

I Will Tell Myself, Be Very Proud of the Writer You are Becoming

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Abstract

Academic writing is a challenge for most graduate students. As a doctoral student at Memorial University, I attempt to explore my academic writing journey. There have been struggles and victories along the way. As I employ autoethnography as a methodology, I intend to use myself as both the subject and object of research as I focus on academic writing. It is my hope that as I narrate my experiences with trying to navigate my way around an academic discourse, my story will be a source of encouragement to other graduate students. It is my intention that as my story unfolds, there will be a shift from thinking that we lack the skills to write in an academic discourse to perceiving writing as a social process which takes time.

Methodology

Autoethnography is one of the genres in qualitative research that depend on self-data (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Leavy, 2017). Autoethnography as a research method came about because scholars were interested in producing research that is “meaningful, accessible, and evocative” (p. 274). Ellis et al. (2011) define autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (p. 273). In other words, autoethnography is using one’s personal experience as a case study in order to gather rich data and have an understanding of that cultural context and experience. Instead of recruiting participants to gather information from, the individual or researcher is the participant. Thus, the researcher is the subject and object of the research. Autoethnography is a combination of tenets of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). Autobiography is the telling of one’s story (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013), while ethnography is studying the culture of a particular group of people over a period of time (Jones et al., 2013; Leavy, 2017). Similar to ethnography, autoethnography writes about culture (Leavy, 2017). To achieve this, the researcher’s personal experience is used as a method for connecting the personal to the larger cultural context (Leavy, 2017).

In this paper, I describe and systematically analyse my personal experience with academic writing from 2014, when I started my graduate program to now, 2017, as I undertake my doctoral program. As Poulos (2013) notes, the central question of autoethnography is *who?* Who am I? Although autoethnography has been criticized for focusing too much on the self, if done correctly, autoethnography moves beyond my story to our story (Poulos, 2013). It is my intention that by telling my story about academic writing, that other graduate students will know that they are not alone in the challenges they face when they try to write in an academic discourse. It is also my hope, that faculty members will show more empathy towards graduate students as they journey through their academic writing.

I recall asking ED 702 (Advanced Educational Research) instructors what the difference is between autoethnography and narrative writing. Their response was that as I read the literature, the differences will be made clear. The answer can be found in how Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) distinguishes

autoethnographic writing from personal narratives. For Jones et al. (2013), not all personal writing can be considered autoethnographic, although all personal writing could be considered examinations of culture. They explain four characteristics that differentiate autoethnography from other personal writings. The four characteristics include: “(1) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response” (p. 22). In my autoethnographic piece, I have attempted to utilise these four characteristics to ensure that my work is not just evocative but analytical (Walls, 2016). For example, as I narrate my academic writing experiences, I also use relevant literature to support or critique academic writing culture. My autoethnographic piece will provide a doctoral student’s perspective on academic writing by highlighting some of the struggles and victories along the way. I have allowed myself to be vulnerable, showing my fears, struggles, and emotional highs and lows through my academic writing journey. It is my hope that other graduate students, not just doctoral students, who are going through similar experiences with their academic writing will find solace and comfort in my writing. I am also hoping that as supervisors and faculty members read my work, they will be more empathetic to the plight of graduate students by being more supportive and patient.

I have decided to adhere to Wall’s (2016) definition of a moderate autoethnography in this paper. She recommends a middle ground between evocative and analytical autoethnography. She writes that she is proposing “a moderate and balanced treatment of autoethnography that allows for innovation, imagination, and the representation of a range of voices in qualitative inquiry while also sustaining confidence in the quality, rigour, and usefulness of academic research.” (p. 2). In my autoethnographic piece, I have attempted to be evocative through narrating my experience to arouse some form of emotions from my audience. On the other hand, I have also attempted to analyse my experiences with existing literature to ensure that I am not engaging in self-indulgence. By using existing literature to support my experiences, I have endeavoured to be scholarly. Having a balance across the autoethnography continuum, evocative and analytical, helps my writing to leave the confines of the ‘traditional’ way of writing research while ensuring that my writing still applies to an academic audience and shows academic rigour. I have opted to write about my experiences with writing in a narrative way. My narrative is based on my memory and recollection of events.

