

# WRIT: Journal of First-Year Writing

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Volume 2 | Issue 2

Article 1

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8-12-2019

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### Recommended Citation

Duarte, Fernanda Lima (2019) "My Theory of Writing," *WRIT: Journal of First-Year Writing*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/writ.02.02.01>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/writ/vol2/iss2/1>

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## **My Theory of Writing**

By Fernanda Lima Duarte

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Writing at the university level can be very challenging for many freshmen students, especially for those who have English as a second language. Building satisfactory writing skill takes practice and great effort. Written communication skill allows one to express emotions and ideas, to understand and to be understood. At high school students can shape this skill that will help them succeed in writing at college standard. I did not have much writing experience back in Brazil, so GSW 1110 class has taught me not solely to write for higher education, but also to create confidence to write in English, as it was a very personal challenge to overcome. This class has taught me new writing aspects such as essay's proposal guidelines, structure, and to learn from my writing mistakes that certainly I will use in others papers and classes. I have followed the instructions for each essay and learned from them. Although my papers were passing—which is reflected in the grades—it is gratifying to realize how much I have evolved throughout the semester to become a better writer that consequently will lead me to turn into a successful student and professional. I have developed three aspects of writing in this class. Firstly, the audience demands have pushed me to build confidence as a rhetor. Secondly, the process of writing led me to evolve many revision strategies. And thirdly, I have improved critical thinking, reading, and writing in analyzing sources, and learned to apply them for academic discourse community writing exigency.

The first criterion I have developed during GSW 1110 class was to shape my writing and self-assurance according to the audience's demands. As an English as second language student, the idea of writing essays in another language for academic audiences has always been a significant obstacle to superate. The lack of confidence on my ideas and writing style, due to the absence of previous writing experience—even in my mother language—made me believe from the beginning of the class that I would not be able to write passing academic portfolios. On my first essay, the project was a literacy narrative where I was asked to reflect on my reading and writing experiences. It felt a little intimidating at first as it made me to hearken back to a place where sometimes it was not so pleasant. The essay title was “The Importance of Reading for Kids” and the intention was to write about something well known for its importance but also because it was something I was raised deprived from. I grew up in an oppressive environment with a violent father, so my mother

could not find means to cultivate reading moments with me and my brothers. Since the assignment requested to journey back in time, it allowed me to understand a part of my personality I did not understand before. Today I realized that it might contribute to explain the lack of confidence in my writing, and sure enough, it felt like I was being born with the literacy narrative essay. For the first project, I could reach the requirement of five pages of writing, which took me a great effort to achieve.

On the second project the title was “International Students in an American College.” I wrote about how students from all over the world come to study in a different environment acquire competence and confidence to succeed in this discourse community. For this essay, I was able to write seven pages, and it was reflecting the gain of confidence I was achieving in my writing. The idea of gaining confidence is supported by Anne Lamott who is a successful writer with 14 novels and nonfiction books published. In her article called “Shitty First Drafts,” Lamott mentions how confidence takes part when it comes to writing. She says, “I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident” (Lamott 528). She complements the idea phrasing “even after I’d been doing this for years, panic would set in” (Lamott 529). These excerpts provide good examples on how confidence can be an important skill that students must develop in order to become better writers for college level. Confidence can be understood as the ability to believe in oneself and one’s powers or capabilities. At the end of the day, confidence was surely the biggest and most precious lesson GSW 1110 class has taught me.

While building confidence to write was an important attribute developed this semester, another essential aspect I have improved was the process of writing, which led me to evolve some revision strategies. Learning these criteria highlighted the value of following the outline given for each piece of writing. From the first project, I found that following the guidance of the proposal form was very helpful. The proposal form held all the structure and plan of the writing to pursue. I learned that breaking down the ideas that I wanted to write acted as a compass to guide me to write a passing portfolio. I ended up developing my writing method: I was transferring the information from the proposal form to my notebook and constructing an outline of ideas to write. I was also jotting more information down, adding details I want to make a link or to mention, and once I have written them on the essay, I would cross them off on my notebook.

Other crucial element during the writing process of the essays was to observe the schedule – it allowed me not to miss any assignment date and to keep the writing productive. The samples presented for each part of the four

projects provided an overview of every step. This way I could know whether I was going on the right direction, which would prevent me from having to redo the parts later on. For the second and third essays, where more sources were required to support the points, I realized that reading the sources before writing the points down would give me more knowledge about the ideas I wanted to express and therefore I would more accurately apply its relevance.

