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English 102

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### Reflective Paper

It has been almost eight years to this day since I had taken my last English class; so I remember walking into English 102 this summer like a deer caught in headlights. Not only did I have to get back in the grasp of studying, reading and writing once again, I had to get back into learning to take criticism on my own personal work. When my class was first assigned to read the first two chapters of the Curious Researcher there were several points about writing that I didn't know about. The first one was that there were several differences on having an opinionated paper that was dominated on personal narrative and an academic paper that included scientific studies and scholarly sources for the material. What I didn't realize until much later was that I only knew how to create an opinionated paper and because of that when focusing on writing my academic paper; I had no idea the struggles I was going to find myself getting involved in.

[I am a Film Studies major](#) and for the past year I have been writing essays on some of the great art films in the world; and so I believed I had somewhat of a clear idea on how to write a paper. I remember when taking English in high school greatly enjoying the experience; and I always loved debates and discussions on controversial issues throughout my class. So I figured this was going to be an easy learning experience. Well, a learning experience it was; but being easy, it was not. When our class had a chance to pick a topic for our upcoming academic paper I was extremely excited; not only because

We were open to choose freely what topics we wanted to research and discuss, (accept the legalization of marijuana) but that I knew I could involve the topic of film, which would be not only enjoyable but also helpful for my major. I remember sitting at home with a pencil and a blank piece of paper contemplating on what topic I should discuss. It then came to me that I wanted to write about glamorized sex and violence in film and what made them such a taboo subject within our culture. I was very excited about this idea and on how the subject would bring so many limitless possibilities that I could bring to my paper. Violence and sex and the way it was portrayed in movies had bothered me for years and to finally express my issues on them and why audiences handled those themes in such unrealistic and unintelligent ways was going to be exciting to talk about! Doing more thinking up on the subject I expanded it much further and it led to how the rating system is used with Hollywood and the history on the Production Code.

We then were given a homework assignment to read chapter one of *The Curious Researcher* and explore and narrow down our chosen subject based on several main categories; for instance the Time, Place, Person and Story. Then the next day in class we were told to expand on the subject and write down other questions that we could use within our paper and then to focus on the most important ones. Then came time to start writing my Research Proposal and I was confident on writing it since I knew firsthand the topic I was going to be discussing. After I wrote a page and a half of my Research Proposal, I handed it in thinking I was in good shape. Of course I didn't get the reaction that I expected when my teacher handed me back the Research Proposal stating most of what I was discussing was boring; and that she had already seen many of these films from past classes. I was stunned and a little bewildered; for I thought what I was discussing was controversial and pretty interesting. I didn't

realize at the time that I actually had no focus on what I was trying to discuss; and yet I still felt pretty confident in myself and of my paper. My teacher told me I was talking vaguely about too many different topics which included The Production Code, history of violence throughout film, the Rating System within our culture and the effects violence and sex have on audiences; and that I didn't have a focus or a subject.

Our class was then told to read Chapter 2 in *The Curious Researcher* and were also asked to reduce our Research Proposal and to try and narrow the subject matter down. Over the weekend I thought of the best ways to narrow my subject down and eventually it got down to me cutting out the theme of sex in films, the Rating System and The Production Code; and just focusing on the violence in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. When we later that next week did the 3.5 Note taking assignment in *The Curious Researcher*, I found the Research Log assignment to be one of the first really helpful assignments on getting to the core of my paper. It was easy to paraphrase and summarize sentences but to actually write out questions from an imaginary reader named Dave and to then answer those questions; I found to be extremely difficult. In some ways struggling to come up with valid answers to the questions that Dave was asking me should have been the first sign that I had no idea what type of paper I was discussing and that I had no idea on what I was trying to say. And yet I still couldn't see that, but that assignment did have me narrow down my paper to just two films to discuss and compare which were Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and Troy Duffy's *Boondock Saints*. Both films have had a very similar fan base and yet professional critics hated one and loved the other; which I felt would be an interesting topic to explain why.

