*Dear Professor,*

*My journey as a student used to be crystal clear. It started in a small private school right off of Hillside Avenue that taught kids from Pre-K to 8th grade. I was there the whole nine yards. I grew up with the same four friends for ten years. We were all A students and figured that life would be pretty great. At least, that’s how I saw it. All I had to do was go to high school, ace that, then college, then… I guess I never thought about anything else. Then high school started. I went from a class with 5 8th graders to a class of 1200. It’s safe to say I drowned. I had no idea how to interact with other people, and pretty much drifted through freshman year. I washed up on shore in sophomore year, but didn’t gather the courage to explore this new frontier until the next.*

*That’s when I realized how far behind I was. I had no passions, no social life, nothing that I could use to identify myself. That’s when my journey really started. For the most part, I’ve been lost ever since, occasionally thinking I’ve made a good enough map to navigate my inner thoughts and then realizing I did something wrong. Then it’s back to the drawing board.*

*This struggle is what I’ve been dealing with the entire semester. However, being in our english class has taught me that sometimes it’s okay to be confused. You need to take a break. Take a step back. You might see a pattern amidst the chaos. I’m still confused, but that’s always going to be a problem to some degree. Accepting that was my biggest accomplishment this semester. Helping people explore their own ideas and making them into videos was also very fun. Facilitating their production became my own project to work on. It allowed me to fully realize how important video editing is to me. That’s another win.*

*So, what can I say about this semester? It definitely started a new chapter in my journey. I can’t wait to see how this one will go.*

*Thank you for guiding me Professor. I still have to challenge you at table tennis.*

*-Dylan Nanjad*

*Using lipograms was one of my favorite exercises. This was the second one we were assigned: Fear and Cure. Writing about our fears without using descending letters was very challenging. I thought harder than I have in years writing-wise. I never realized how limited my vocabulary was. The cure was exponentially more difficult: not using ascending letters. I spent a long time racking my brain for any words that worked, then realized that simplicity was the key. Sometimes you don’t need any fluff. I loved the challenge, and practiced outside of class.*

Fear:

I scare me. That’s the worst part. Sometimes I don’t know what occurs in this head of mine. One moment I’m invincible, then the next I’m a void. All of these doubts make me want to run and never turn back for fear that if I do… who knows what will happen. This is a clash of wills, but it’s inside my head. Here I stand, both savior and demise. A voice tells me the turmoil will never end.

Cure:

A pen on paper.

*As soon as I heard the essay topic, a spark ignited in my mind. Finding freedom. It was perfect. I didn’t want to write about conventional freedom. Everyone knows what that is, we didn’t need another essay about Martin Luther King, Jr. or Gandhi. This was my chance to try something creative. I’d never been given this opportunity before. Writing it felt...right.*

Cats, Tents, and Storms: a Non-Academic Study of Why Life Makes No Sense

Life is defined as a set of conditions “that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter.” No matter how different organisms are, they all struggle to meet these conditions. To live. All of this started billions of years ago, back when the earth was young. Our insignificant but precious world came into bloom, manifesting in the form of life. Everything that we see, from Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* to splatter paintings of blood in the streets of Rwanda, originate from this moment. But after finding life, what happens? After we go extinct, maybe octopi will inherit our throne— which we took by default after dinosaurs were exterminated by chance. It’s incredible, isn’t it? We are a product of possibility.

We start four years ago. I’m on the last hiking trip of summer camp. Our group is small, and the only other camper with a Y chromosome is Steven: my partner. It’s the final night of our trip, and we got lucky. It was supposed to storm all week long, but we barely got any rain. Everyone was relaxing, enjoying mac n’ cheese with pepperoni. I was stuffed. And satisfied. It had been an amazing last hike. The world was perfect. The storm had missed us. We could see it in the distance between two mountain peaks. But we were safe. We had control. The storm grows impatient.

It was like watching an antelope eating — not mac n cheese, probably some form of grass. The world was peaceful. Thirty feet away, a tiger crouched, eyes on our antelope. Its claws unsheathed. Hunger on his mind, but underlying it a feeling, pure and raw. *You know what to do.* He’s tired of waiting. One more second, then he’ll strike. It begins. The antelope looks up.