The issue of ethics is an important aspect of research. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) define social research ethics as “the set of ethical principles that should be taken into account when doing social research” or “the set of ethical principles held by social researchers” (p. 17). In writing this paper, I thought about ethics, especially relational ethics. Relational ethics deal with the ethical issues that may arise within our relationships with others with respect to our research (Ellis, 2007; Leavy, 2017). To ensure that ethical procedures were followed, I contacted Dr. Luff to gain permission to include her in my piece. She was thrilled to learn that I viewed her as a mentor. Dr. Luff gave me permission to use her real name. “Muyiwa” is a pseudonym I am using for my housemate. He was the first peer that gave me feedback on my writing. I lost touch with him, so getting consent from him was not feasible. My supervisory committee members were not asked because I was not sure if my portrayal of them will be seen as negative (Ellis, 2007), however, that is not my intention. To ensure that others in my narrative are not implicated, I have opted for pseudonyms or not using names. I have also thought about what psychological and emotional harm this writing might cause me. Apart from feeling vulnerable, I believe there is no emotional harm in this writing.

A Whole New Writing Approach

Academic writing is an endeavour every graduate student that seeks to be part of an academic discourse must engage in. A discourse is an academic context that has its own ways of thinking and communicating, which people in that context adhere to and it varies from discipline to discipline (Badenhorst, 2008). Writing is a social practice. For an individual to be successful at writing, they must acquire the writing practices of that academic discourse (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer, and Ru, 2015; Starke-Meyerring, 2011). For doctoral students like me, academic writing is part of the discourse we intend to belong to. One purpose of doctoral education is to develop scholars with academic writing skills that make meaningful contributions to that discourse (Can & Walker, 2011). As a doctoral student one is expected to write for publication in addition to writing course assignments and dissertations. This can enable one's path towards a career in academia. Can and Walker (2011) note that "the stakes are high, from an institutional perspective and from the perspective of individual students to obtain academic writing skills" (p. 509), because individuals and institutions are often judged based on the quality and quantity of research productivity. In reviewing the literature, I have learned that academic writing poses a real challenge for most graduate students (Badenhorst et al., 2015; Can & Walker, 2011; Kamler, 2008; Starke-Meyerring, 2011). Paré (2011) and Starke-Meyerring (2011) explained that long term participants in academic writing discourses view it as normal. Therefore, they cannot comprehend why doctoral students struggle to write clearly. Long term participants forget that they learnt through repetition and constant practice to master academic writing in their various disciplines. As noted by Starke-Meyerring (2011):

What is particularly important for doctoral education is that as a result of their repeated unfolding through institutional and disciplinary routines, genres become so normalized that they appear universal, "common sense" to long term participants in these genres. That is, to supervisors, the ways in which writing works in their research culture can easily appear as simply "clear writing", surely the way everyone writes, with writing appearing as a universal skill—transparent, invisible, hidden in plain sight. (p. 78)

The argument here is that academic writing is not implicitly known but explicitly taught. Time and practice is required for graduate students to be socialized into academic writing. That is, we need time to learn to read, research, write, and speak in ways that are acceptable in our academic discourse.

Some graduate students have anxiety over their writing (Can & Walker, 2011; Kamler, 2008). Some have dropped out or thought about dropping out due to the demands to produce writing that is academically acceptable (Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Hunter & devine, 2016). This paper describes and analyses my academic writing journey. The aim of the paper is to celebrate how far the journey has taken me (despite the struggles) and to be a source of encouragement to graduate students struggling with academic writing. I begin by referring to an epiphany that occurred in October, 2017, and then proceed to give a chronological narrative from 2014 to present.

My Narrative

October 11, 2017

Who is that looking through the mirror? I barely recognize myself. Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? Not you my queen, right now you are stressed, and it is affecting the way you look! That morning a colleague had said I looked stressed but seriously, my eyes are red and what has brought all this on? My 701 writing!

The struggle is real. The above is an epiphany I had when I got up from bed in the morning. I was trying to figure out how I was going to rework my Doctoral Seminar in Education: Area of Specialization (ED

701) paper to impress my supervisory committee. ED 701 is a mandatory course for doctoral students in the Faculty of Education. I had spent the previous day sitting at my desk for hours trying to find the right words to express myself academically. Will they like my writing? Will they think it is childish? I know what I am trying to say (after all, I have done the reading), but how do I back these up? In the words of Paré (2011), “those familiar with academic writing know what to say, and they know where, when, and how to say it” (p. 66). This was certainly not the case with me. At times, the word is at the tip of my tongue, but somehow, I cannot seem to articulate it. This is a paper I had been working on since June, 2017.

