory can marginalize its sufferers and decimate their ability to function within society’s parameters.

The most noticeable commonality between Funes and Leonard is their shared impairment of memory. The basis of both narratives is the fact that, in one

way or another, the main character's memory is impaired and thus they are forced to cope with that disability. Interestingly, despite that Funes' and Lenny's impairments are diametrically opposite, their struggles to cope and create some semblance of a life are surprisingly similar. Their shared struggle is an indication of just how crucial memory is to creating both an inner identity and an outer persona. Without memory, it is impossible to construct and continue to update an identity, or to interact as expected with the outside world. With an abundance of memory, though, it is just as difficult to sift through the massive amount of information being processed in order to create an identity, and just as difficult to communicate effectively with the outside world through the clutter littering one's mind.

In order to understand the difficulties created by each memory disorder, it is first important to understand each disorder separately. Leonard suffers from trauma-induced chronic anterograde amnesia. The distinction "chronic" is important; many people suffer posttraumatic anterograde amnesia for a short period of time, then as their brain heals, they regain the ability to form new memories. (Myers 366) For Lenny, at least in the period of time depicted in *Memento*, it appears that his "condition" is one that he is stuck with for the foreseeable future. For him, of course, there *is* no foreseeable future—since he cannot create new memories, he cannot gauge any meaningful passage of time and thus he exists in an odd paradox of perception. Leonard understands that life around him continues to go on. The position of the sun changes in the sky and thus Leonard is aware that the day is passing into night, but he cannot recall what he has done in that day; Leonard finds himself in an unfamiliar place and thus he must have

moved or gone somewhere, but how he got there is a mystery. The limited awareness he does possess is his procedural memory at work, retention of information independent of conscious recollection, (Myer 366) or the “conditioning” that Leonard believes makes his life possible. Unfortunately, the great majority of the everyday human experience lies in the mechanisms of declarative memory, the memory of facts and experiences one is aware of learning (Myer 366)—the part of Lenny’s memory that is malfunctioning. Because he cannot remember the past five minutes, let alone the past twenty-four hours, Leonard exists in a wholly uncertain world, unable to create a complete perceptual picture of the world around him.

Funes, on the other hand, exists in a world of superperception and hyperawareness, in which “every stone, every bird, every branch” (Borges, 136) is its own completely unique entity and every moment can be recalled with perfect clarity. In psychological terms, this condition is referred to as hyperthymesia. (“Hyperthymesia”) After his accident, Funes found himself able to recall everything that had ever happened to him—every event, no matter how insignificant, and more importantly the details of each individual moment as though it had just happened. Funes’ condition created a godlike state of perception, in which “[h]is own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them” (Borges, 136) because each time he caught sight of his face or hands, they were an entirely separate entity than the last time he saw them. Since each moment, object, person, work of literature, anything with which Funes comes into contact is perceived as completely unique, he is unable to stitch these entities together and create archetypes, the psychological mechanism by which humans categorize, understand

and relate to the world. In this way, Funes is just as unable as Leonard to construct a complete perception of anything. Their worlds are equally fractured, though the mechanisms of that breakage are opposite.

Leonard and Funes are both forced by their memory conditions to create systems to process and cope with the outside world, though these systems are reflections of both their respective conditions and the unique problems resulting from each. Lenny's system is entirely physical, mostly because he simply cannot trust his mental faculties to keep track of where he's been and where he needs to go. Thus, he takes Polaroids, writes notes in a specific handwriting he has taught himself to trust, and tattoos the most important pieces of information into his skin. It is ironic that he regards this system as ironclad because in fact it is just as fallible as Leonard himself. Anything that Leonard does or believes is based entirely on his experiences within the past five minutes, rendering him unable, as mentioned above, to construct a complete perception of anything. The note "Don't believe his lies" (Nolan) on Teddy's Polaroid is a perfect instance of this partial perceptual blindness. Leonard makes that note when Teddy tells him that, essentially, his entire *raison d'être* is a lie—that his wife survived but later committed suicide by insulin injection, that Leonard already found and killed the real John G, and that he and Teddy have been killing John and James Gs ever since to maintain the façade. Later on in the film, however, Leonard takes the note to mean that Teddy is lying about one of any of number of things: that people are chasing him and he needs to get out of town, for example.

Funes' system of coping is entirely mental, though just as unreliable as Lenny's physical system—somewhat ironic, given Funes' superhuman mnemonic abilities. Funes' attempt to categorize his memories and perceptions into a useful system of organization was a counting system in which each number, rather than being a series of numbers from a base-ten system added together, was represented by a word. The narrator calls these words “a sort of marker,” (Borges, 136) an indication that Funes was scrambling just as much as Leonard to form all the information from his brain into some kind of useful perception. The patterns in a standard base-ten number system are what allow people with average memories to add, subtract, multiply, divide, count—simply put, to understand and remember numbers and put them to use in any meaningful way. For Funes, however, these patterns created nothing but irritation and confusion. Whereas most people rely on the standardization of the Arabic number system, for Funes, individualization was key. Thus, 7013 is “Maximo Perez” (Borges, 136) and 7014 “the railroad,” (Borges, 136)—two entirely unrelated concepts to someone with normal memory, but for Funes, the quantification and expression of what he saw as a unique notion.

Though their systems are very different, the fact that Funes and Leonard felt the need to create a coping mechanism at all is a stark illustration of the debilitating effects of their respective conditions. Whether from complete lack or total glut of memory, both men could only perceive that which was directly in front of them—for Lenny, a few moments at a time and for Funes, a few objects at most. In both cases, altered memory led to this perceptual blindness, which in turn affected everything about the way both men lived their lives. The extreme measures utilized by both

men to relate to the rest of the world showcase the immense importance of memory to normal perception. Psychologically speaking, memory is the basis of all perception. Without properly functioning memory, there can be no learning, no perception, no coherent thought—essentially, none of the basic mental function by which people define themselves.

Without the ability to build coherent thought, Leonard and Funes are forced to cling to something else to motivate them to continue to exist. Though their goals are very different, both Leonard and Funes develop a *raison d'être*—an ideal or purpose that allows both to function despite an utter inability to perceive, and in fact gives each a reason to fight through his condition. Lenny's aim is to avenge the rape and murder of his wife by killing the second man present at the attack, who he believes to be named John or James G. This goal is one of the things Leonard has conditioned himself to learn, and so it stays with him throughout memory flashes, with a few exceptions—often when he first wakes up. Lenny's flimsy system is the key to achieving this goal, and it ultimately turns out that Lenny's recollection of the event is just as feeble as the system he uses to avenge it. After Leonard kills Jimmy, Teddy informs him that Jimmy is not the real John G, and that they killed the real John G ages ago—and that, since Leonard didn't remember that, they've been tracking down and killing John Gs ever since. At this point, the fragility of Leonard's system works to his advantage. He writes down Teddy's license plate number, knowing that he will "remember" it as John G's, thus perpetuating his purpose despite its total falsehood.