Finally came the Rough Draft of my paper and to tell you the truth I don't remember much on how I actually came about on writing it. I just remember writing it like how I write my film critiques in which I explain in detail several scenes of each film and discuss what it means and how the director did it. In this Rough Draft I was comparing Pulp Fiction to the film Boondock Saints and explaining why I believed Pulp Fiction was effective in its profanity and violence and which Boondock Saints was not. When getting back my Rough Draft the next week was the exact moment that I finally realized something about my paper that I didn't see until then: I had no idea what the hell I was doing. When going over it with the teacher I realized that almost everything you could do wrong when writing an academic research paper, I had been guilty of. Not only did I have multiple spelling and grammar errors but I had several sentences that ran on and sounded more opinion based. I jumped around the paper, wrote way to informal and lacked complete structure. My paragraphs weren't even split up correctly and my citing was also incorrect. But the real problems of the paper were that it they were just not academic enough and lacked any real scholarly sources. I had no real research question, no controlling purpose, no formal structure or theme; and most importantly, I couldn't even give an answer on why my paper should be read by anybody at all. I didn't know what to do at that point and when arriving home I felt I was stuck in a situation in which there was no way of getting out of. I also agreed with everything that was said and I knew that if I didn't make any drastic changes quickly on where I was going with this paper; I would probably fail the class.

For almost two days straight I did a little creative project that we also did in class; and tried it on my paper at home. I used a scissors and cut out all the main ideas and themes that were within each paragraph of my paper. Afterwards I sorted them around to try and figure out the best way to answer

what I was trying to say. But there was just one problem: I didn't really know what I was trying to say. Over the weeks of struggling on finding a purpose and a clear thesis of my paper I decided to ask other classmates how their papers were going. The answers I had gotten were pretty unsurprising, but the one thing that I did find surprising was that it seemed like every single student was struggling with completely different issues. One student thought he had way too many facts in his paper which made the paper completely boring and dry. Another student was struggling in finding several sources on his topic because his topic wasn't so universally known or discussed. Another was worried he wouldn't make the 10 page mark; and didn't know how much longer he could go on with his subject without it sounding like it was rambling. I didn't find one student that was struggling with the exact same problem as me in which I found to be astounding. A few students seemed like they were in worst shape than me and yet most seemed like they were on a much better track with their paper than I was.

Having another discussion with the teacher after class and rereading my rough draft over and over to myself, I finally started realizing that I was trying to prove why Pulp Fiction was considered an art film. When talking to my helpful Aunt over the phone who happens to be an English teacher I described to her the predicament I was currently in. Me and her for over an hour started going through the main points of my Rough Draft and were trying to figure out what exactly was my thesis for my paper. Over time I came to the discovery that I couldn't even give her a solid explanation on what an art film truly was; which was extremely embarrassing. My first goal was to do some serious academic research (which I figured I should have done in the first place) and try to get a good, solid and scholarly answer on what the definition of an art film was. I remember going to the UWM library and being completely lost on trying to use the computer systems on looking up titles, names and articles. Reading through The

Curious Researcher on how to correctly look up information on the internet through Google and Yahoo, I found to be very helpful. The internet is a very dangerous tool when trying to find solid academic answers. A lot of the information I could be collecting on the subject matter I'm researching could be false or inaccurate.

The Curious Researcher showed me not only to spot inaccurate information but sources that seemed either suspicious or not scholarly enough. Also with help from several of the UWM employees, I was guided through the UWM library index in which I was taught the best terms and wordings to use to get the best results for what I was looking for. Learning the UWM library database was difficult at first; but with enough practice I became very comfortable with its system. Within a week I finally had found several great credible scholarly sources that ranged from artists, professors and historians that helped me find the true definition what an art-film or an art-house film was. When heading home with all my new information I then used all my pieces of scraps of paper from my rough draft and designed an elaborate structure on how the layout of my paper will eventually unfold so it becomes easy to read for the reader; and that my information and what I was discussing wasn't all over the place.

