

Applied Humanities

Choices

Choices in Your Writing

5 Module Five: Impact of the Humanities / Page 5.2.5 Choices in Your Writing

On this page: 0 of 2 attempted (0%) | 0 of 1 correct (0%)

Objective: Apply what you've learned about making choices to your own exploration document.

Choices in Your Writing

As you've seen, artists are decision makers. Whether they start with a chunk of granite, an empty canvas, or a blank page, creators make choices up to and including choosing to declare a piece completed. And none of these choices are made in a vacuum: Every work is created by a person who knows something about the works that have come before, art history, methods and craft, and the surrounding culture. It cannot be otherwise.

The same is true with your exploration document. Although much of its structure, content, sequence, and duration is dictated to you by the assignment, no two students will ever complete it in exactly the same way. This would even be true if they were given the same two artifacts to work from, the same theme, and the same sources. The individuality that you personally bring to the project is what makes your work a reflection of your unique perspective on the world.

Musical composers will listen for sections that don't sound quite right and then experiment with various options, and you too will find this process helpful when writing. You can improve most of what you've written if you simply give it another shot. (And if your second version isn't as good as your first, then you have some nice validation that your first version was actually pretty good!)

Make Statements and Answer Questions

In her book *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg describes one way she's found to make better choices in her writing. Read the following excerpt from the book, then answer the questions below it.

In the early seventies there was a study done on women and language that affected me very deeply and also affected my writing. One of the things the study said was that women add on qualifiers to their statements. For instance, "The Vietnam war is

awful, isn't it?" "I like this, don't you?" In their sentence structure women were always looking for reinforcement for their feelings and opinions. They didn't just make statements and stand behind them: "This is beautiful." "This is terrible." They needed encouragement from outside themselves. (By the way, what they found to be true for women they also mentioned was true for minorities.)

Another thing women did in their speech was to use a lot of words like *perhaps*, *maybe*, *somehow*. Indefinite modifiers. For instance, "Somehow it happened." As though the force were beyond understanding and left the woman powerless. "Maybe I'll go." Again, not a clear assertive statement like "Yes, I'll go."

The world isn't always black and white. A person may not be sure if she can go some place, but it is important, especially for a beginning writer, to make clear, assertive statements. "This is good." "It was a blue horse." Not "Well, I know it sounds funny, but I think perhaps it was a blue horse." Making statements is practice in trusting your own mind, in learning to stand up with your thoughts.

After I read the article, I went home and looked at a poem I had just written. I made myself take out all vague, indefinite words and phrases. It felt as though I were pulling towels off my body, and I was left standing naked after a shower, exposing who I really was and how I felt. It was scary the first time, but it felt good. It made the poem much better.

So even though life is not always so clear, it is good to express yourself in clear, affirmative statements. "This is how I think and feel." "This is who I am at the moment." It takes practice, but it is very rewarding.

But while you are practicing writing, do not worry if you see yourself using those indefinite words. Don't condemn yourself or be critical. Just be aware of it. Keep writing. When you go back over it, you can cut them out.

Another thing you should watch out for are questions. If you can write a question, you can answer it. When you are writing, if you write a question, that is fine. But immediately go to a deeper level inside yourself and answer it in the next line. "What should I do with my life?" I should eat three brownies, remember the sky, and become the best writer in the world. "Why did I feel weird last night?" Because I ate pigeon for dinner and I wore my shoes on the wrong feet and because I am unhappy. "Where does the wind come from?" It comes from the memory of pioneers on the Croix River. It loves the earth as far as the Dakotas.

Don't be afraid to answer the questions. You will find endless resources inside yourself. Writing is the act of burning through the fog in your mind. Don't carry the

fog out on paper. Even if you are not sure of something, express it as though you know yourself. With this practice you eventually will.

Multiple-Choice Question

How did Goldberg's revelation change her writing?

- She changed the way her female characters spoke.
- She removed vague and indefinite words and phrases.
- She edited different things as she wrote her initial draft.
- She took more risks than she had taken before.

Short-Answer Question

What is Goldberg's advice about questions?

No response saved yet.

Revision

Revision is a crucial but often neglected step in the writing process that can dramatically affect the overall quality of your writing. During revision, you will focus on aspects of your project that could be improved or corrected and make changes to content, evidence, grammar, and style accordingly.

A couple of weeks have passed since you first started writing your exploration document, so you can now evaluate your writing from a fresh perspective. Because it can be hard to assess your own writing, you might want to use the following questions to guide you.

Focus

- Does my thesis encompass the claims I'm actually making?
- Is my language concrete and specific, or have I left things vague or unclear?
- Does each question have a clear answer?

Evidence

- Do I need to include more evidence from my sources to support my main points?

- Do I need to better explain how my sources support my claims?
- When using information from my sources, have I avoided plagiarism by distinguishing other people's words and ideas from my own? Do I need to add any citations?

Style and Grammar

- Are there any typos or grammatical errors that I need to correct?
- When I read my text aloud, does it make sense and flow naturally?

Instructor Feedback

- Have I addressed any comments my instructor made on earlier versions of my work?
- Do I need to ask for clarification on any instructor feedback I've received?

SNHU Academic Support Resources

If you need any help revising your paper before you submit it, you can use the Online Writing Center provided by SNHU.

Visit the Online Writing Center by opening the Academic Support module in your course and clicking "Get Help with Your Schoolwork." You will find options like live workshops, drop-off paper review, video resources, and one-on-one tutoring.

Watch the video below to learn more about the Academic Support resources.

Accessing Writing STEM Help (Academic Support Overview)



YouTube video. <https://youtu.be/RWiS5DEu-To>. Uploaded June 3, 2020, by SNHU Academic Support Resources. To activate captions, first click the play button and then click the CC button in the embedded player. For a text transcript, follow the link below.

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