Funes' *raison d'être* is much more generalized than Leonard's, though just as powerful: the desire to, by whatever means, catalog and make sense of the excessive number of memories he possesses. His unique system of numbering is one attempt to organize the utter mass of information thrown at him at a daily basis. The fact that he stays in bed in the dark all day may be another attempt at this; reducing the number of things that cross his attention makes for a smaller amount of information to process in the first place. Funes's most obvious method of cataloging is his attempt to recall and assign numbers to around 70,000 of his memories, thus creating some kind of artificial archetype, perhaps better suited to his matchless understanding. He is, however, foiled in his attempts when he realizes that to recall a single day would, itself, take a single day, meaning that his life would become an endless loop of recollection and categorization, to the point that someday he would be cataloging days of pure reminiscence.

It may seem that, in comparing Leonard's active goal with Funes' more passive one, one is weighing apples against oranges, but the comparison of the two aims reveals an important notion about the human experience: people exist for a reason to exist. If Leonard remembered the murder of the real John G, in what way would he continue his life? He could not get a job, settle down with another woman, have a family—in short, he could never have any of the benchmarks by which most people measure a successful or even average life. The same can be said for Funes--if he were to ever get out of bed and venture into the world in order to build a life according to society's standards, he would likely be overwhelmed by the sheer amount information with which he would be confronted. Leonard and Funes'

separate goals, no matter how repetitive or Sisyphean, allow them to, in Teddy's words, "lie to [themselves] to be happy," (Nolan) and thus continue to exist without utter despair.

Leonard can't remember anything new, and Funes can't forget a single thing. Though their memory conditions are contrary and wholly different on a scientific level, their consequences are unquestionably similar. Both men are tragically impaired, lack an ability to independently function in society, and eventually find a *raison d'être*. The unfortunate stories of these men reveal the same important truth about the human condition: memory is a vital aspect of human consciousness, and without it, we are as lost as Funes and Leonard.

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The 2010 Prizes for
Outstanding Writing Portfolio

“How do you think about your identity as a writer?” That is the fundamental question the portfolios in my course seek to answer. Building upon several smaller reflective writing assignments over the course of the semester, each writer answers this question in the supporting materials produced for the portfolio: the introductions to each essay (called “Examples of Work” in the MPortfolio schema) and the writing philosophy statement.

The introduction to each essay describes the goal of the assignment from the writer’s point of view, as well as reflects on the skills the writers learned in the course of drafting and revising the essay; in this way, writers frame their individual works for readers and for themselves, pointing out specific achievements in different types of essays. The writing philosophy statement asks writers to put into words their beliefs about and approaches to writing as a way of introducing their portfolio to their readers. The philosophy statement also encourages writers to assess their progress in the course and to reflect on how they might continue to develop their writing in the future. Taken together, the introductions and the philosophy statement allow writers, through words and visual elements, to create a writerly persona or identity for themselves.

Thomas Yeh’s portfolio, included here, achieved these goals admirably. Not only has he used images and design elements in a thoughtful way to enhance the visual impact of his portfolio, but he has also developed a “voice” for himself as a writer that makes his portfolio both inviting and sophisticated.

*Christine Modey, Instructor, SCW 100
Sweetland Center for Writing*



Welcome

Hi everyone, and welcome to my MPortfolio! Here I am as a new member of the Michigan community, fresh out of Athens High School in Troy, MI. I chose to go to this university in the hopes of attending the prestigious Ross School of Business. It'll be tough trying to get in, but after helping run the family furniture business, I know I have the potential for success in this field. However, lately I have come to realize that majoring in Screen Arts and Culture would not be a bad fit for me as well. [Filming](#) is a hobby of mine and I definitely wouldn't mind learning how to get better at it. Perhaps in combining my passion for film and business I could become a Hollywood producer. Other than academics, the Michigan campus has so much to offer and the activities I have become involved in during this past semester are [Running Club](#), [Squirrel Club](#) (no joke!), [K-grams](#), [Move-In Makers](#), [Alternative Spring Break](#), and the [Delta Upsilon Fraternity](#).

Now let's get to the thick of things (the reason why you're here). In my portfolio, I have displayed under the Work Showcase tab a collection of essays I have written for my SWC100 course. Having the opportunity to nurture my skills in this transition-to-college writing class, I now feel that I have the confidence and abilities to succeed in future academic essays. Back in the days of high school, I knew I was having trouble with writing. Some of the problems I encountered were: not having clear arguments, poor structure, and lack of valid evidence. However, by practicing these skills through the varied types of writing done in class, I have turned my weaknesses into strengths. A semester's worth of coursework has had me picking at my brain as we investigated a central theme of identity, applying that individually as well as communally. Whether it was through narratives, reflections, or analyses, each essay, as you will soon see, challenged me to become a better writer. And so now it is my hope that by browsing through my works you will have an interesting glimpse into the process of my college writing transformation.

Thanks for your time, and enjoy!

Thomas Yeh



1. Literacy Narrative
[The Midnight Reader](#)

2. Analytical
Summary/Reflection
["Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan](#)

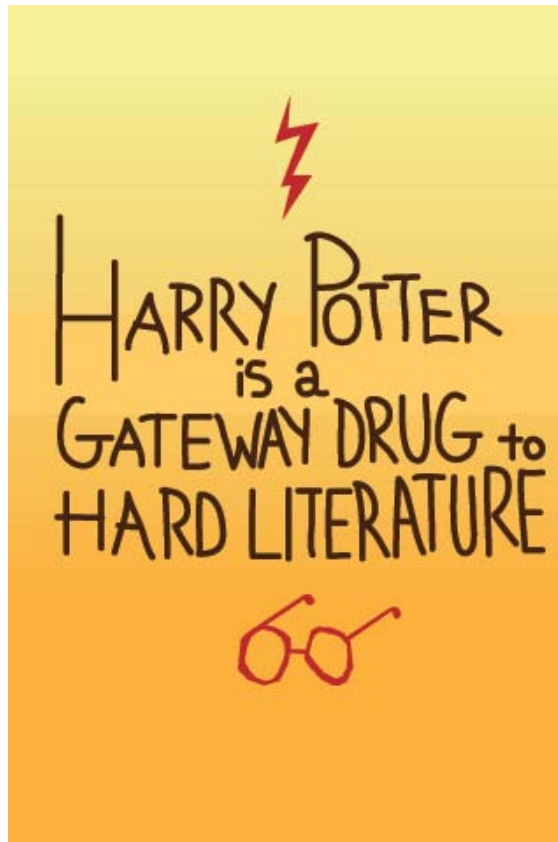
3. Annotation/Reflection
[The Annotated "Self-Reliance"](#)

4. Sense of Community
[Athens Cross Country](#)

5. Academic Reflection
[Reflections of an Avid Facebooker](#)

The Midnight Reader

Grab a hot cup of coffee and get ready to spend the next seven hours living life in my shoes. Alright, maybe not literally seven whole hours, just long enough to experience my literacy narrative. This assignment focuses on the theme of identity in reading and writing. Naturally, what better way to understand who I am in both of these fields than by examining my fixation on J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* collection?