Prior to this experience, I heard other doctoral students complaining about their writing struggles, even those that were about to complete their dissertation. In an autoethnographic paper titled, *From "bitch" to "mentor": A doctoral student's story of self-change and mentoring*, Gearity and Mertz (2012) tell a moving story about Gearity's struggle to complete his dissertation. This included the many challenges he faced and how he finally saw Mertz (his supervisor) as a mentor not a *bitch*. I can remember offering platitudes to a fellow doctoral student in Engineering when he complained about the many corrections he had to make on his forty-page paper. He talked about how he was avoiding his supervisor because he still had not made the changes to his paper. Now that the shoe is on the other foot, I dare you to offer me those platitudes! I did not think that it would be this hard, really!

How do I describe my academic writing journey? Usually, when one goes on a journey there is a destination. With the destination in mind one can brave the elements, ignore or accept the inconveniences, enjoy the sights because no matter what happens, there is an end in mind. With academic writing the journey has begun but the end is nowhere in sight. Every time I feel it is safe to settle down, the journey begins again. My academic writing has had its ups and downs. However, the perceived obstacles on the way have helped improve the way I write academically. For example, someone recommended that I read my writing out loud. This has helped me notice mistakes and change the structures of my sentences. The more I listen to people's feedback, the better my writing becomes. I do not consider my academic writing extremely bad or extremely good on the academic writing continuum. It is somewhere in the middle. The plan is to keep progressing towards the good side of the spectrum. The journey to *becoming* an academic writer is not an easy one. Most things come easily to me, but I have to say this has been a frustrating, exciting, exhilarating, annoying, stressful, and challenging experience.

Master's Program (2014- 2015)

February 2014

What is she talking about? I looked around the room to observe if others felt as lost as I did. Everyone seemed fine, so what was wrong with me?

The above was a memory I recalled on the 2nd of February, 2014. It was my first experience with academic writing. It was orientation day for graduate students at Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford. Anglia Ruskin University is very contemporary. I felt at home there. In contrast to the ambience of the physical environment, I was feeling out of place with what was being said. The speaker kept mentioning the words *academic writing* and I kept wondering what they meant. “What is academic writing?”, I thought. “How is it different from how I have been writing all my life?” After all, I graduated with honours in my undergraduate degree. At the end of orientation day I walked up to her, introduced myself, and shared my concerns about academic writing. The speaker gracefully explained to me that it

was a writing style that graduate students are meant to use to convey their ideas. Fortunately for me, I was enrolled in Dr. Luff's class for that semester. She was an intelligent and graceful mentor.

Kotter (1990) explains that an effective mentor is someone who energizes people by motivating and inspiring them to live up to one's ideals. Dr. Luff was that mentor who showed me that it was possible to learn academic writing; she was never condescending. This made me comfortable and willing to be vulnerable. Dr. Luff taught me to eliminate or reduce the use of "I," adopt a more passive voice approach to my writing, and to get rid of the words "and so on" and "come up with." She jokingly threatened to take off one mark for every "come up with" she found in my writing. She also taught me about referencing and citations to give my work more authority. By being specific about some problems with the way I wrote, I was able to make corrections (Paré, 2011; Starke-Meyerring, 2011).

Someone else who was helpful in my journey was a housemate. He was one year into his master's program when I showed him a draft of my first written assignment for constructive criticism. I felt vulnerable showing him my work because I did not want him to think less of me. Starke-Meyerring (2011) explained that graduate students see their writing as their identity. For me, if he did not like my writing, it meant I was inadequate. He was critical but helpful. He showed me all the places I had used the word "I" and Muiyiwa helped me to restructure some of my sentences. This provided a template to write using the passive voice. The passive voice in writing helps you sound objective, while the active voice makes you sound less objective. I can remember thinking: "but it is my work and my experiences, how can I separate myself from my work?" This is still a challenge for me in academic writing. How do I separate myself from writing something I am passionate about as though they were not my experiences or insights? Muiyiwa's criticisms helped me in my writing after I had taken the constructive aspect of it. As much as he was helpful, he was not very gracious. I felt like there were certain aspects of his criticisms that were personally insulting. For example, he said "hey, seriously, seriously! Why would you say this like you are from the village?" He is Nigerian, and villagers are mostly considered illiterate. The aspects of what he had to say that were directly related to my paper were the ones that were considered. The revised work was shown to Dr. Luff and she was very pleased.

