Eng1121/E106

Prof. Schmerler

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**The Final Portfolio**

**“My Journey”**

From geologist to translator, to yoga teacher, to mother, to nurse. After ten years in school and nine years in university I thought, I was done with being a student, but after becoming a mother I realized the need to change my profession again and dove into medical field. Changing the country, changing lifestyle, changing place, changing role, changing profession – everything has changed in my life recently and I finally can tell that it really works for me.

Science degrees, scientific career, scientific research. I miserably failed in writing scientific articles. Why? I don’t know for sure. Maybe I didn’t really believe in what I was doing, maybe didn’t get help I didn’t realize I needed and thousand other “maybes”. The fact is it didn’t work out and I had to let it go. Now I feel every day that I am in the right place and in the right time.

This semester of Spring 2019 in City Tech was challenging. For the first time I was confronted with the terrain of knowledge I was expected to master by mostly working one on one with the thickest book. I suppose, such approach is designed to teach students to learn independently, but in reality, I felt like little kitten frown into the water, drowning. I feel strong urge just to create more structured and to the point program for teaching in the way that can be easier understood and remembered. It’s the end pf the semester and things clearing up a bit and I know that the next one will be better.

English class has been a breath of air for a drowning person. I think it worth something to hear it from someone like me, who’s a) not a native speaker; b) did not enjoy English I class at all. Allowing free writing and creative expression as oppose to emphasis on grammar made a huge difference. Low stakes assignments relived the worrying about grades and helped to focus more on what I was righting, instead of how I was writing. The focus on content before structure and gramma improved my vocabulary and got me out of my shell a little bit more, which is not a small fit for an introvert like me. Doing in class assignments were tremendously good, because when I was doing the homework, its foundation was already there and I only had to extend and deepen what I already had. Additionally, the fact that the teacher as a professional writer were doing the same assignments and also were giving feedbacks in class, made it feel more like a workshop and allowed the class time to be relaxing, yet productive and thought provoking. Afterwards I was usually left more relaxed, inspired and self-worthy again.

The best part about writing is that you never know what you’ll write until it appears on the paper. Self-discovery: it was challenging and a little bit scary to dig deeper into yourself, find new-old things there. For example, for me most creative and artistic outbursts happen during hardest times. I think, writing as a form of art acts like a vent for extra emotions you feel. Helps me vent out during hardest periods, but writing doesn’t naturally happen to me when I’m happy.

**UNIT 1**

*Everybody thinks differently. For me it is always been a challenge to convey what I mean in writing regardless the language. Expressing thoughts in clear and easy understandable way is the obstacle I often struggle with. Low stakes assignments relived the worrying about grades and helped to focus more on what I was righting, instead of how I was writing. Unit’s 1 Freedom essay opened my eyes to look at the writing as a process of rewriting, which is normal and necessary. Reflecting back I can see now that I have a new tool to write better. Simply put it is to pile all the thoughts on a paper and then work from there, extracting idea by idea and allowing yourself to let go some of them and accept the fact that you can not include everything in one piece.*

**The Fear and the cure. Writing with constrains**

Sometimes I fear to look around and see that this life was a dream. What I have around me now is so unrealistic, so unbelievable, so incredible, so fine – it is almost unnatural.

Different cultures, different continents, different voices, different looks, different views… and still we found each other and did not let it vanish and fade. This is the miracle of life, the treasure and I am afraid to lose it.

Now once I gaze in inner-me, I see grace, peace, magic … we are remaining in one pie…so, gaze, praise our sun, rain, sea.

**Essay. Facets of freedom**

‘Go, be free!’ says my husband, when I leave him with our baby boy to go do some things that need to be done. For me, it’s almost offensive: how can I “be free” while I’m away from my boys?! It does not feel like freedom. It feels like I’m ripping half of my heart out and leaving it at home or, at the very least, an arm. I step outside and look at the blue sky, white clouds and shining sun. The world is still there. Surprisingly, universe did not crumble down only because I left home. Now I can feel the freedom.

I believe, freedom is very individual thing, like a fingerprint. For example, freedom for one person could be the worst confinement for another. My grandmother likes to live alone, she feels like her freedom is violated when guests are staying too long. On the other hand, my mother can’t find freedom and peace when her husband goes on a business trip. Freedom can be different even for the same person at different stages in the life. I used to think that only odd people go to the movies alone, now I am that odd person, because it makes me feel good and free. Freedom has numerous facets. Now, let’s look at some of them.

