Snowflakes: Reflecting on a Semester That Passed Far Too Soon

To think it was only yesterday that snowflakes were falling, the wind roaring with temperatures well past freezing. Now the sun greets us early and stays well into the evening, rain bringing in the season of rebirth and new beginnings. Sixteen weeks really passes in the blink of an eye. It's a double edged blade of sorts, one hand we get through the painful classes quickly oh how I loathe you math–but it makes the good classes, the memorable ones with the professors you never forget and the classmates you know by name or can chat with pass you by with that same frenzied speed. Looking back on English 103, I find it ironic. A class I was on paper overqualified for, ended up being the class I'll be taking the most from. You were right when you'd said that we'd learn a lot from this class, regardless of where we were at.

When tackling my literacy narrative in WP1, my biggest hurdle was the rhetorical situation I'd dug myself into. As I wasn't writing about a universal experience, but rather a niche, hundred-plus dollar software most people have never heard of, I had to figure out how to translate my specialized knowledge for a general audience. Through this project, I learned that audience awareness isn't just about setting a mood; it's about clarity. In my first draft, I described the Vocaloid editor as a "cold bright hellscape" flanked by "cryptic parameters". However, a peer reviewer pointed out a major gap in how I described the editor, noting it was "hard to understand some of the parts... especially when describing the grey and green sliders". I learned to fix this in my revision draft by actually defining the parameters instead of just listing them; I clarified that "PIT" stood for Pitch and "POR" for Portamento, explicitly describing them as the tools I used to "surgically correct" the voice. I even created a dark-themed infographic to visually map out the software's "Control Center" and "Micro View" to make the interface digestible. In my WP1 reflection, I summed up the entire experience by stating, "you have to be willing to sound wrong

before you can sound right". This idea perfectly encapsulates the messy trial-and-error process of both tuning a Vocaloid and learning to write effectively for a new audience. The initial "wrong" sounds–the cryptic jargon and confusing first draft–are necessary hurdles. We have to be willing to make those mistakes, recognize the friction they cause our readers, and painstakingly correct them. This meticulous attention to clarity is essential for my songwriting. When I am writing lyrics or producing tracks for a new Vocaloid song, I must actively use this empathy to ensure my listeners aren't alienated by complex phrasing, guaranteeing that the emotional core of my music is clear and accessible, rather than lost in cryptic metaphors.

WP2 pushed me to learn how to ground persuasive claims in undeniable, hard-hitting reality. I chose to write about existentialism, but initially, my draft felt a bit more like a "philosophical monologue" than a fully fleshed-out narrative argument. During the revision phase, I realized that to truly persuade my audience, the emotional core of my essay needed far more anchoring. So, I drastically fleshed out the section detailing my time volunteering at the hospital, adding highly specific, humanizing details like the boy I painted vistas of Japan and the Florida Keys with, and the older sister who acted as a brutal director for the videos she was leaving behind, who gave me the bracelet I still wear today. Looking back at my WP2 reflection, I noted how crucial it was to lean heavily into those details with lines like "the sterile hum of machines and the faint burning scent of alcohol in a hospital room at 3 a.m.". That specific sentence represents a massive breakthrough in my writing. It showed me that stripping away the academic distance and injecting raw, sensory vulnerability isn't a weakness in a persuasive essay; it is the very anchor that forces the audience to pay attention. By painting that vivid, visceral picture, I transformed abstract existentialist concepts into undeniable narrative proof. I found myself relying on this exact same strategy recently; when drafting my speech, "The Pen is a

Torch," for the St. Norbert College 2026 writing showcase–that I was invited to attend as a speaker–I made sure to anchor my broad themes of creativity in tangible, emotional resilience. Moving forward academically, as I continue my theatre studies and dive deeper into psychophysical acting methods, I will use this concept of grounding the abstract to defend my character choices, ensuring my theoretical acting choices are always rooted in undeniable reality.

By the time WP3 rolled around, I had to confront the strict mechanics of academic writing, specifically the necessity of balancing my arguments. The peer review feedback cut right through my stubborn pride. My peers pointed out that while my main idea was strong, my body paragraphs were noticeably unbalanced; I was giving Carter's "everyman" image a "magnifying glass" while giving Biden's "team-focused" message a "passing glance". When it came time to write the revision draft, I had to put my ego aside. I heavily fleshed out the context of Biden's chaotic Kabul withdrawal to match the weight of Carter's Iran hostage crisis. To tie it all together, I also added a crucial connecting sentence to explicitly link their rhetorical strategies to the impossibly high expectations they created, proving that setting themselves up to be judged harder later was their fatal flaw. As I noted in my WP3 reflection, "When you seek to become better at any skill that's creative in nature, you learn more by the meticulous study and application of that study than you ever would by just aimlessly doing it". This idea was the beating heart of the entire analysis project. Breaking down the political ads wasn't just an exercise in pointing out ethos or pathos; it was about actively dissecting the architecture of someone else's work to see exactly why it succeeds or backfires, and then applying those structural lessons to my own writing. After all, both sides of a comparison must carry equal weight if the logic is to hold. This understanding of structural balance and meticulous study will be incredibly useful for my future creative ambitions. As someone who hopes to one day be a playwright, ensuring that opposing

characters or conflicting themes within my scripts carry equal narrative and logical weight will be the key to writing compelling, realistic conflict rather than one-sided melodrama.

Of course, this semester also highlighted glaring areas for improvement that I must continue working on. First, I need to get a better handle on the academic side of these papers right out of the gate. In both my WP2 and WP3 conferences, we had to discuss the absolute necessity of adding a proper title, formatting my APA citations correctly, and appending a formal bibliography. My plan to fix this is to create strict, internalized checklists for my bibliographies and formatting before I even allow myself to write my conclusion so I don't overlook this crucial "academic housekeeping". Second, I need to focus heavily on brevity and organization. Because I am used to writing thousands of words for fanfiction or getting lost in the weeds of theatrical theories, I tend to overwrite. As my peers pointed out in WP3, I was "burying" my main idea under a "mountain of historical background in the intro". In my WP3 reflection, I acknowledged this flaw directly: "the reader shouldn't have to go hunting for my thesis to know my focus sooner". This quote highlights my tendency to get so caught up in the setup and historical context that I forget the actual purpose of an academic introduction. The reader's time is valuable, and hiding the main argument behind walls of context only weakens my authority. Moving forward, my plan to improve my brevity is to practice aggressive outlining and force myself to move my thesis up to be far more direct right away, cutting the fluff before it derails the paper.

Looking back at my answers at the start of the semester and looking at the above, the biggest shift is how I view the boundaries of writing. At the start of the semester, I saw a massive wall between the creative writing I love, like my lyrics and narratives, and the seemingly dry, academic essays that felt like they ate away at my soul. Learning that what I hated was "mutt genres" and learning to keep the rhetorical situation in mind really changed my perspective. I

realized I don't have to abandon my personal style; I can weave my unique voice into professional conventions to make those essays feel like I wrote them, not some machine or the bare minimum. This experience also affected my writing process. Prewriting isn't the hardest part anymore; rather, it's the organization of everything. How I choose to flow the information, moving paragraphs around, and altering the thesis to build a solid first draft. By actively studying and breaking down reading to see what works, I've learned to deliberately apply those techniques rather than just writing until I achieve some arbitrary perfection. In truth I know that in taking this class, however fleeting it was, I am a better writer, so thank you and best of luck with future classes Dr. S. And if we run into each other at Walmart, don't be a stranger.