

Layla Wofsy

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Professor Merwin

### Reflecting on my Grammatical Learning Process

#### **I. Introduction**

Before enrolling in this course, I had always viewed grammar as something simple that just had to be included in writing and I never thought much about the power of grammar. I had always spent time making sure I was using correct grammar, rather than thinking about how my grammar could impact the meaning of what I was trying to convey in my writing. Now, when using grammar, I think about how I want my writing to be understood by the reader and how I could use grammar to emphasize my ideas. Additionally, now when reading the work of others, I take note of the grammar and rhetorical choices made by the author and use my new knowledge to help better understand the meaning of these words.

#### **II. Rhetorical Composition. Students compose and/or revise texts in multiple genres, using varying grammatical choices suited to the rhetorical situation.**

The assignments in this course have allowed us to learn how to strategically utilize grammar in various literary genres. In the weekly exercises, we practiced using grammar in creative ways. For example, I composed sentences about a crime scene and a magical forest and made specific grammatical choices based on the situation I was writing about. Additionally, in the revision assignments, we were given opportunities to look back on previous writing pieces and make changes based on what we learned in the class. For the first revision assignment, I

edited a speech I had written for my “Oral Communications” course. One of the changes that I made in this assignment was using what we had learned about active and passive voice. I made sure that my verb tenses provided a consistent time frame until it made sense for it to shift during the speech. For example, I changed “I have felt” to “I feel” because the sentence was an active, present tense sentence. Lastly, in my revision for this piece, I took what we learned from class about coordination and subordination and added a punctuating sentence into my writing and joined two clauses together. Overall, this course taught me how to make purposeful grammatical choices suited to the rhetorical situation that I was attempting to convey to the readers.

**III. Critical Thinking. As they undertake scholarly inquiry and engage in critical thinking, students analyze, compose, and/or revise texts with grammatical choices to better guide the message sent to the reader.**

In this class, I learned how to engage in critical thinking in terms of understanding grammatical choices when reading other writer’s works. This was apparent in the commonplace assignments in which I analyzed pieces of writing to understand the authors’ strategic grammatical decisions. My newfound ability to understand the choices that these authors made in their writing to better illustrate the message of their work, has helped me improve my own writing. For the first commonplace assignment I selected a section in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I analyzed Harper Lee’s use of elevated language and in the opening paragraphs of the novel in order to communicate to the reader that the narrator is speaking as an adult. Additionally, I discussed in my analysis piece that the narrator’s proper use of commas and dependent clauses show that there is a sophisticated sentence structure which strikes me as impressive. For example, I explained that when the narrator says, “His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his

thigh,” she is including the use of a semicolon which struck me as advanced sentence structure element rather than simple grammar that a child would use. When I first read this novel in middle school, I did not think twice about the grammatical choices made by the author. However, now I am able to recognize the impact that Harper Lee’s grammatical decisions have on my understanding of the book and specifically the narrator. For the second commonplace assignment, I looked at a paragraph in *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. I highlighted Woolf’s strategic use of language and grammar to communicate to the reader that Orlando is not phased by her new body after unexpectedly experiencing a gender transition. I explained that the long sentence structure suggests that Orlando was not stunned or shocked, a message that is important for readers to understand because it is the basis of the rest of the novel. Overall, these assignments have required me to meticulously examine the work of other authors to appreciate their rhetorical decisions which have contributed to my own work and the grammatical choices that I make.

**IV. Writing as a Process. Students understand and practice making grammatical choices as a process, recursively implementing strategies of thinking, drafting, revision, editing, and reflection.**

In my past writing classes, I would write for the deadlines. I would complete an assignment, turn it in, never to revisit it again. This class however, has taught me that writing is a process and requires continuous revision. For example, for the second revision assignment in this course, I looked back on work that I had completed for an assignment in my “Writing for Publication” course. After revisiting this piece, I noticed that my sentences were not as clear or as concise as they could be. In order to fix, this I edited and condensed sentences such as “Lauren Kent-Delany, Director of Educational Programs, believes that “one of the greatest

strengths of the internship program is the interns getting to learn from each other,” which is something that occurs during events like the journal club” to say Lauren Kent-Delany, Director of Educational Programs, said “one of the greatest strengths of the internship program is the interns getting to learn from each other,” which occurs during activities like the journal club.” Those revised sentences achieved the same message as the original, but were more clear and condensed. By having the opportunity to look back on this piece, I was able to rethink and reflect upon my original grammatical decisions in order to revise and improve my writing. Now, I better understand that writing is a process and successful writing requires revision.

## **V. Conclusion**

This course has opened my eyes to the world of utilizing grammar in a strategic manner, rather than simply for the sake of proper sentence structure. It is evident that I have improved as a writer because of the knowledge and experience that I have gained from this class. Moreover, in addition to strengthening my own writing, I have learned how to be a better reader in terms of understanding the grammatical decisions of others. This impacted the way I interpret readings and internalize the message the way in which the author intends. Finally, I now understand the importance of revision and will no longer be satisfied with completing a writing piece with the belief that it will never be revisited.