"The Midnight Reader" recounts the biggest night in the magical world that belongs to Harry Potter: the release of the seventh and final book of the enchanting series. Cozy in bed with my long awaited prize, I take you readers along on an overnight adventure, drowning you in vivid imagery.

The Midnight Reader

Thomas Yeh

Twenty past twelve on a mild summer night. I spend tonight wide awake and curled in bed with a coffee in one hand, the other firmly grasping the seventh and final book of *Harry Potter*. Exactly one hour and twenty minutes ago I had stood in line awaiting the midnight release at Barnes & Noble.

I trace my fingers around the intricate cover art. Harry, alone, stood in the center of a wrecked stadium, his hand outstretched and reaching upwards. Without hesitation, I flip over the cover. Excitement and relief flush through me as the answers to questions I had pondered for so long now lay waiting to be discovered within the text at hand. Yet, the thought of having to end a journey which has consumed the last ten years of my literary world is daunting. I pause for a moment to sip on my coffee while reflecting on these thoughts. The caffeine rush floods my system and ushers me past the title and onto the first page of the first chapter. With the night still young, I follow Harry into his and my own final journey.

My eyes pass over each word in a slow and deliberate manner. The words form sounds and images, and like with any good book I read, begins to play a movie in the back of my head. I envision the actors from the *Harry Potter* movies and hear their voices bring the text to life. Concentrating with full force on the story, my hand absent-mindedly raises to dump more caffeine down my throat. Imagination takes hold on reality as I fall deep into the Harry Potter experience; one foot in England while the other still comfortably in bed.

Four hundred pages later, I sit immobile except only to flip a page now and then. The empty coffee mug rolls off the bed but lands noiselessly on the carpet floor. Need more

coffee, I think to myself. Three hours in and still another half of the book remains to be read. Soothing chirps of the nighttime orchestra whisper through the open window, casting a hypnotic spell on me. Succumbing to the fatigue running through my body becomes a tempting thought but nevertheless remains fleeting. My desire to know what happens overcomes the ache, and with high spirit I troop on in the night.

I feel the warmth of the sun beam through the eastern window, announcing the coming of day and the beginning of the end for my nightlong journey. Only four chapters separate me from accomplishment and rest. My eyes water up as a prolonged yawn erupts silently from within the prison of a body I tried hard to keep it in. Six hours of nonstop reading, I imagine, is very much like the reader's equivalent to the runner's marathon. The notion of this fuels me on for the final stretch. A horrible snoring sound bursts through the walls of my room, but is drowned out by the intensive noises of *The Battle of Hogwarts*. Here in all the chaos of the story, I finally learn of the drawn out truths I had waited for so long. I devour every last word with an insatiable hunger for more. Sadly though, the pages wind down and the end becomes clear. Returning to reality, I stare reflectively out the window. As the night ended, a new day began. I look down at the book in my hands. The last page is spread open and I reread the last few words, telling myself "all is well."

A quarter past seven on a warm summer morning and life begins to stir in the once serene house. However, now I lie content to stay in bed with my hands holding shut the book I so eagerly threw open hours ago. Heavily drooped eyelids slide down to cover my glazed eyes while the worn-out grin forms a slight half-smile. The delicious aroma of hot breakfast goes unnoticed. At the journey's end, it is sleep at last for the midnight reader.

The Midnight Reader is the story of me undertaking a nightlong journey to complete my ten year long obsession with the literary works of J.K. Rowling. As a whole, the *Harry Potter* series played an integral role in how I perceived “good” literature while growing up. This narrative is not just about who I am as a reader, but also who I am as a writer.

This story was important to me because it marked the end of a long-standing relationship with reading. My love of reading has never been as great as when the next *Harry Potter* novel would come out. The night that *Deathly Hallows* debuted, I was determined to find out why everything was happening the way it was. There were many confusing secrets I had not yet discovered and I also did not wish for anyone to spoil the end to me. As a result, my obsessive love for *Harry Potter* books led to me isolating myself in my room and staying up all night to read. After reading through the entire series, my hunger for more books like the ones I had finally put aside was ravenous. However, skepticism at finding something as great as *Harry Potter* soon squashed all hunger for more literature. It wasn’t until my senior year of high school that my love for books would return. While still rereading the *Harry Potter* books on the side, my 12AP English class began studying classics and how their themes are universal even in today’s modern times. Scouring the bookshelves at the library, I began my new journey into the world of classics. I began with *Fahrenheit 451*, then progressing to *Brave New World*, *Anthem*, and many others. One classical series I have had my eye on for some time now is *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. I had seen the movie and loved it, and my friend who read the series recommended that I try reading it. Although I have not yet read a single word of Douglas Adams’s series, I anticipate that this could very well be the next great obsession to parallel my previous one with *Harry Potter*.

Returning to the topic of the narrative, the influence J.K. Rowling had on my writing could be interpreted by how I tried to make my narrative read like a novel. The philosophy behind my writing consists of simply writing the way I would try to speak. This allows for my writing to come off as more fluid, which is a characteristic I noticed J.K. Rowling possesses. Her method of storytelling captures the attention of a reader and holds it by never breaking flow. I feel that this narrative represents my strengths as a writer to be able to recreate a dull moment and tell it in a way that would interest readers. Through the abusive use of numerous specific details I was able to paint a vivid image that progressed through a period of seven hours. However, my weakness as a writer is easily seen by my lack of a more interesting narrative plot. A nighttime adventure of reading, in my opinion, is not exactly the most interesting of topics to write on.

In my present situation, I can reflect back on how my reading and writing changed in that the two skills have become hand in hand. For each book I pick up, a part of that author's writing style is absorbed into my own. I learn how to draw upon previous reading experiences which pile together to form my own literacy in essays, short responses, and narratives. My midnight marathon reading merely symbolized the end of a Harry Potter phase. From then on, began a new exploration into unfamiliar works. To quote my own narrative, "As one night had ended, a new day began."



1. Literacy Narrative
The Midnight Reader

**2. Analytical
Summary/Reflection**
"Mother Tongue" by
Amy Tan

3. Annotation/Reflection
**The Annotated "Self-
Reliance"**

4. Sense of Community
Athens Cross Country

5. Academic Reflection
**Reflections of an
Avid Facebooker**

"Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan

"So, what country are you from?"

I get that question a lot. I respond, "Taiwan," and in an almost defiant tone, "but I've basically been raised here in the U.S. all my life. Ever since I was eleven months old."

I'm Asian. I'm American. And I know how to speak Mandarin and English exceptionally well.

The second assignment in this class works on developing critical reading skills through the completion of an analytical summary and reflection. When I first read Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue," I knew this would be my narrative of choice to summarize. It was perfect. We're both Asian, American, and at one point in life, suffering adolescents under the sometimes embarrassing language barriers.