Another significant aspect is revision—it plays an important role when it comes to finishing a project. Nancy Sommers defines revision in her article “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers” as “a separate stage at the end of the process that comes after the completion of a first or second draft and that is temporally distinct from the prewriting and writing stages of the process” (378). Before GSW class, revision for me would be more an exercise of making changes in the text such as substituting terms and phrases or avoiding word repetition and misspellings. During this semester, I learned that revising process goes beyond the sentence level—it requires reviewing the connection of the arguments in a semantic level. Sommers reinforce this idea when she says, “students do not see revision as an activity in which they modify and develop perspectives and ideas” (382). This excerpt clearly shows the importance of the deep revision of ideas and arguments supported, and not solely cleaning up the text in the project.

For all my four essays, I have followed the instructions mentioned above, and I continue to pass my projects with continued improvement. This progress is reflected in the grades. On my first essay, I achieved B grade, reaching 3 out of 4 points. The second essay, I achieved 7 out of 7 points for the B grade. And on my third project, I achieved A grade, reaching 9 out of 10 points. The progress experienced in each essay had reinforced my confidence to write in academic level and motivated me to do my best to become a better writer. Learning the process of writing with all its procedures and how to deeply revise papers are important tools acquired this semester and will help me to write in the GSW 1120 class.

The final aspect I have improved during GSW 1110 class was critical thinking, reading and writing in composing papers and analyzing sources, and how I learned to apply them for academic discourse community exigency. The academic audience are the professors I am writing to who are capable to influence the discourse as they expect my papers to respect the MLA format just as the grammar conventions. Formatting and rules of language have a big role in making the reader interested or approving what is being read. On my first essay, I have made many writing mistakes such as misspellings, comma splices, misuses of apostrophe, errors in page formatting and source citations to name a

few. On my second essay, although I have learned from my mistakes on previous project, I still made some errors at the sentence level, but in less quantity.

When it comes to critical thinking, the third essay required more analytical writing and reading of sources due to its subject “Rhetorical Analysis.” In this essay, I wrote about how I experienced the process of writing a thesis for my graduation back in Brazil. This project demanded a more discerning definition of the rhetorical terms such as exigence, constraints, audience, and motivation, as well as how I critically connected them to context of writing. Starting from the second essay, where position and points required more support from sources, I learned to judge its relevance and accuracy, and to apply them to the piece of writing. In the article titled “Thinking Critically” written by Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell, is stated that an “evidence is relevant if it specifically applies to the case being discussed” (81) and an “evidence is accurate if it comes from a reliable source” (80). This way, “reader can determine whether the evidence is credible and whether the writer is trustworthy” (Kirschner and Mandell 81). Kirschner and Mandell also complement this concept stating that “strong evidence convincingly supports a statement or assertion, while weak evidence does little to persuade readers that a point is worth considering” (80). This exemplifies how important it is to critically analyze the excerpts selected to supports points in a rhetorical situation. In the end, mastering critical thinking, reading and writing in GSW 1110 class helped me to gain competence in producing a convincing with strong level of accuracy essays for an academic discourse community.

During GSW 1110 class, I have acquired many writing skills that enabled me to evolve as a writer. Although I have learned from my mistakes, some errors are still occurring at the sentence level, such as punctuation and misspellings. I have improved my confidence to write essays for an American academic audience, and it represents a great personal achievement. As a student, I am in a lifelong learning process, so mistakes are part of the path, and I will grow with them. For the GSW 1120, I will be more careful in proofreading, being more vigilant on observing for errors as this level of class requires diligent grammar. The next writing course demands more awareness when doing research for sources. As Synthesis Writing is a big theme in this class, it is essential to critically analyze the connections between the sources and the points supported. For next papers, essays guidelines and samples will not be provided, so it is expected that students have learned them from GSW 1110 class. To succeed in GSW 1120, it is important to assimilate the skills mentioned and to avoid making the same mistakes in future papers.

Over the course of the semester, I have learned a lot from GSW 1110 and the Theory of Writing essay reflects the progress acquired during this class. I

have realized to shape my writing and self-assurance according to the audience's demands. Another essential aspect I have improved was the process of writing, which led me to evolve some revision strategies. I also learned critical thinking, reading and writing in composing papers and analyzing sources, and how I learned to apply them for academic discourse community exigency. As an English as a second language student, it takes longer to overcome issues, but I believe I have attained enough writing skills to enter the next level and continue the learning process.

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