Ultimately, freedom seems like a luxury. According to one of the most accepted developmental theories: Pyramid of Needs theory by American psychologist A. Maslow (1943), human development can be viewed as “climbing” a pyramid from survival needs at the bottom to self-actualization (or Ultimate Freedom, as I see it) at the top. In general, this means you can’t even think about freedom, or even about trying a new hobby, until you have air to breath, food to eat, roof other your head and, maybe, some money. Good example of priority to satisfy you survival needs first can be found in the autobiography of American minister and human rights activist Malcolm X, which he wrote in 1965. Malcolm X shares his memories about the time he spent in Charleston Prison. Malcolm X explains, how for the first time in his life he was able to focus. Imprisonment allowed Malcolm X to improve his writing and reading skills, probably because there he didn’t have to worry about what to eat or where to sleep.

Escape from reality is a form freedom. Have you ever lost yourself in a book? I know I did. It happens when you lift your gaze from the written letters of a book and blink confused to the world around you. You don’t see letters when you read, you, actually, see what you’re reading about. Lost in a book is the feeling when the whole world is in your head and it’s beautiful, and colorful, and full, and whatever you want it to be. There you can be free from rules, limits, and even yourself. Malcolm X shares similar experience of escaping reality in reading: “Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had I was reading … months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life”.

Kids have a special kind of freedom: imagination. For instance, one of my son’s favorite games is to crawl around the living room, while hidden under a blanket and to bump into me, couch, fridge…” Oh! Who’s that? And where’s my Max?”, I exclaim, acting surprised, and my two-year-old is laughing contagiously. The limits of society, the “dos” and “don’ts” are not yet pressed upon kids. The freedom to see magic everywhere and believe in what you see. Magical thinking and imagination are qualities that should be greatly appreciated in adults, too. Imagination is very hard to carry into adulthood, but it gives you all the freedom you want, and that makes it so valuable.

Freedom has many facets. Freedom is luxury, self-realization, escape, reading, imagination, magic and much more. For me, freedom is now: when I turn the key in the keyhole, I hear my son running to the door: “Mama! Mama!”; when I walk in and breath in the delicious smell of food, and see my husband is standing in the kitchen with a just-flipped-omelet on a skillet. Ironically, family, new roles and obligations have allowed me to realize who am I and what I like to do for the sake of myself. Today, I feel more free than ever.

**Reflection on the chapter “Shitty First Drafts” in Annie Lamott’s book “Bird by Bird”**

Finally, somebody voicing an honest opinion about difficulties of writing. I've been waiting to hear this for so long! "Shitty First Draft" is  what I've been doing all my life, I just called them "drafts" and more then the first were "shitty". So, no, I am not surprised at the chapter's title, I am relieved!

Do you write a “down draft,” an “up draft,” and a “dental draft” like Lamott says? Ha-ha, very funny! I usually write those and more, because " there is no limit for perfection", meaning you always can make it better. The problem is finishing. When do you decide that this is it? I'm still not clear for that question...

I'm old fashioned I like to write by hand using pencil on a paper. Next step is to stop, go have some tea or do something else. Then with fresh eyes I'd go through the text with a marker. After this I'm ready to type and fix all my marked places. Next, I would print that out and after another break I'll fix the printed version again and the process  of typing and printing repeats at least once more... or endless times.

**UNIT 2**

*Genre switching in unit 2 was very enjoyable for me. The hardest part was to choose the topic, but after that I was able to relax and have fun. I got to write a poem and was surprised to realize how much I miss that revealing and creative experience.*

**Recipe for breathing exercise: alternative nostril breathing**

Time : 10-15 min

Ingredients:

·        Living breathing person

·        Quiet environment to seat and relax

·        Chair (optional)

Instructions:

1.       Seat in a comfortable position with straight back and neck. Hands resting on the knees.

2.       Take a deep inhalation and exhale slowly and completely.

3.       Fold index and middle finger on the right hand keeping the rest of the fingers straight.

4.       Fold the right hand the way that you thumb is close to your right nostril and your finger is close to the left nostril.