Communication is an important tool in society. So then it'd be logical to think that a person ought to step in and do his best to intervene when it would make the situation smoother, right? Wrong. Not when it means stepping all over family. That's just disrespectful. In my summary/reflection of *"Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan*, I examine the importance of compassion and understanding in my family, all while working on drawing critical evidence from Tan's work.



Analytical Summary/Reflection: “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan

Thomas Yeh

The literacy narrative, “Mother Tongue”, by Amy Tan, is about the different kinds of Englishes which exist in Tan’s world and how she went against the grain to become a successful writer using the same kinds of Englishes she once despised. Tan recounts how she coped with communicating in a simplistic manner of English with her not so fluent mother, then on the other hand, learning to develop and hone her English skills in school. As a teen, Tan, under the orders of her mother, pretended to be her own mother on the phone because few people were able to understand what little English her mother was able to speak. Her belief that growing up with the broken English her mother used was a detriment to achieving high test scores on her English exams. However, Tan challenged herself by forgoing the stereotypical route of science and math expected in Asians and became an English major. Working through several drafts of her first major project, Tan was able to construct her breakthrough novel The Joy Luck Club with the help of her mother and the different kinds of Englishes she grew up with.

As a fellow Asian-American, Amy Tan’s narrative sparked a sense of understanding for what she went through because I experienced the same situations as she did. Tan admits that she “was ashamed of her [mother’s] English” because it was “limited” and “imperfect” (274). Growing up, my perception of my parents’ linguistic skills was far from accepting. I winced each time I heard a mistake in grammar or pronunciation and associated the feeling with hearing the unbearable sound of wailing sirens. On the other hand, unlike Tan, who was forced to be a bridge of communication between her mother

and the outside world, I took it upon myself to speak on the behalf of my parents (274). Whether it was making calls for doctor appointments or ordering food at restaurants, I felt obligated to stop my parents from causing confusion in communication. I saw this as my opportunity to take control and save my parents and myself the embarrassment and to alleviate any hassles that could have ensued.

While Tan believes that her mother limited her achievement in English at school, I find myself in the opposite situation (276). Having to cover for my parents' inadequate level of English allowed me to practice a level of English beyond what was expected for a young child. By representing my parents, I had to quickly develop the communicative skills expected for one adult to converse with another, and consequently, my capacity for the English language grew exponentially faster than my classmates. I remember being in first grade and already taking the second grade vocabulary tests and outperforming some second graders as well. My success as a well-rounded student landed me in a program called P.A.C.E. Once a week I was ushered down to a small classroom with a few other promising young minds and given a packet of problems to solve. These were the same kinds of problems which had puzzled Tan, such as fill-in-the-blanks and word analogies (276-277). Tan describes her experience as confusing and impossible due to the overwhelming imagery created by the word pairs. In my case, I saw each pair of words as a small piece to a puzzle. Rather than use imagery to help solve the problem, I relied on a systematic approach. By logically thinking about the meaning of each word, I pieced together the analogy puzzle one by one.

In the present time, I now look back and feel shame for being embarrassed about my parents. They insisted on trying again and again to practice their English in public so that

they could improve, but I became a hindrance to that goal. Over time, I did ease up and realize the mistake I was making, and as a result, my parents did indeed improve. My father developed the majority of his English from watching sports on TV and from interacting with customers at his job. My mother, in her free time, took ESL classes that our city offered. They then made the conversion from speaking purely Chinese at home to a mixture of Chinese and English. While my parents are still nowhere close to having impeccable English speaking skills, I am nevertheless rid of any shame I once held for them and only filled with pride to have witnessed such a transformation.

Although the journeys that Tan and I underwent differ in some ways, the overall messages that can be taken from our accomplishment are the same: English, in all its different variations, is still a language, and the only person that can limit you from achieving your goals is yourself. From this experience I also learned a little life lesson on what it means to be a part of a family. Often, at times I tend to misplace my affection and respect for family, putting my own selfish interests first. I thought I was protecting my parents when it came to representing the American side of the family, but in the end I was only an obstacle to progress. I acted out of an individual love for my own reputation rather than honoring what would be best for the family. Sure, families are comprised of a group of related individuals, but what holds us all together is the understanding that everyone is equal and deserves love and respect all the same.

5. Academic Reflection

Reflections of an Avid Facebooker

First-Year Writing 2010

Identity: The Reality of Facebook

Thomas Yeh

These are the reflections of an avid Facebook user. Two years of experience and numerous online social interactions have led me to wonder, “what does Facebook mean to me, and what exactly does that say about me?” This is an era in which online social interactions are as important as the offline physical ones, and thus, Facebook now dominates a part of who I am. Moreover, in thinking about my own online activities, I believe that Facebook helps me become more socially aware of friends, distant and close, from reading news feeds, and it also influences how I express my identity as I have the option to display only what I wish to show.

Possibly the greatest thing about Facebook is the invention of the news feed. It’s like walking into a room full of your friends and hearing little tidbits of news put compact into short little phrases. I read about how my best friend is no longer in a relationship and right below that I see the guy down the hall from me is complaining about the upcoming Orgo exam. As Clive Thompson mentions in his article, “Social scientists have a name for this sort of incessant online contact. They call it ‘ambient awareness’” (Thompson 59). In layman’s term, I have formed an almost psychic awareness with my friends in which I could easily tell you what kind of mood a person was in based on what he or she was doing on Facebook. Take for example my best friend’s love situation. Small tell-tale signs on his Facebook profile reveal an emotional wreckage that would otherwise go unnoticed by the average browsing user. Under my keen observations, the sudden change in profile picture from happy-go-lucky tricycle rider to the solitary thinker staring off into the night sky

launches the first of several suspicions that not all is well. Other signs include Facebooking in the dead of night and posting sorrowful messages on past friends' walls asking to do some catching up. While my friend did eventually tell me of the breakup, all of these observations were made before the big announcement. To simply put it, his actions spoke louder than his words. The on-hand awareness of how my friends are doing, no matter the distance, allows me to feel a continued sense of involvement with those otherwise fading friendships and forges stronger ties and longer lasting bonds.

