

“Humbling Experiences and Influential Teachers”: Podcast Transcript

Episode Description. In this episode of “How We Write,” Mae, Lexi, Megan, and Sylvia will discuss humbling experiences and influential teachers. We will explore personal stories while referencing sources to advance our theories. We will talk about everything from private schools and small classrooms, to tough teachers. Finally, we will discuss how these experiences impact how we approach tutoring for the University of Texas Writing Center. You can find more information at ... <https://uwc.utexas.edu/>

-University Writing Center:

INTRO

(4:05) Hey y'all, and welcome to-- “How We Write.” A podcast from the University Writing Center-- At the University of Texas at Austin. Today, humbling experiences and formative teachers.

Megan: Hi, I'm Megan, I'm a third year journalism and religious studies major.

Sylvia: Hi, I'm Sylvia, I'm a junior sociology and philosophy major.

Lexi: Hi, I'm Lexi, I'm a freshman history major.

Mae: And I'm Mae and I'm a sophomore English major.

Question 1:

(4:40) So what was a humbling experience that you guys had in your learning?

(4:44) Megan: Well when I was in high school I learned a lot of journalistic writing because I wrote for my school newspaper. So by extension my journalistic teachers were big sponsors of my literacy at the time but because I had gotten used to journalistic writing (Brandt). You know it's short, it's very concise, you know you are using as few words as possible. When I got to college and I suddenly had to write longer academic papers, it was very difficult for me. So it was a huge humbling experience like our theme is to have to completely change the genre that I was writing in from what I had learned previously.

(5:28) Mae: I had a really similar experience, but also kind of the opposite. In high school I learned lots of really long form academic writing and I felt really secure in that because of praise from my teachers and stuff. And then once I left high school I started learning more journalistic writing which is really different and a lot more to the point and I feel like that was really difficult for me. I learned journalistic and blog style writing, so

yeah it was very humbling for me to have to change up my style so quickly after feeling so secure and confident in the style I learned for a really long time

(6:05) Sylvia: Yeah! Similar to what happened to you, Mae, I had a similar incident when I switched from public school to private school in 5th grade. And then my teacher assigned me to write a literature review on *Much Ado About Nothing*. And I had never written any professional research or academic writing. So when I came to class, I was in a very small class and all my students desperately outperformed me and it was pretty humbling just because I required a lot more help as a public student, so that was a difficult kind of assimilating to private school culture and yeah!

(6:42) Lexi: I kind of had a similar experience but I was assimilating from high school to college and I mean in high school I was one of the smartest students. I was top of my class, teachers praised me and said my writing was great so I came to college thinking I had this in the bag and then my first paper came back and it had red ink everywhere. And I just kind of realized that I needed to step up my game and that being cocky wasn't going to get me anywhere. And yeah, I worked hard to make sure that I wasn't going to be some cocky little high school, stuck in high school person, and then I got better.

Question 2:

(7:23) Okay, so how do you all think your teachers affected your learning or literacy process?

(7:28) Sylvia: I think that my teacher from fifth grade was definitely my strongest literacy sponsor (Brandt). I was in a small classroom at a private school, so the teacher had a very close relationship with all their students. And the teacher was able to better understand my learning process, and I found a study by David Pedder that actually shows that smaller class sizes allow students to develop more trusting relationships with their teachers, that in turn allow for better academic growth compared to larger class sizes (Pedder). So I think my teacher definitely affected my literacy process just by--in habit of being in a small classroom, and having more of a one-on-one relationship where we could really work together. And I was able to get one-on-one tutoring with her after class. So yeah.

(8:11) Lexi: Yeah, and I actually had a pretty small class, considering it was a college class--less than 20 students, so I could actually send my essays to my professor to get marked up before I had to turn them in. So it was really nice. And honestly, the greatest impact she had was through her feedback. You know, I was writing way too much, more than I needed to on certain things. And none of it was specific, like it needed to be. And her telling me the specific places that I needed more evidence and less just rambling

on, it all helped clarify what was going on and what direction I needed to go in so I had, like, my best chance at success.

(8:47) Megan: Yeah, I was kind of the same way, but also kind of the opposite. So because I had, I was so used to journalistic writing and I had such a difficult time writing longer papers and meeting things like page kind of word count. When I first got to college, I had a, I had a rhetoric professor last year, who, who just hated the entire academic, the entire enterprise of academic writing. And he encouraged us to write as few words as possible so that our writing didn't sound bloated and things like that. And so whenever he forced us to cut down on our word count, while still writing in an academic way, you know, I was able to combine writing academically with what I was already used to writing, journalistically. So it was really nice to have kind of a literacy sponsor that allowed me to use those skills (Brandt).

(9:39) Mae: I had a lot of teachers that were really, really encouraging and supportive of my love for reading and writing, and I got a lot of positive feedback from them. And that was really motivational for me as I was learning these different genres and feeling really insecure about my writing. It kind of helped me--their positive feedback helped me to kind of push through that and keep working on it, because I knew that I had, like, the potential to be better in those areas.