While spending time designing it I finally could visually picture how the layout of my paper would look like. Spending hours constructing the structure of my paper, it also came to me not just the main thesis of my paper but also the main purpose on what I was initially trying to discuss. I couldn't believe all the morphing my topic has gone through since the beginning of my research. It started out from Violence and Sex in Film and then turned into Pulp Fiction vs. Boondock Saints. It morphed even more and became me discussing Pulp Fiction and why it is considered a masterpiece of art. When having another meeting with my teacher we both came up with the idea on how Pulp Fiction became a staple

in American culture in which that not only art-house fans loved it but mainstream movie watchers adored the film as well. I found that an intriguing idea and I started doing some background search on pop culture in America and what exactly defines it.

My paper then morphed one final time and my research question finally ended up as: What makes Pulp Fiction an art film and what can that mean for pop culture? I remember in the beginning of my research I had about three resources, all coming from books; and now at the end of my journey I came to about 12 sources which included several scholarly book sources and several scholarly online articles. English painter John Walker, philosophy professor Bery Gaut and author and writer Edward Gallafent are just some of the scholarly sources I had found which helped me form my paper into how I have it now. What I find amazing about my slow journey to completing my paper was that I learned about a lot of things that I didn't know before; which I now realize is the reason for a research paper in the first place. Like it is said in the book *The Curious Researcher*, there is no point in doing an academic paper if the researcher himself believes there is something new to discover that he doesn't already know. Near the end of the class we were told to reunite with the imaginary reader Dave once again from the *Curious Researcher* in Exercise 5.6. Unlike the first time when answering his questions, my answers now seemed far more confident, clearer, and concise and I finally saw how much I have learned within this class and what working on this research paper really taught me.

The most important things that I know I have learned in this class was finding the importance of a research question for a topic I wanted to debate, and also to be able to answer to someone not only what I'm saying has a purpose but is also interesting as well. I believe the biggest challenge in English 102 was that I had to completely scrap most of my original paper and realize everything I was doing up

to then was completely wrong. I came about this paper in believing it would be much easier than it actually was and because of that I was blindsided with a huge reality check. I never have a problem when I am criticized for my writing or the ways I come about my writing. But I do have a problem when I realize that I am struggling and still cannot grasp what is exactly wrong; and that I can't find the best ways to fix it. I also learned when writing an academic paper that is the thesis question I am using isn't guaranteed to stay the same throughout the whole research process. There is always so much new and interesting information that you can come across and that could turn out to be much more rich and interesting than your original thesis; which could get you to eventually change it into something completely different.

Now coming to the end of this class I find it quite humorous to actually go back and look at my rough draft because it not only now reads so horribly but it also looks nothing like the final paper I had just completed. Comparing both of my papers is interesting because it seriously looks like they were written by two separate people and the changes I had made from the beginning to the end of this paper is astounding. When coming to the end of writing my final paper I realized the paper was several pages too long, and I didn't know what exactly to cut out. I read my paper over and over again and sometimes even out loud. There was a lot of information in my paper that I really didn't want to take out but I realized that it really didn't add any importance in what I was trying to say, and all it really did was either go slightly off subject or go on far too long which made my thesis in the end feel less powerful to the reader. I offered my paper to be considered as the 'Mock Assessment' for my class and it was a refreshing to hear the remaining problems that I still had with my paper a few days before I needed to hand it in.



I realized my quotes were way too long and needed to be trimmed or turned into block quotes, I needed to get rid of 'pop art' and concentrate more on 'pop culture', and I needed to start introducing my quotes and explaining who I was referring to. I trimmed the paper as well especially the first 4 pages, so my thesis question of Pulp Fiction would enter into the paper much quicker for the reader. I also stated the question of my paper much better and changed the title from a question, more into a statement which now reads: Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction has Altered the Art Film and has Changed Popular Culture.

I am very grateful to have taken English 102 as my very first class in 4 years because it gave me a chance to finally get in the mode of reading, writing and doing academic research; which I haven't done in a very long time. Learning to use the amazing tools at the UWM library was also a great bonus because it taught me how to find information using the UWM database and search engines. I am now very happy in how my final paper turned out and even though it probably has its fair share of flaws, I am confident it has met all the major requirements on being a passing research paper. I have taken away a lot of great things from this summer class and there are several tools of writing in which I will not only put to good use for my film website but also through upcoming academic classes as well.