A raindrop kisses my face. My perfect world stands still for a moment. Then the ambush. My group runs to the tents for cover. The antelope tries as well, but it’s too late. We’re both caught. The storm and tiger roar as one. Steven and I try to keep the tent from being ripped to shreds as the tiger’s teeth dug in, every fiber of its being telling it *This is what you were meant to be. Go.* The tiger is free, just like the storm. It’s doing what it was meant to — fulfilling its purpose. In that moment, it is happy. The world is his. Steven and I scream as the storm strikes again and again. With life. That’s the best way I can put it. We were alive. We were being punished by the chance that is nature. We got a week’s worth of storm in one night. We had no control over what happened. We were trapped. In that moment, we were happy.

*The next unit was genre. I was confused throughout the entire thing, to some degree. Exploring the various methods of communicating information for specific purposes was not something I saw coming. It was a rabbit hole I had to pull myself out of before getting completely lost. I’ll definitely explore it again, just not anytime soon. I know enough to be satisfied at the moment. Our first assignment was to make a recipe for something we are skilled at. I have a passion for martial arts, and felt confident writing about it. I was sharing something I love.*

Ingredients:

1. Mouthpiece
2. Gloves and wrist wraps
3. Rashguard – elastic, quick to dry, and fits snugly
4. Shorts
5. Water and food
6. An open mind

* Go to a martial arts gym. Sign up for a class
* Follow instructions carefully
* Always ask questions about things you don’t understand. Doing this shows that you want to learn, and your instructors/peers will be glad to share their knowledge.
* Have fun :)

*While exploring these cultures, one that stood out the most was comedy. This was also partly because of my discussion in anthropology about why every society has a trickster tale. They communicate taboos through humor. This shows that attaching a positive emotional feedback with information is one of the most effective forms of communicating said information. I wanted to explore this idea, and came across a variety of videos that used it.*

John Oliver’s videos were some of the first explanatory videos that I enjoyed watching. Over time, documentaries have lost their appeal to me. I believe it’s due to the exponential increase in media use. We now have access to nearly unlimited amounts of information at the tips of our fingers, which was impossible just a generation ago. Surfing the web so much has effectively destroyed our attention span, making it harder for us to absorb information that is presented in a certain manner. This has lead to shows such as John Oliver’s “Last Week Tonight.” The episode I’ll focus on is about cryptocurrencies. He takes advantage of the need for reliable information and communicates it through humor. Humor makes the audience even more susceptible to persuasion and more likely to remember what Oliver and his team has put together.

In the cryptocurrencies episode, Oliver explains the basics of this new enterprise with a fresh balance of jokes and serious talk. He focuses on the risks regarding this shiny new prospect, warning his audience of the dangers. The target audience is really anyone who is new to a topic and wants a crash course on the basics. It’s short and sweet, which is what makes “last Week Tonight” so successful.

*I wanted to try sending a comedic message through a video, and worked with my classmates Krys and Jackson to make their multimodal project. We wanted to communicate the importance of preparation for interviews. Although we didn’t have much time to prepare, we had a lot of fun making the video. They came up with the script, and I was responsible for editing the videos. I’m definitely going to explore creating more funny videos that discuss interesting and controversial topics.*

[*https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BGyCoVry\_U7b6Q6KcWslJQjlE-0oWU1c*](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BGyCoVry_U7b6Q6KcWslJQjlE-0oWU1c)

*Unit 4 was my favorite. I got to do something I’m passionate about: video editing. Sadly, this semester my mind has been clouded, so I spent most of my time helping others come up with ideas. That’s how I ended up making their videos instead of coming up with my own. It was a nice challenge, and I enjoyed providing help for those who asked. In total I made three videos. One was for the genre switch. The other two were art inspired. Both classmates wanted to talk about the struggles of being an artist. I helped Wilfny put together a timelapse video in which he drew his message out. For Maria, I pieced together a series of interviews of artists talking about dumb questions and problems they come across. The experience was very stressful, as I lost a lot of time due to a death in the family and had to rush the process. The products could have been much better, but I’m still happy I tried.*

*Wilfny’s video:* [*https://drive.google.com/open?id=1G9ReCs82HhFFOMRbY0Jzurn5HReNSwNW*](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1G9ReCs82HhFFOMRbY0Jzurn5HReNSwNW)

*Maria’s video:* [*https://drive.google.com/open?id=1RsZ8lxpUdMttiLFfLTYjXG2i9LPCci8E*](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1RsZ8lxpUdMttiLFfLTYjXG2i9LPCci8E)

*This marks the end of all my work this semester. It was chaotic, but just enough.*

*I loved it.*