5.       Exhale completely and put the right thumb on the right nostril.

6.       Close your eyes.

7.       Slowly and evenly inhale through the left nostril.

8.       Close the left nostril with right ring finger.

9.       Open the right nostril and exhale trough the right nostril.

10.   Inhale through the right nostril and close it again with the right thumb. This is the end of one cycle.

11.   Repeat steps 7  to 10  ten times or as much as you feel comfortable.

12.   Feel more calm, relaxed and rejuvenated.

Notes: Breathing should be as slow as possible. Try to exhale twice as slow as you inhale. You can count in your head: count to four while inhaling , count to eight while exhaling.

**Example of the genre: poem**

Trees

By Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see   
A poem lovely as a tree.   
  
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest   
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;   
  
A tree that looks at God all day,   
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;   
  
A tree that may in summer wear   
A nest of robins in her hair;   
  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;   
Who intimately lives with rain.   
  
Poems are made by fools like me,   
But only God can make a tree.

Kilmer, Joyce. "Trees" in Monroe, Harriet (editor), *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. (Chicago: Modern Poetry Association, August 1913), 2:160.

**Analysis of the poem “Trees” by J. Kilmer as a genre**

“Trees" is a [poem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyric_poetry) by American poet [Joyce Kilmer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joyce_Kilmer). J. Kilmer is famous for his simple style, appreciation of nature and religious views. The poem was written in February 1913, it was first published in [*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry_Magazine) in August 1913 and included in Kilmer's 1914 collection *Trees and Other Poems*. It addresses to people who appreciate nature, I guess, that’s one of the reason it was so popular and was liked by public. From the other hand, publishing in the magazine of poetry suggests narrow circle of fellow-poets-readers.

The purpose of the writing poems in general and “Trees” in particular is to convey not only information, but emotions as well. Emotional message translates through using reach adjectives and metaphors. For example, Kilmer compares unanimated object: a tree, to a child “whose hungry mouth is prest against the earth's sweet flowing breast”, and to a person who “lifts her leafy arms to pray”. Using the language, J. Kilmer evokes colorful images in a reader. The main signature of poem as a genre is the rhyme. The rhyming words and certain number of syllables in each line create unique tone, melody, character and feeling.

I would speculate that poetry is the most creative type of writing. It can be written in wide variety of ways and still called a “poem”. Traditionally, poems suppose to have rhythm and rhyme but in modern poetry even that is not required. I understand poems as a type of writing that translates emotions through words in an artistic, creative way.

**My writing in the genre: poem**

Breathing in

with eyes closed.

Suffocating from within,

I’m lost in abyss of thoughts.

Crowded mind,

Be quiet!

The reaction is mild:

I’m crying.

Letting go tears,

Clear and free.

Everything disappears

In the endless sea.

I’m dissolved in the air

With silence inside.

Flowing nowhere

With nothing to hide.

Raindrops falling

From the gloomy sky.

The water is pouring

Nature’s lullaby.

Body’s asleep

But mind is awake

To find the answer,

To find a break.

Flies to the mountains,

Flies to the seas.

Nowhere or everywhere

The one with the breeze.

Bundle of energy,

Emotions and means

Searching for purpose,

Realizing her dreams.

The goal is set,

The way is clear.

Don’t you dare to forget

That love lives here.

Long, steady flow

Sets free all doubt.

I feel the glow

And breathing out.

**UNIT 3**

*Research of unit 3 was and is challenging, not due lack of ideas and information, but due to overwhelming overflow of both. It felt like it could use more time but like with any research it can be endless without clear deadlines.*

**Research inquiry: Breathing Exercises (Pranayama)**

Breathing is what we do all the time without any regard on how exactly it works. Imagine, if you had to consciously inhale and exhale every time, you’d have make yourself breath faster if you run, or make yourself breath slower if you sleep. Conscious breath control 100% of the time is just impossible, it won’t be time to live! Although, conscious birthing or breathing exercises can be very beneficial for health.

I feel that it is important to open up further discussion and analysis of breathing exercises, alternate nostril breathing exercise in particular, because this exercise can be useful for anyone who experiences stress or want to feel more relaxed and even more happy.

Breathing, as well as heart beating, food digesting, cells dividing and many more process are all controlled by our autonomic nervous system: system that keeps us alive. Autonomic nervous system can be divided into tow parts: sympathetic and parasympathetic. Sympathetic nervous system usually associated with our “fight or flight response, it speeds up the heart and respirations in response to danger or stress. Parasympathetic nervous system acts the opposite way – slows down the heart, relaxes the muscles and puts us into “rest and digest” mode. Sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are complementary, for example, with each inhale the heart rate speeds up a tiny bit (sympathetic response) and each exhale the heart slows down a tiny bit (parasympathetic response).