The suggestions provided by Dr. Luff and Muiyiwa with regards to academic writing were utilized in my other course assignments. I was doing well. One particular incident proved to be a confidence booster in another course I took. As is customary in the courses taken for the master's program at the university, one course required a written assignment of 3000 words. The instructor, Phil, was impressed and surprised at the way my writing and ideas "flowed in a logical manner." I was in the university library putting the finishing touches on my master's project writing, when a colleague of mine (who was a consultant for schools around the area) asked me what marks I received for Phil's course. Not to be rude, I told him. I reciprocated and asked him what his marks were. When he told me, I was shocked. I felt good because this colleague belongs to a small group who speak in class and make me feel inadequate. My marks were much higher than his and this made me smile through the day. I attributed my marks to progress in academic writing. I felt that by doing better than him, I was finally being accepted in the academic community and that what I had to say mattered.

Can and Walker (2011) write that part of the challenge students face is articulating their thoughts. The next hurdle in academic writing appeared when I was writing my major project for my master's program. The literature I was reading for my paper was useful, but I found it challenging putting what the literature said in my own words. Dr. Luff (now my supervisor) was very helpful in the writing process. She would provide endless possibilities and suggestions. There were days I wished I could borrow her brain. She was articulate and eloquent. "Why could I not be like that?" She was encouraging, reminding me of my strengths, and finding ways for me to articulate what the literature was saying without spoon

feeding me. The second person on my committee was quite impressed. The marks I received from the major project fell 2 marks short of an A (that was painful). Receiving a good grade was validation that I could be a part of the academic community which I desperately wanted to belong to. I was proud of my work and did not mind sharing it with colleagues who wanted to read it as an example of how they should go about their writing. In retrospect, the reason why I was in awe of Dr. Luff, is that I failed to realize that academic writing is culturally shaped (Starke-Meyerring, 2011). I assumed that it was an individual skill. I should have been less hard on myself because Dr. Luff was a long-time member of the discourse in which she teaches, while I was a newcomer.

Doctoral Program (2016 – present)

I'm panicking. Calm down. What do they mean by "my writing needs work"? Am I really up for this?

This was how I felt after a meeting with my supervisor before school officially began. Coming to Canada to pursue a doctoral program has been a revelation. My supervisor representing my committee members suggested that I work on my writing because my major project writing was not up to the standards required for doctoral writing. At first, I felt offended, then inadequate (Can & Walker, 2011). I went back and retrieved my major project writing, and indeed, I had to agree with them. My writing did not reflect the writing style of the articles I was reading. I had to do something if I was going to succeed as a doctoral student. What I thought of as very good, was now just good. According to Starke-Meyerring (2011), the standard of expectations of writing changes from undergraduate writing to master's writing to doctoral writing. I assumed that the way I wrote in my master's would suffice in my doctoral writing. The challenge then became how to move my writing from good to better. But the issue was, I did not know how to do this. I needed to figure it out. I perceived writing as an individual endeavour. I had a deficit and I had to fix it, but I had no idea how.

The first course I took served as a confidence booster. I got a really good score on my first assignment. This is the comment that was given: "This is an excellent paper demonstrating strong understanding of characteristics of the three research approaches. It was a pleasure to read. Your statements were explicitly articulated in clear language, supported by the research literature, and exemplified by appropriate examples."

This comment provided a life line. I was not as bad a writer as I thought. I was scared turning in that first assignment because the critical voice in my head was reminding me how I had failed as an academic writer: how I did not belong here, how I was too simple to write in a complicated academic way. In Badenhorst (2018), a common factor shared by the graduate students that attended her graduate writing course was self-criticism. I honestly wish I could be very confident, but the need to be acknowledged by the academic community seems to make me doubt myself. I realized that I did not have to be complicated. I liked it when people understood my work. I used this positive comment to propel me in writing my other assignments which turned out well. The comment validated my self-worth as someone who could eventually belong to an academic discourse.

The winter semester in 2017 had me enrolled in a graduate writing course. This was the comment provided at the end of the course:

Dear Chinwe,

Thank you for your assignment titled: "Chicken soup for the PhD student in academic writing." Your opening sentence sets up a contrast and pulls the reader in. Good introduction, it sets up

the problem and identifies a clear purpose. In the body of your paper, you pose insightful thoughts and comments and the writing flows really well. You have an easy style that is still academic. I found your aha! moments very interesting. Your analysis of your writing is well done and thorough. The samples of writing clearly show your learning over the course. I'm glad you watched the Brown and Neff videos and your conclusion is positive. All in all, this is a well written assignment. You have great potential as an academic writer and I think you will just continue to grow and develop.

