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Rough Drafts: Myth or Reality

As I started my last year of high school English, I had one goal in mind: to get a decent grade and get out of there. I have never been a big fan of English due to the fact that I hate writing. Despite this, I have always been able to pass English with decent grades, because I would do well on assignments. I started the first couple months of that semester with this philosophy. My teacher at the time was not getting any good papers out of me and was not teaching me anything new about writing. Everything was the same, until I got a student teacher named Mrs. Johnson. She taught me the most important lesson when it comes to writing, which is that bad rough drafts were necessary to write any good paper.

When Mrs. Johnson first came in our class, we were just getting started on writing our senior project paper. She was a very young teacher with a lot of energy. It was easy to work with her because she could relate everything we were having problems with. At first, my plan was to try and write the perfect paper the first time and hope that I would get a good grade on it. I knew that probably wasn't going to happen, but I still hoped. As you might expect, I got stuck while writing the essay and decided to go ask for some help. When I met with Mrs. Johnson, she told me something that no other teacher had ever told me before: just write

whatever comes to my mind and then bring it back to her. I had never thought of that before. As I sat at home that night writing that first paper, all I could think to myself was, "Damn, this might be one of the worst papers ever." I was sure I was going to get a bad grade on my paper.

The next day I took my paper back to her and made a comment about my paper being awful. When I said that, she sat me down and gave me some lasting advice: "Koooper, these rough drafts are supposed to be awful. They are called rough drafts for a reason. Your next drafts only get better from here." As I processed what she said, she went through my paper and made a lot of comments and revisions. She handed me the paper and told me to rewrite what I had and make the changes she suggested, then bring that paper back to her. When I brought the paper back to her the next day, once again she edited it and then said to make the changes she suggested and bring it back to her. We did that three more times. Around the third time she made me rewrite it, I swore she was crazy.

Finally, after five attempts at a rough draft, she told me that it was perfect and I could write the final draft. She explained to me that it won't always be like this when writing a paper and that once I get to a point where I think my essay is fine, I'll have my final draft. I started to use that technique every time I wrote anything. It didn't matter if it was a history paper, science paper or English paper, I always used the technique of writing bad rough drafts and then sculpting them into my final draft. I used to be very scared of writing because it would frustrate me so much. I used to get stuck while writing a paper. It was very discouraging and made me not want to write anymore. Using the methods Mrs. Johnson taught me, I appreciated writing much more because I got better at it.

Writing multiple rough drafts forced me to read my essay and see where I was lacking. Before, I left out a lot of stuff that could have helped my story become more detailed. Whether it was more description in an anecdote or in my thesis, my essay missed all those opportunities to be better. After writing one or two drafts, more ideas came to my head which helped me in my essay. I could incorporate those ideas to make my essay more interesting. Rereading my papers also helped with grammar. On the first draft I wouldn't catch any errors. All I would do is hit spell check and think my essay was perfect. I was missing a lot of punctuation and grammar mistakes. It also helped with seeing if I had redundancy in my essays. I am now able to find these errors and fix them.

Another thing rereading my essays helped with was smoothing my paper out. I didn't have very good transitions between my points. My teachers used to tell me my essays were choppy and I never understood what they meant. After going back and looking at my essays again, I could easily tell what they were talking about. Mrs. Johnson helped me understand that transitions take practice and the more I work on them, the better they get. Now, I can make the corrections needed to write an essay that flows well.

Before, I used to get told my essays weren't good and I was lacking a lot of content and detail. I let that get to my head too much and convinced myself I really wasn't a good writer. Not only did Mrs. Johnson help me with techniques with writing but also helped me increase my confidence in my writing ability. I went from getting Ds and Fs to ending up getting an A in the class and getting As on the rest of the papers in the year. I have learned that writing is a process; it takes a lot of patience and that's okay. My current writing goal is to edit my rough drafts more heavily so I can reduce the number of total drafts I write. I am focusing on

introduction and conclusion paragraphs, but I know that as long as I stay patient and work hard at it, I will be get better. Writing is not a skill that comes easily to everybody. Just like anything else in life, if you work hard at it, you will get better.