Vagus nerve (or wandering nerve) is a largest nerve in the body and composes 80% of parasympathetic nervous system (Stern, E., 2019). Vagus originates in the brain stem’s areas that control breathing and digestion, emotion and communication and connects to almost all internal organs, including the heart and digestive system. In other words, vagus nerve connects and relaxation (parasympathetic response) and breathing.

Life is very stressful for many people. Constant stress in life tends to accumulate and leads to overdrive of sympathetic response and constant “fight or flight” mode. Sympathetic system in this situation suppresses the function of vagus nerve and weakens its ability to send information between internal organs, the heart and the brain (weak vagal tone, Stern, E., 2019). In the long term, the body is trying to compensate the weak vagal tone by activating inflammation response, elevating blood pressure, causing anxiety and various imbalances.

The human body has a tremendous potential for self-healing, but it happens in relaxed state (parasympathetic response). Hence, stress activates sympathetic response and hinders the ability of the body to self-regulate and self-heal. Therefore, practices which promote relaxation and support parasympathetic system help the body to overcome imbalances. One of the such practices is conscious birthing exercises.

Breathing pattern can be consciously controlled for some period of time. Slow equal inhales and exhales balance sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. From the yogic point of view, breathing is the vital energy (prana) and breathing exercises help the vital energy to flow smoothly throughout the body.

I’d like to explore why such a wonderful, almost miraculous, tool as breathing exercises is not so widely spread. It seems very ironic that with widespread popularity of yoga, practicing yoga postures (asanas) is more popular then breathing exercises (pranayama).

First of all, breathing exercise is seemingly simple. In our capitalistic society simple things are overlooked as not worthy attention. For example, taking an expensive pill might seem more productive then taking couple of breaths.

Second, breathing exercises require great regularity. They don’t give fast results. Regularity is the key to success. For example, it’s harder to practice breathing exercise every day for months to improve depression then just take an antidepressant. Although, in the long run, the breathing exercise give more stable results and don’t produce addiction.

Additionally, yoga and pranayama is often mistaken as a religious practice. True, that yoga is historically rooted in Indian religious tradition, but it does not apply any religious context to doing yoga or pranayama.

People need to be aware of this simple yet effective tool to promote health, reduce stress, feel more relaxed, increase the quality of life.

**Some of the most influential sources I have read and based my opinions on regarding my topic (breathing exercises):**

Alderman, Lesley. “Breathe. Exhale. Repeat: The Benefits of Controlled Breathing.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 9 Nov. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/well/mind/breathe-exhale-repeat-the-benefits-of-controlled-breathing.html.

Boncompagni, Tatiana. “Want a Better Workout? Just Breathe.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 4 Jan. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/04/nyregion/want-a-better-workout-just-breathe.html.

Carrera, Jaganath. *Inside the Yoga Sutras: a Comprehensive Sourcebook for the Study and Practice of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras*. Integral Yoga Publications, 2006.

Desikachar, T. K. V. *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice*. Inner Traditions International, 1999.

Iyengar, B. K. S., and Yehudi Menuhin. *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika*. Harper Collins, 2014.

Reynolds, Gretchen. “Why Deep Breathing May Keep Us Calm.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 5 Apr. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/well/move/what-chill-mice-can-teach-us-about-keeping-calm.html.

Stern, Eddie. *One Simple Thing: A New Look at the Science of Yoga*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019.

**UNIT 4**

*Multi-modal Project. The first time I heard this heading I was shocked and confused and lost. I was literally was starring at the space while my mind was racing: what does it mean? Can it be graphic art like one of the M. Lombardi’s? Does it have to have words in it? Do I have to be in it? That last question was asked by inner introvert. Then I took a deep breath and started to think how I can visualize my believes.*

*I decided to show an example: me. The video is about how I feel breathing exercises helped me not only got pregnant, but go through it and even beyond. I took my morning exercises as you would take pills: every day at certain time. The results didn’t take long to show. I have no proof of what or how it worked....was it the calmness and sense of relaxation after the exercises? Or was it simply more oxygen getting into my body? Or was it a placebo effect? We'll never know, but it worked. I hope it will work for you too.*

[*https://youtu.be/C-Aag6bzUKM*](https://youtu.be/C-Aag6bzUKM)