Seeing that I am fairly confident in my ability to gauge my friends, why not analyze myself for a change? For this experiment, I kept a pen and notebook beside my laptop to record my online experiences over a span of a week. Some things I wrote down were sending and receiving messages, uploading photos or videos, or just simply logging on and browsing the mini feed. However, out of all the possible things I could be doing online, I'm most likely to be updating my status. First, let's be clear, we all know that there are those statuses you could say are a little generic and devoid of depth like the typical "In class, bored, text." I am proud to say that I do not belong to that unfortunate group of uncreative users. My updates hold far more depth and represent quite a tale to tell for the few words I divulge. For example, on Thanksgiving Day, I decided to post a new status proclaiming "Thomas Yeh was a lost child." Now unless the Facebook reader had experienced what occurred to me earlier in the day, the status would have no significant meaning. On the other hand, to me, I saw that status as a reminder of a hectic morning of arriving late to the Detroit Turkey Trot 10k race and then afterwards realizing I had no idea where in the world I had parked my car. Nevertheless, there were times when I switched from the abstract to direct updates, especially in cases where I was hard pressed to hold in my

excitement. Recently in the past month I participated in the running club's Nationals race. At the race, I ran my first ever 8k and in the process, ending up beating a long time rival and friend of mine for the first time in any race since we were sophomores in high school. In a teasing sort of way, I went on to post to the rest of the Facebook community that "history was in the making: I beat Garrett Carpenter at Nationals." The free-form style of status updates allows me to have full creative control over how I present myself online, be it a rather mysterious fellow or laid-back jokester. Thompson argues that in the spirit of constant status updates, "[there is] a culture of people who know much more about themselves" (Thompson 62). Given that I only update my status to reflect what is occurring at that moment in my life, I can conclude that status updates allow me a chance to mull over significant events. The ability to go back and see what kind of posts I had made in the past leaves a paper trail of my mental progress through life. Furthermore, a study made by Zeynep Tufekci claims social grooming "to improve one's reputation and status as well as access to resources and social and practical solidarity" (Tufekci 79). Because Facebook allows me to choose what pictures I want to be tagged in and what to include or remove from my information, I feel that my identity is compromised in the sense that I try to hide embarrassing photos of myself or choose to not post updates on stupid things that happen to me. Sure, by grooming my online personality I do think my reputation has benefited more so than if I had been completely open with my life, but it comes at the cost of being genuine. I show you the side of me I want you to know, but talk to me in person and I'm not the person you think I am. When I'm on Facebook, I have the safety of the computer screen in front of me to create smoke and mirrors to capture only the parts of myself I want to be captured. Out in the real world where I'm constantly on the spot, I make mistakes, I

embarrass myself, but I'm sincere. I wear my character on my sleeve so to speak, and don't fuss over decorating and trimming it for show like I would online.

Bringing this reflection to full circle, if I admit to being dishonest on Facebook, what does that say about my online social awareness? Am I really as in tune with my friends as I had originally thought? Am I the only fraud here or were they faking all along too? These questions, full of many hypothetical situations, could go any which direction. It's possible that some people are true to themselves while others, like me, not so much. What's important for me to take out of this is the knowledge that in an internet-gearred society, how I carry myself on the web versus in person represents a potential trend where the virtual world is preferred over living my own life. Nevertheless, the key word here is "potential." What happens from here depends on my own actions. It has been said over and over again throughout life that the first step to solving any problem is to recognize that there is one. I recognize my problem, now to begin solving it.

Teaching SCW 100 for the first time, I didn't know quite what to expect when we were asked to incorporate the eportfolio in the classroom this past fall. I made it a priority to teach a segment on visual literacy, using an advertising analysis assignment as a way to purposefully weave together visual and textual analysis. I handed the class over to my course assistant Lindsay Nieman who taught the how-tos of eportfolio, and we both did our best to connect the how to the why by discussing rhetorical choices and audience.

This sense of audience was what made Alexander's portfolio stand out. It seemed uncommonly aware of how to capture a reader's imagination and command attention, even about something as ephemeral as the writing process. While reading his work and seeing the striking images he chose, I could tell how much he valued this chance to share his writing experiences in a public venue as he guides his reader confidently through his site and his essays, but more importantly through his progress. As audience rather than simply teacher, I learned in a very visible way that what he had learned over the term wasn't just the writing skills he practiced so diligently; he had gained an appreciation of his strengths, which allowed him to turn his weaknesses into territories he could explore with a ruthless determination.

In his final version of his writing metaphor "On Clay and Diamonds" Alexander calls himself "a master of revision," and I love that this portfolio gives him the chance to make such a claim, and to make it public. Somehow this online presence seems to make these statements even more real. Later I received an email from Alexander asking me what other writing classes I might recommend, perhaps for the upper-level writing requirement. I wrote back to remind him that his requirement could be filled in biology, his current major. He wrote back to say, yes, of course, but he meant beyond that; he has decided he wants to do more writing than is expected in his major. He wanted to write for writing's sake. This to me was one of the greatest rewards of the award.

*Jennifer Metsker, Instructor, SCW 100
Sweetland Center for Writing*

Dear viewer,

I am a transfer student to the University of Michigan, and a recent immigrant to the United States. I was born in Voronezh, Russia, yet grew up in Israel.

I am therefore a multicultural person, with a broad cultural outlook upon the world we live in. My unique background can be noticed in some of the essays presented in this eportfolio, which you will hopefully enjoy reading through.

SWC 100 is my first college writing course, as college writing was unheard of in Israel. As you can understand, I am not a native English speaker, so I am quite proud of being able to write in English as well as I do.

Under the showcase tab you will find a collections of essays I have written while enrolled in SWC 100. I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed writing them. You will also find there drafts of my essays, so you can realize how far I have come during this course. In addition, my old writing metaphor is there as well, which I have written at the very beginning of SWC 100. I hope you will read it and compare it to my new writing metaphor, that has a whole tab of its own in my portfolio.

Before you go on to explore the rest of my eportfolio, please notice that for each paper that I have written for SWC 100, I have also written a piece titled "Reflection" in which I share some aspects of the process of writing with you the reader. My SWC 100 instructor, Jennifer Metsker, said that they were wonderful, so I hope you will find them worth reading as well.

I would also like to point out that there is no special order in which my eportfolio should be read. Just bear in mind that chronologically, I have written the old writing metaphor first, the Reflective paper second, the Analytical third, the Persuasive (a.k.a Argumentative) paper forth, and my (new) writing metaphor last.

So, welcome to my electronic portfolio and enjoy your stay.

Best,

Alexander Liberman.

I did not have many goals for SWC 100 when the semester started. It was my first semester at U of M, and my first semester at a foreign university. I never enjoyed writing before, as I always believed that writing is a talent that I do not have. Also, I feared that my English will not be on par with the students of this famous American university.

I viewed SWC 100 as a burden that I had to bear in order to graduate from an American university. At most, I was planning on using this course to measure how far away was I trailing behind the average American student.

I was surprised and very pleased to find out that my knowledge of English is sufficient enough to produce, with the proper guidance, some very well written essays - in my humble opinion, at least. Also, SWC 100 awakened in me the desire to write, something that I never realized was part of me. Under different life circumstances, SWC 100 might have pushed me far enough to consider becoming a professional writer, but alas, I have already given my soul to the god of science.

SWC 100 is a pre college writing course, so it had only let me taste a little of the college writing world. Therefore, my immediate next goal is English 125, and next year, I will take one of the upper level college writing courses.

I also speak of my writing goals at the end of my new writing metaphor titled "About Clay and Diamonds", so be sure to glance over there as well.





About Clay and Diamonds

My New Writing Metaphor

When I was a kid, I once watched a potter work with clay. I still remember clearly how quickly and easily the woman could shape the soft clay into anything her heart desired. As I was watching her, the clay between her hands started to resemble a jug, one like the many others already present in her shop. I left the scene before she could manage to finish her creation, but I still remember how out of the many jugs in the shop, no two identical jugs could be seen. Moreover, some of the jugs looked like the potter abandoned their creation halfway, and instead moved on to create yet another version of the jug she was working on.