Question 3:

(10:14) So is your teacher the thing that humbled you? Or your peers?

(10:17) Lexi: Oh definitely my teacher! When I finally talked to my peers about the trouble I was having adjusting. All my peers which were liberal arts honors freshmen were all having the same problems and we were all kind of figuring out college together and we had no idea because we were so scared that everyone else had it figured out and we were the only ones behind. But it was so comforting to know that we were all in the same place. So it was definitely the teacher that caused the humbling experience but we were all so glad that she did because it set us up better for the future.

(10:48) Sylvia: Lexi, I actually had a kind of different experience that you did, where I would say that my peers are the ones that humbled me the most. My teacher was super helpful in getting me up to speed even though I did receive pretty harsh criticism from her. I was still more humbled by my peers just because I saw how well my peers were performing in class and it just made me a lot less confident in my work and my level of writing. So, just by relation to being in a small classroom with them, I was witnessing how good they were doing and I was seeing that I wasn't up to par. But my teacher was

very helpful which is why I attribute her as my literacy sponsor (Brandt). But yeah, I would say that my peers humbled me.

(11:25) Mae: My teacher didn't humble me either. Actually I am worried they bolstered my confidence a little too much because my humbling experience came when I only started writing things that weren't just academic essays and I had to work in other genres as an intern. So my teachers definitely were not the ones who humbled me.

(11:45) Megan: I would have to agree with Mae as well. It was more the overall experience in coming to undergrad and learning and relearning how to write in a long form academic genre. But then, my teacher was kind of the one who took that humbling experience and turned it into something more productive. So it was both the experience and the teacher that both humbled me and I don't know, that gave me confidence in my ability to write in different genres.

Question 4:

(12:32) What was effective about your teacher's feedback? Has it helped you in your work as a writing consultant?

(12:38) Mae: So my teachers were really encouraging of me and my writing and I feel like that really motivated me. I mean, okay, this sounds bad, but I like being good at things so they're encouraging my writing kind of made me love writing more, and really helped me to like push through the troubles I was having in other genres. In general, I feel like my teachers' feedback really helped me, like, accumulate strategies like compliment sandwiches, which I usually use in the UWC. And being a little extra empathetic towards students who maybe feel a little bit out of their element about their writing, which is something I'm very familiar with.

(13:17) Sylvia: Yeah, Mae, I had a very similar experience, especially with the compliment sandwiches thing. My teacher definitely gave a lot of constructive feedback. But they're also pretty harsh on me at times. But I think it was really helpful as a learner and a young learner to sort of hear some positive reinforcement and then get a small critique thrown in. So I think that definitely helped me as a writing center tutor, just because I feel more comfortable like softening, like the vibe for people and making them feel a little bit more comfortable and not getting too bogged down with thinking that their work is bad or anything and my teachers also really helpful in teaching me how to do research and conduct like research in a library. So I feel really confident that I can help students find sources and integrate quotes and anything like that if need be.

(14:05) Lexi: Yeah, I would definitely say that the way I help people at the Writing Center is similar to the way that I got feedback from that teacher. Of course, I'm not as harsh as she was. You know, she kind of gave specific and pointed notes throughout the papers that I knew specific points of improvement with kind of a general summary of the end of like, what about my writing needed change, not necessarily just that essay. And I actually read that in the *Active Learning and Education Journal*, that effective feedback is characterized as being specific and that it says clear goals for the students to achieve, which my teacher definitely did, and it's definitely something I tried to emulate at the writing center myself (Knight).

(14:41) Megan: Yeah, you know, I hadn't really thought that that hard about my professor's feedback until now, to be honest, he wasn't really known for his feedback more so for his teaching itself. But now that I'm thinking about it he most of his feedback was about not my writing itself. But where I needed to go back into the writing process, whether that was outlining or maybe even a little bit of research, my writing became better at that process. And so kind of it reminds me of a reading in the supplemental class readings, where, I think by Maxine Hairston, where she basically emphasized the importance of teachers exploring the like the non linearity of the writing process and how writers don't just go step by step, you know, we might go through a few steps of the writing process and they completely backtrack and restart (Hairston). And so it goes hand in hand with what I find myself telling my consultations a lot at the Writing Center, is having to go back and maybe refocus on their thesis, do some more research, or completely, you know, re outline what you're trying to say so that they can write more effectively.

OUTRO

(16:01) Thanks for listening to this episode of "How We Write." If you would like to engage with this material further, you can find links to the resources mentioned in the episode description. Thanks again for listening!

(16:12) Alice: You've been listening to Mae, Lexi, Megan, and Sylvia discuss how humbling experiences and great teachers shaped them as writers and consultants.

How We Write is a production of the University Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Our theme music was created by Michele Solberg. Until next time, keep writing.

Works Cited

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