

While your instructors definitely hope that you have learned from this class, we have no illusions that it was the best experience of your lives and you are forever transformed as a writer. You might feel ambivalent about the class. Many of you still dislike writing. Many of you like it a bit more than you did three weeks ago, but it is still a painful struggle. Some of you came into the class a good writer and will leave an even better writer. One of the reasons we will not believe you if you tell us your writing is “fixed” is that no one—not me, not you, not even the boy-geniuses making robots in the hall—can totally change/improve their writing in a month. That is because writing is a process. That idea is important enough to repeat: writing is a process through which we develop, revise and communicate our ideas. Writing is tough. It is painful. It has many parts. From the Steven King essay to the hellish reflective writing (“what was difficult about writing this essay?”) we have forced on you daily, this class has been planned to be a sort of reality check/skill boosting session in which you can figure out where you stand as a first-year college writer, honestly assess the challenges that lay ahead, and create a plan for tackling these difficulties. In order to really execute the last part of this goal, you need be detailed, sincere and realistic when you write this prospective essay. This exercise is designed to help you do that.

Pair up with one other person in the class. Switch papers. Then read your partner’s paper out loud to them. Both the reader and the listener/writer should keep these questions in mind:

- How does the paper *sound*?
- What is the overall tone of the essay? Does it change?
- What parts ring true, and which phrases or ideas are more generic or clichéd?
- What claims to you make in this essay?
- What details are there to support these claims? (i.e. is what you say true? How do we know?)

As your own paper is being read to you, take notes on your own copy of the draft. After the draft has been read, spend a few minutes discussing with your partner. Switch and repeat.

Keeping It Real, a Quick Guide

BAD = When I came into this class I was a terrible writer, however, with the help of my instructors, I feel that I can conquer anything that comes my way. I have no doubt that I am going to soar through my first-year college experience thanks to these wonderful teachers.

GOOD = I have always struggled with writing. I feel that I have good ideas that I cannot get onto paper. However, this class has helped me to realize that having a good idea is only the beginning and that “good” writing is the result of a lot of steps including brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing. I think that part of my difficulty as a writer has been that I am impatient and I want it to just “flow” out of me. Now I realize that half the battle is just taking the steps and giving myself enough time.

¹With apologies to Dave Chappelle for blatant plagiarism.