I used to write my essays from start to finish in a single sitting. I used to write like water rushing from an open dam - powerfully at first, but little by little as I got tired and when my thoughts would flow as slowly as the calm water far downstream, I would stop. The calm water at the end of the journey could never climb back upstream and redo the trip again, and I, like it, almost never revised or changed my essays once I have written them. Writing in a single sitting had the great advantage of producing a complete essay in a matter of hours, but the drawback was that my essays, except only a few, were nothing more than mediocre.

When I think of my writing metaphor today, this image from my childhood of the woman working with clay floats in front of my eyes. I no longer write in a single sitting. Instead, I have become a self-proclaimed master of revision. It is true that now it might now takes me days, or sometimes weeks, to create a college essay, but the final result is no longer mediocre. Like the potter from my childhood I, too,

create many different versions of my essays. I first write a draft that hardly resembles the jug I am creating, but nevertheless I have created something. I leave it, let it dry, and put it aside. My hands now know how to create whatever it was that I had first created, quickly shaping a new piece of soft clay into the amorphous jug I tried to create on my first attempt. Since I can recreate my previous work with ease, I continue from where I left earlier, attempting once again to create a proper jug. On rare occasions, I will manage then to create the perfect jug, or at least, the best one I can. More often than not however, my second attempt at jugmaking resembles a jug, but it isn't a proper one yet.

But at least I have created a jug. This jug, I can now show to people and ask for their opinion. The feedback I get from them motivates me to try and improve my pottery. Consequently, I try my hand at creating different jugs. So I create a small jug. I also create a big one and a square one. None of the jugs appear to be very good. The small jug does not hold in enough water. The big one is too heavy to lift, and the square jug is simply ugly. Armed with the knowledge gained from creating all those failures of a jug, I now attempt and succeed in creating a proper jug. It is the best jug I can create. It may or may not be perfect, but I and others are highly satisfied with it, and so I label it as my final jug.



All those different jugs represent the revised drafts of an essay that I wrote before being able to come up with a final draft. I sometimes have only a few of those defective jugs, and sometimes I have a lot of them. I once revised an essays five times, and none of the revisions look anything alike. Thankfully, my essays are not jugs, so they all sit on my hard drive, taking up a tiny amount of space.

Before taking SWC 100, I could not revise my essays at all. After taking it, I have become a self proclaimed master of revision. I however do not wish to be a master of revision. I don't want to create countless flawed essays first, in order to produce a decent essay later. I don't want my jugs to be small or big or square when I first make them. I want them to be perfect on my first try.



On rare occasions, I sometimes think of my essays as diamonds. There are times when my first draft is very good, but never the less it can be improved upon. I think of that first draft as of a rough diamond. Rough diamonds are diamonds in every sense of the word. They are carbon crystals that hold the title of the hardest mineral. But rough diamonds are plain, almost boring looking stones. They might be the hardest elements on the planet, but they lack the glamorous beauty associated with those gemstones. However, if I spend time working on my first draft, cutting and polishing it I can make my rough diamond truly shine. By eliminating repeating elements, choosing better words and keeping constantly in mind the precise ideas I am trying to convey to my reader, I can make that very good draft into a superb final one.

Currently, I am at the stage where most of my drafts are still made out of clay. When from time to time I manage to create my drafts from carbon crystals, I realize how much effort I waste on creating those countless clay drafts. Creating numerous jugs when one has plenty of time under his disposal isn't such a bad thing, but there are times when an essay is due shortly, rendering my long term pottery skills useless. The end result is a paper that I could have written better, a paper that does not reflect that I have come a long way. Therefore I have set my sights on a new goal - make a rough diamond out of every first draft. I admit that rough diamonds still need polishing, and so I will still revise my essays to some degree, but nevertheless, my goal will take me one step closer towards my perfect first draft's dream.

Analysis paper

Deadly Water

Draft 1

Draft 2

My AD

Reflection

Other

[My old writing metaphor](#)

Persuasive paper

Commuter Friendly

Future

Draft

Reflection

Reflective paper

Draft

Food For Thought

Reflection



My Writing Metaphor

Some say writing is an art. Others claim that it's a science, or more simply put - a skill one has to master in order to become a successful writer. I believe that, like with many other things in our life, the truth lies somewhere in between.

What do you think? Do you consider writing to be a science or an art? I think one's answer greatly depends on one's approach to writing. People that cannot write unless struck by inspiration, which enables them to write a masterpiece in a single draft, will no doubt call writing an art. On the other hand, people who like to prepare themselves before resting their fingers on the keyboard, or grabbing their favorite pen, people who like to brainstorm, to jolt down ideas and key points before starting, will probably consider writing as a science. Like a sculptor working on a granite stone, they first wish to make a rough, miniature version of the image they want to engrave into the stone. Once satisfied with the first draft, they will go on and make a bigger sculpture, still rough on the edges, and far from perfection yet, but much more complex and detailed than their first draft. At this point, they might get tired, and rest a little, and prepare themselves for the tremendous task of chiseling away all the impurities and defects, polishing the surface till it shines, and making their work a masterpiece. The outside world would be awed at the beauty of this piece of art, but few will realize that what they see is actually a result of great efforts and skill, rather than a moment of inspiration.



In the same way sculptors work on stone, writers work on their poems, articles or books. However, unlike working on stone, an author has the ability to revise and edit what he or she has written, and if struck by inspiration, produce a brilliant essay in a very short period of time. In comparison, working with stone is a tremendous physical task, where one cannot offer to make mistakes, because one cannot press an undo button, or revise what they did, if they mistakenly made a hand where a leg should have been. That probably explains why there are so few sculptors working with stone, while writers are as plentiful as air.

Because writers have great flexibility in how they work on their articles or books, there is no single metaphor that can describe the process of writing. Some write slowly but steadily, like a stream carving its way through solid rock, eroding the hard surface little by little, until many years later, one doesn't find a gorge, but a canyon. Others write in waves of inspiration, like the lightning produced by a thunder storm. The lightning flashes might not be long or frequent, but each is powerful enough to illuminate a dark night as bright as day.



I lived for many years on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean is usually calm, but from time to time, one might witness a serious storm. The day after, one can see a large amount of debris the storm has washed on the shore. From afar, the debris looks just like garbage that should be collected and transported to a landfill, so we might once again have a beautiful clean beach. However, people who look through this debris after each storm often find beautiful sea shells, and in other part of the Mediterranean shore, one can find ancient coins worth hundred or thousands of dollars originating in long lost ancient treasure ships, hidden deep beneath the waves.

