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### Following Rubrics Does Not Contradict With Pursuing Freedom

Stepping into college is like starting a new journey in life; we meet different people and learn new things everyday. One of the best parts I experienced so far in college is the flexibility. As an adult, I get to control my own time and decide what I do next. However, students still need some rules such as the Academic Honesty Policy and the attendance policy to behave better both academically and physically. Similarly, so does writing. We need a guideline to assist us to write more creative and profound works under a unifying standard. The five grading rubrics for all First-year Composition students are Unity, Evidence/ Development, Presentation and Design, Coherence, and Audience Awareness. All of them challenge me to think before I type down any word. They work together to teach me how to write good essays in a systematic way, and I can see myself improving from each rubric when I try to reach its requirement.

When I just came to America, it was challenging to have my thoughts in Chinese first and then translate everything into my second language. However, what I feel relieved about is that both my language teachers in China and in America required a strong thesis statement in the introduction paragraph. No matter what language, one feature of a good paper is unity. The grading standard, unity, asks writers to identify their writing purpose and organize other details around their thesis statement. Thus, in the journal entries I wrote, I used my outlines and brainstorming as the basis for my three main writing projects. They helped me a lot by reminding me of the thesis statement. In the Biography component, I told a story about how I finally feel free to ask questions and how I found my interest in math. Through this story, I introduced my theme for the whole portfolio which is pursuing freedom, breaking down restrictions, and living as the best version of myself. I wanted to illustrate my theme in this first component and then incorporate it throughout the rest of the portfolio.

After knowing the central information I wanted to write about, I had to gather authorized evidence next. In my third writing project, which is to write about a process that we found in the novel, *Everything I Never Told You*, I got compliments from my professor for providing a good amount of concrete evidence from the book to support my thesis. This is

one of the reasons why I chose the third project as one of my revised papers in the portfolio.

Most of the time, readers will not trust the author's personal opinions when there is insufficient evidence. The more credible examples in the work, the more convincing words will turn out to be. By giving secondary evidence from the book, I successfully make my process about how to make your crush hate you sound "reliable." Similarly, in order to further demonstrate how I pursue the freedom which I mentioned in my biography component, I created a chronology as my wildcard exhibit to give more examples of important things that have shaped my life so far. Each example and its explanation proves that I truly work hard on approaching my goal of being free. Unlike the evidence I found for my Project III, my personal experience is primary evidence. They are credible and they are real cases that happened to me.

Without much English vocabulary accumulation, I wrote like an elementary student when I first came to the States. Or actually, I was worse than an elementary school kid because I had more grammar mistakes. Although I learned to write the correct grammar and improved a lot during the past three years, I still write awkward sentences or make citing mistakes. As a result, I always book appointments with writing tutors on

the *Academic Enhancement Website* every time I finish composing the working thesis draft.

Native speakers suggest including the reviews by my professor to help me grow at a much faster pace. However, nobody including those native speakers can perfectly meet the standard of Presentation and Design in the first draft. We all need some time to identify the flows and fix them before we get the final look. For my Exhibit of Composing and Revision Process, I show a big portion of grammar and word choice revision. You can see that I was unsure about the tense for one verb, "can." I changed it from "could" to "can" back and forth. This is one example of how careful I am during the revision process. After many times of reading out loud, highlighting odd sentences, and phrasing in a natural way, I end up having final submission drafts containing much more fluent words.

Appropriate word choice is not good enough to make my point of view sound reasonable if I don't explain the evidence with my own words. Coherence is a significant rubric standard, because it acts like a bridge connecting some rigorous theory or facts to understandable daily words. If there is more than one concrete piece of evidence, readers need explication for the relationship of that evidence and the thesis of the entire paper. They wonder how the writer makes multiple resources work together and display one message at

the end. Thus, this is one way for writers to show their analysis and critical thinking skills. I chose my writing Project II to be another revised class essay because I was coherent between the reference I found and my research question. I used the example of church and school dress codes to demonstrate one reason behind the shaming of female victims: the impact of culture. Then, I laid out my own thoughts in prose voice to compare and contrast those two examples. By doing so, I have more power to persuade my audience and help them understand the meaning of each evidence.

My dad has taught me one communication skill used for a big crowd whenever I want to get people's attention, that is, to make myself sound like an authority and to be aware of my audience. In the first writing project, each of us wrote a friendly letter to Dr. Bray about a book that we recommended reading in later reading units. The most challenging part of this project was to find persuasive reasons to support our book suggestions. Since the only audience in this project was Dr. Bray, we needed to stand in her shoes and think of reasons she would like to hear. When I did the peer review for Shihan, I focused on checking his performance on audience awareness. I read through his reasoning and examined those reasons as if I were Dr. Bray. In the review I wrote for him, I pointed out that he did a good

job on identifying his audience. Shihan stated that the background of the protagonist in his suggested book shares a common ground with most of the students in our English class, and this consideration made his reason sound convincing. Considering the audience perceptions are integral to writing a more effective paper because in this way, writers are well prepared to provide satisfied answers even before readers start asking.

Before I have my First-year Composition class in college, I have composed research papers that has requirements such as minimum word count or no ban words. Nevertheless, this is my first time to have standards focusing more on the way of thinking and the skill of composing. With the help of rubrics, I realize my strengths in writing are a strong thesis statement, evidence demonstration, and the coherence between them. At the same time, I figured that I hardly think about audience awareness in the past, because I believed that only the writer's thought mattered. After the three main projects, I learned to switch my position to think of questions. It not only helped me get diverse ideas, but also helped me make a closer connection with my audience. Additionally, I knew that I make grammar mistakes and this is an issue I should always work with. Dr. Bray once told us that writers are supposed to spend most of their time on revision. Without the adjustments, writers will not be able to step up

and improve. The freedom I obtain in college gives me a chance to live however I want. With no rules above me, however, I might turn out to be an apathetic student or a thoughtless writer. Following rubrics does not contradict pursuing freedom, because I still get to decide what to write and how to write.