Thaer Tayeh

Professor Robert Leston

English 1710

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Dear Professor Leston,

I entered this class after a three year absence from attending a college. Needless to say my writing was a little rusty, and I think that was evident in our first paper, the tech-lit narrative, as I had completely forgotten how to write a paper in MLA format. I haven't heard of that style or Purdue owl in over three years and their existence has long since been forgotten to me. The blog posts were a great exercise to help me get back in shape in terms of writing. I say exercise because that is definitely what it was. With two blog posts a weeks, about an hour on each blog, it was a repetition that did not allow my writing to rust and forced me to get the necessary practice to improve as a writer. Your writing prompts would include specific questions you wanted to see us address in our blogs. Addressing them gave my writing a direction and helped me organize my thoughts. A technical writer is expected to analyze and write specific documentations. The blog posts aid in preparing for that expectation. With the writing prompts I prepare to include key information in my writing that you expect to see. This is similar to how a technical writer must address specific information the audience expects to find. Writing papers for projects was definitely more nerve wracking than writing blogs. When writing a paper there's more of an expectation. More information is needed and the information must be relevant to the topic and include as much detail as possible so the reader does not question where claims are coming from. I think I felt more anxiety when writing the issue paper than the exploratory one. The reason is because with the exploratory paper I'm giving a more general explanation of what the issues themselves are and focusing my writing more on the sources I researched for my issues. With the issue paper however, I now have to focus all my research and writing on a specific topic. For me the topic was girl soldiers and after the grueling process of searching for reliable sources, I wasn't sure how to begin writing the paper. When I did start writing, I was doubting if it was any good or made any stress and I began to stress myself and shut off my laptop. After a few hours I came back to my laptop collected myself and thought about how I could organize my paper. I broke the paper up into the subtopics and worked on each subtopic on a new page before bringing it all together into one paper. I felt like after I had a direction to follow, the writing flowed from the keys on the keyboard to the page more easily and I began to feel less anxious. Breaking up my paper and writing each part on a separate page before putting it together became a routine I used in writing not just for your class, but for all my English classes this semester.

I have to admit that I did find some of the readings to be boring but I believe my approach to the

readings changed after your small speech on confusing boring with not understanding. So for the

readings that followed that day I thought to myself, ok, so let's try to understand the point the

author is trying to make. I put this into practice when reading McLuhan's’ “The Medium is the

Message”. I had to re-read sentences or whole paragraphs a few times before I understood the

message. With this practice I learned to be more patient when reading and it became easier to

comprehend the readings. You had also mentioned looking up the definitions of words we come

across when we don't know what they mean. This just seemed like one of those things that

obviously makes sense and I don't know why I did not always do this. So this became something

else I'd put into practice, and when I would stumble on a word that was foreign to me, I'd look it

up before continuing my reading (I like adding new words to my vocabulary anyway).

I feel that I have grown as a student in your class. If you recall, in the beginning of the semester I

was not as involved in the conversations as I have become later into the semester. As I have

mentioned earlier this was my first college semester in three years. I was out in the rough real

world for those three years and had to now re-adjust to the discipline of being a student once

more. Our class was of a humble size and I enjoyed the conversations of English 1710.

Listening to some of my fellow classmates presentations such as Michael, Rownak, and

Naveeda, gave me inspiration on how to present my issue when the time came. I enjoyed reading

my classmates’ blogs and the ideas and examples they bring up in their responses would make

me go back to the readings and re­­­­-read some passages. The way they would articulate their blogs

would also make me try harder to make my blogs come off more clear and meaningful.

Particularly the writings of Samantha and George, as I felt their writings came off very coherent

and well-written. I believe I am also improving as a researcher. In this class I’ve learned to do

more than just type something in Google in order to conduct research. I’ve learned of the various

sources I have at my disposal as a CityTech student such as Ebsco, Jstor, Project Muse etc, and

the difference in reliability between a scholarly source and an internet source. This was a big aid

when doing my research on my issue presentation on bias in the media. Looking back, I am

proud of the research I was able to do for my presentation and I’m glad I was able to get a

reaction from my classmates on the images of bias ads I located online but I wish I had done a

better job at actually presenting the issue. Nerves kicked in when it was time to present and I was

not as organized and well-spoken as I had hoped to be. However my presentation was in late

September and since then I feel my participation in class discussions and letting my voice be

heard given me more confidence in my tone.

I can honestly say that I have changed as a citizen due to our class. I no longer see things the way

I did prior to this semester. Living in a capitalist country, it is no surprise that our nation is run

by the dollar. However I was not aware of how corrupt and disgusting our corporations were and

how much we are under their control until watching the documentaries “The Corporation”, and

“The Four Horsemen”. Some examples from the documentaries that disturbed me were the Nike

CEO who had never even visited the overseas factories that take advantage of third world

country citizens and force them to work in inhuman conditions. As well as the man from Wall

Street who said higher ups in corporations were rejoicing during 9/11. These documentaries have

stirred up a loathing of capitalism in me. As I’ve mentioned before in class, when walking

towards the 34th street Harold Square subway station on the way to work, I pass the Macy’s

building with the giant “BELIEVE” sign in capital letters sticking on it. Seeing this sign now

disgusts me because it’s another example of a heartless corporation perverting an empowering

word of hope as a means of advertisement all in the name of making money. I can think of some

notable readings that have changed the way I think and feel on some matters. Catells’ “Occupy

Wall Street: The Salt of the Earth”, I believe Castells is right in one individual can not truly

represent the needs of all of us. That if as a society we were to be horizontal, such as the

Zapatistas and Occupy Wall Street, we would perhaps function in a more fair manor and better

coexist with one another. Thomas Frank’s , “Why Cant Johnny Dissent”, was a real eye opener

for me. As I was reading I was thinking back to some shirt I might’ve seen in a Hot Topic store

or to some cheesy super bowl car commercial and I am thinking, Thomas Frank is right.

Corporations have turned the attitude of rebelling and the idea of individuality and turned them

into marketing schemes. I, as many other, see this all around us and yet it did not hit me on the

head until I started reading, and it hit hard. However I am not as pessimistic as Mr. Frank. I do

not believe corporations have taken the ability to be activists away from us. Rather I believe they

have forced us to be more creative in participating in activism, such as Dominguez with

electronic disturbance. Andreou’s “Anti-homeless spikes” has made me more sympathetic to the

homeless and I feel a weight of guilt for the many times I’ve walked passed them without giving

a glance. This is especially true now since my recent move to New Jersey forces me to commute

through Penn station every day. It is impossible to go to and from Penn station without seeing a

great number of homeless individuals sitting on the floor with cardboard signs. I am a different

person than I was before though as now ill purchase them a sandwich if I can and a few weeks

ago I took old blankets from my house and collected a few from my girlfriend’s home to give to

some of the homeless on my way to work. They say ignorance is bliss and they may be right

because I can never see things the way I use too, but I’d rather be aware of the world I exist in

and all its faults than live blissfully in the matrix.

It has been a real pleasure being a part of your class professor Leston and a part of the English

1710 community this semester. Never before have I been in a class that had such a societal feel

to it. I appreciate the comments you’ve made on my papers and as I move forward to future

semesters I hope to hone my writing skills even more. I also hope to become even more

confident in conducting research and that citations become less of a challenge for me. I wish you

all the best in completing your book and hope you are granted the sabbatical.

Sincerely,

Thaer Tayeh