I have never been to the Grand Canyon in my life, but I watched a movie once that showed what happens when the Hoover Dam is opened. Indescribable amounts of water rush past the open gates of the dam into the canyon. The speed and force of the water can crush anything that stands in its way. No living creature can survive if it crosses that pass of the rushing white water. However, the Colorado river is long, and after a while, the rushing water settles into a gentle flow, and the dangerous scenario turns into a calm, beautiful and enjoyable one.

If I have to come up with a metaphor to describe my writing - how I write, what I write, and what the end result looks like, I would probably say that if you could combine the two vivid descriptions of the power of nature I told you of before, you will get a more or less accurate picture of myself as a writer. Honestly, I enjoy writing very much. I do not however, like people criticizing my writing. Still, If I find my piece of writing to my own satisfaction, I do not really care if somebody else doesn't. I do not dread the process of writing. I am mostly worried about the criticism I will receive, since more often than not, I write a graded assignment, and my academic success depends on what the examiner thinks of my essay, and not of what I think.

I do not plan ahead. I do not brainstorm or write down key points that I would like to build my article around. I simply start writing. No matter what the subject is, I always have something to say about it, and if I don't, I don't look for ideas, I simply say so. After all, no opinion also counts as an opinion, because if you have nothing to say, it means that for some reason, you don't care about the subject, and you can write about that as well. Like the rushing water from the open dam, or the storm at sea, I write and write and write, until I cannot go any more. By the time I tire out, I might have

completed only an opening, or maybe got stuck in the middle, but more often than not, I have a finished product in my hands before I call it a day. If the article I am writing is a personal one, where I simply share a part of myself with you, the reader, like I am doing right now, I will put the finishing touches on it right after I finish writing it, and say that the job is done. I will read what I have written. Check for spelling, grammar and typing mistakes. I will make sure that one can understand my line of thinking, and that no line of thoughts suddenly ends or starts without a reason. Or I would check that I did not go astray from the topic at hand, like a train at full steam that has gone off the rails.

However, If I am writing a piece where I need to properly explain to, debate or convince the reader, my article will have to be seriously revised and improved, even if I did manage to complete it on the first try, which I often do not. Usually, at a later point in time, I will return to my article, and read it carefully. Every time I that I will find that my paragraphs are not flowing, that I am not even convincing myself with my arguments, I will have to rethink my ideas and change my words. I will have to debate whether I explained too little, and my reader might not understand, or explained so much that he or she do not remember what the original topic was anymore. After I am done, I will usually go over my piece a third time, if the deadline permits, to check and polish places here and there.

As to the end result, I will probably be satisfied with it. As to what the reader or critic will have to say, I do not know. One might find stones polished by the sea and washed ashore to be beautiful and mesmerizing, while another might find them plain and boring. One might find that the calm waters away from the dam soothing his soul, while another might find the scenario way too quiet and lifeless, being too far away from the rush of deadly water, which although frightening, might still leave one totally speechless. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, my friends.



Analysis paper

Deadly Water

Draft 1

Draft 2

My AD

Reflection

Other

My old writing
metaphor

Persuasive paper

Commuter Friendly
Future

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Reflective paper

Draft

Food For Thought

Reflection



Searching For Evidence

Writing an argumentative essay should have been easy. After all, all one needs to do is take a stance on a certain matter and argue for it. But argumentative writing isn't worth much without solid evidence. One could argue that the earth is flat, but modern science has countless times proved instead, that the earth is round. Such an argument therefore, will convince no one, even if in all other aspects, the essay written very well.

The topic for the argumentative essay was very broad. The preference was for a topic discussing college life, but any other topic could do as well. I do not like broad topics, because I usually have trouble choosing a topic for my essay. I always fear that I might choose a topic that will result in a weak essay. As a result, I spent a week thinking about my topic. Keeping in mind that it should have something to do with campus life, I finally decided to write about a topic close to my heart - commuting to college, by car.

When people in the US think of college, they often think of dorm life. Residential halls are such an integrated part of college life that even students whose parents' home is only a few miles away from campus, still choose to live in the dorms. They do it for the "college experience", or so people say. I however, decided to commute to college by car, even if it meant spending an hour on the road every day, just to get to and from the university. I simply cannot see myself sharing my personal space with people I have never seen before, or live in a room with neither a bathroom nor a kitchen. More so, I see no reason to pay six thousand dollars or more for such accommodations, especially when I know my family cannot afford to pay for something I do not want or need.

So here I am, driving to college 5 days a week, 18 miles in every direction, sometimes twice a day. Some people who heard of my "heroic" travels said

that it must be hard to spend so much time on the road, be it summer or winter, if one can simply live in a walking distance from campus. They did not say this out loud, but they probably thought that I was defiantly getting the short end of the "college experience" stick. I however, cannot disagree more.

On my orientation day at the end of the summer, just before fall classes started, I was told that the university is not commuter friendly, and driving to and from the university will be a challenge. More so, since commuters are a minority, I was told, the university does not try in be more commuter friendly in anyway. The funny thing though, is that once I started driving to the university, I realized that this "minority" might actually be the majority of the student body. I also realized from overhearing conversations or asking classmates directly, that dorm life is much more bitter than what the university would like students to believe.

Therefore, I felt like a paper arguing that the university should be more friendly would defiantly make a strong case. I also had a proposal as to how the university could actually become more commuter friendly, and how this arrangement will benefit commuter students, dorm dwellers and the university authorities alike. I had all the needed pieces required of an argumentative essay, except one. I still lacked evidence to support my claim. And as I have said in the beginning, without evidence, my paper will convince only a few.

Finding evidence however, happened to be a tremendous task. Logic dictates that no matter which topic you chose to write about, somebody must have said something about your topic already, so finding references for a college essay should not have been much of a problem. Still, no matter how hard I tried, I did not manage to find many articles discussing the advantages, or even the drawbacks, of commuting to college by car. The few articles discussing commuter students that I did find, dated 10 or 20 years back. I could not use those as sources for my paper, because a large portion of my argument was based on college life as I know it in 2009, and not as it had been known in the 80's or the 90's.

I was quite desperate at this point, because I had chosen a topic after a long debate, and did not want to abandon it in favor of another topic. Finally, I found the evidence I needed in the least expected place - the U of M homepage. As small unassuming link with the words "portrait of U of M, undergraduate education" appeared there. Clicking on the link reveled a five page collection of facts and figures about undergraduate education in U of M, intended, I suppose, to convince high school students to choose U of M as their Alma matter. I found out there for example, that one third of the student body lives in university housing, which amount to saying that two thirds of the students do not live in the dorms. Exactly the kind of evidence I was looking for. Together with more facts from the "portrait to... education", and some information I have found on the university's housing website, I had enough evidence to support my two main claims: one, a large number of students commute to University by car, and two, a large number of students bring or which to bring a car to campus, even if they live in the dorms.

All together, I now had enough evidence to write a proper argumentative essay, but I was still worried that I lacked proper references, and ended up writing a very choppy paper. After I was reassured by my instructor that my essay had enough backbone, I rewrote a major part of the essay to make the words flow, rephrased other parts to avoid possible misunderstanding, and my final draft was done.

Analysis paper

Deadly Water

Draft 1

Draft 2

My AD

Reflection

Other

My old writing
metaphor

Persuasive paper

Commuter Friendly
Future

Draft

Reflection

Reflective paper

Draft

Food For Thought

Reflection



Food for Thought

My mom and I open the door to an Arab ethnic shop, here in Michigan. Loud Arabic music and a strong smell of spices hits us as we enter the small shop. The two workers in the shop are discussing something in Arabic. When they see us enter, one of them greets us in English, and the two resume talking.

We go through the narrow aisles, inspecting the goods on the shelves. We are looking for high quality tea often found in Arab shops. Pickled vegetables, olive oil, bags of spice, ethnic pastry, dry fruits... ah here it is, cans of dry, premium quality tea leaves. My mom picks her favorite tea, an Earl Gray bergamot Ahmad tea, and we continue to explore the small shop.

At a corner we find a small fridge, and in it, among other things, stand a couple of feta cheese metal cans. Most of the package is covered by a picture of a goat, and it has in Arabic which we cannot read. On the bottom, in small letters is printed the "best before" date, and "made in France". The French do not traditionally make feta cheese, but we know that a large Arab community exists in France, and they certainly know the secret of good feta cheese. My mom takes a last look at the shop, hands me the feta cheese and the tea, and I make my way to the cashier. As I pay for the food, the worker behind the register, who himself speaks with a slight foreign accent, hears an accent in my English, and decided to ask where are we from

originally. I answer “Israel”. For a moment there, I could have sworn I had seen a raised eyebrow on the man’s face, but it might have been my imagination.



Later that day, my mom declares that she would like to see what the closest Indian grocery has to offer. We appear to be running low on peas and nuts. Both of those can be found in the American supermarket as well, but for a mysterious reason, the price tag there is sky high. And so, we head to an Indian store most closely located to our home.

The Indian store is small, just like the Arabic one, yet this time, no loud music or exotic smell greets us. Instead, we find ourselves in a neat simple store, which reminds me more of a storage warehouse than a grocery shop. I spot a pack of cashew nuts right away and call my mom over. I do not like the fact that the package shows no expiration date, but the nuts look fresh. The price tag indicates a reasonable price and my mom declares that she is taking them. A few moments later, we locate a pack of peas, and after a similar inspection, take them as well. We still have some of my favorite Indian basmati rice, but my mom cannot resist checking what the store has to offer in that prospect as well. Unsurprisingly, we find some authentic basmati Indian rice, typically packed in woven fiber, twenty pound bags.

Twenty pounds is the smallest rice bag the grocery has. Indians probably like to eat a lot of rice. I, with all my liking of rice, haven't finished eating the previous twenty pound rice bag we have at home, so there is no reason to buy another one right now. We take a last look, and head for the register. The Indian man behind the register asks no questions. He simply thanks me for buying at his shop. We exit the store and I drive my mom and our groceries home.

Until recently, my family and I lived in Israel. Back there, I don't remember ever walking into an ethnic grocery shop. A vivid collage of memories shopping for groceries floats into my mind, when I try to remember what the shopping experience was like. There is a white flash, and I find myself standing in front of a medium sized supermarket, one of many stores in a national chain. I am wearing a light t-shirt, shorts and flip-flops. The air is hot and dry - a typical August weather. A pile of bottled water in packs of six sits in front of the store, immediately to my right. I politely nod to the security guard, and wait a moment for the automatic doors to slide open with a hiss. The cool breeze from the store's air conditioner welcomes me as I enter.

Another flash, and I find myself pushing a shopping cart in from of myself. I am passing the dairy section of the store. I pick up milk, eggs and yogurt, and continue on. Flash. I am standing in front of a shelf. I consult my shopping list and pick a 1 kg package of authentic Indian basmati rice. I roll on, stopping for a moment to grab two packs of pasta imported from Italy. Flash. I have just reached the hummus and tahini stand. I check the expiration date, pick one of each, put them in my cart, and start pushing it forward. I probably continue shopping for more goods, but at this moment, the memory becomes fuzzy and gradually fades away.

Back at our apartment in Israel, I unpack and put away the things I have just bought. My mom is in the process of making borscht. From across the thin kitchen wall, one can hear the neighbor hammering schnitzels. From below, somebody has been cooking for hours and nothing else but hamin can be cooked for so long. From across the street, one can identify the weak aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

We mostly eat Eastern European cuisine at home, because that is what my parents grew up on. However, life in Israel has introduced a variety of dishes

to our table. The rice I bought earlier, is something my parents had never seen on the dinner table when they were children. So is hummus, tahini, couscous, tuna, pita bread, burekas, feta cheese, sweet potatoes and a variety of other vegetables.

People often say that the key to understanding a foreign culture is to understand the language. But learning a language is time consuming and a difficult task. How many languages can the average person learn while working and supporting a family? But what if one could learn about a culture by eating its food? Brillat-Savarin engraved his name on the pages of history forever when he said “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” I cannot agree more. I believe that by eating the same food, I somehow come to understand people better.

In my math course at the University of Michigan, on my right, sits an Indian guy. I do not know him very well, and we do not meet each other outside the classroom walls. However, since he is Indian, he probably eats the same basmati Indian rice that I like so much. It might or might not be true at all, but it somehow makes me feel closer to this person, even when I know so little about him. On my left in the same class, sits an African American. I have absolutely no idea what he eats at home. For some reason, I find it hard to open up to him, and we continue to stay strangers.

In my biology class, facing me sits a sophomore student from Greece. His name is hard to pronounce and I have first met him just this morning. Knowing that he is Greek, he reminds me of arid weather, the naked rocks and olive trees - a scenery common both in Israel and in Greece. His presence also reminds me that I enjoy eating a lettuce, tomato and feta cheese salad, also known as Greek salad. Even though we have just met, I feel that I know him already. The other occupants of the table are two girls which I cannot place their lineage. Who are they? What do they eat for breakfast? They are a complete enigma in my eyes, and “What do you eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner everyday?” is not a question one asks a complete stranger he or she has just met.

Had I not grown up in Israel, I would have never had the chance to be exposed to so many different cultures and their signature food. Because I used to live in Israel, I feel that right now, here in Michigan, I understand

people better. I might not speak their language. I might know only a little about their culture, but I enjoy eating their food. It makes me venture into a claustrophobic and small ethnic shop looking for my favorite food without a second thought.

Ethnic shops are small and cramped. The aisles are so narrow that if another customer stands in that aisle already, one should either wait or seek passage through another cramped aisle. The merchandise is often unlabeled, anonymously packaged, or at best, carries a description in a language that isn't English. The items are often sold in bulk, which makes the products much cheaper, but also imply quantities that a westerner will have difficulty consuming. I however, even if bothered by the way ethnic shops look, do not feel intimidated. I do not care about the size of the store, or the way the merchandise is packed. Had I not grown up in Israel, the food on my plate would have looked much more boring, and the world, much more alien.

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