In this course, I discovered that many graduate students were struggling with academic writing (Badenhorst, 2018; Paré, 2011; Stark-Meyerring, 2011). This course also provided the opportunity to interact and learn from other students. While in this course, I learnt about free writing, where one writes without focusing on grammar, but rather focuses on ideas. We learned that although the critical voice is there for my protection, there is a time and a place for it to be heard. This course gave me the courage to experiment with my writing – that I could have it both ways, there was no need for a dichotomy. A dichotomy is where two concepts, ideas or positions are in opposition. I assumed that my academic and creative writing had to be in opposition to one another. Ivanič (2004) described creative writing as the product of a creative process which involves emotions, personal style, and content. I felt there was no room for the creative process when I wrote academically. Now, I think both of them can work together even though one may have a louder voice than the other, depending on the audience and context. The course was a good experience and as usual, I assumed I had academic writing figured out.

There are pressures that arise from expectations at an institutional and disciplinary level for doctoral students (Badenhorst, 2018). In the area of specialization course (ED 701), critical annotations were a requirement. It was scary sending out my first annotation because I thought my supervisory committee would not like it (Badenhorst, 2018; Stark-Meyerring, 2011). It turned out they did. This served as another confidence booster. My supervisor has published several books and articles and I am still intimidated by the professors in the program. My supervisory committee members are very intelligent, professional, articulate, and eloquent women. The pressure was on because I did not want to be a disappointment. At the end of the course, I was required to write two thirty-page annotated bibliographies covering twenty readings across my research area interests. I was confident to write these, after all, the critical annotations were not bad. It soon became apparent that I was wrong. It was a gruelling writing experience. I submitted what I considered my “final draft” for the first paper. When I got my advisor’s email, the subject of her text read: “Feedback on your very rough draft.” I was taken aback by her comments. I went through her comments on the paper and was so disheartened. I did not know where to begin. Here I was, congratulating myself on meeting the deadline and writing what I assumed was a really good paper. An example of one of the comments in the paper was:

Chinwe,

I would like for you to situate yourself as an educator and explain why this research and paper is important in your larger research? Why are these people important in the research you do— How will this paper help us to understand the importance of how children learn, in what context and why we need to understand what these people bring to the table that will inform your future work that you will build on. There needs to be an introduction. This is written like an essay and not an informed body of literature that takes into account your experience and perceptions as an early childhood educator. Write a narrative introduction.

In a research survey by Starke-Meyerring et al. (2009), they found that there was a unanimous concern about doctoral students’ writing among faculty members in Canada’s top universities. The realization

that I had a problem with my writing at a doctoral level was very discouraging. I went into an emotional low. Can and Walker (2011) explained that although many doctoral students are affected by critical or negative feedback, many doctoral students in their study did not lose their confidence. I lost my confidence; I had no idea where to begin. I was anxious and I could not bring myself to look at my work (Badenhorst, 2018). The overwhelming feeling of not doing a good job stunted my writing. To remedy this, I separated myself from my paper for about two weeks before revisiting the paper. By distancing myself, the feedback provided by my supervisor made sense. For example, my text was bulky, even though my supervisor stated that it was “meticulous.” I wanted to pour out everything I knew about the topic instead of taking relevant aspects that related to the topic. I had to learn to select a few sentences from my annotations to include in my writing. I was ready to rewrite the paper and give it a structure I felt would demonstrate my ability to think logically. According to Can and Walker (2011), when doctoral students lack confidence in their writing ability, ongoing engagement with receiving feedback improves their self-confidence as academic writers. By revising my work, getting feedback and having discussions on that feedback, I could see my academic writing improving.

The main difficulty for me was in analysing and synthesizing the ideas from the literature review. It was obvious that I had read, but I was having difficulties taking the literature apart and putting it back together, so that it did not look like the original literature. I have a new-found respect for faculty members who publish books and articles. Finding the right words, structuring sentences, and overusing commas (Can & Walker, 2011) were all thorns in my flesh.

My supervisor and supervisory committee taught me to think through the data. My supervisor suggested that I try to think of it like I am explaining it to a teacher. She advised me to not be so rigid in my writing; I tend to put the criticisms before or after the claims I am making, meanwhile it can be mixed up and put in the middle. Signposting was another challenge. I assumed that because I had said it earlier, the reader should remember. My supervisor explained the importance of providing an introduction to each section. She also explained that at the conclusion of every section, a synthesis of the literature was needed to remind the reader of the important themes. My supervisory committee members suggested that it was not enough to explain the findings of a study; I had to mention the methodology and sample used as well. I realized that there was a huge difference between the first draft I sent in and the final version I submitted. I am glad they pushed me and would not accept mediocrity. It was not an enjoyable experience, but it was a writing development experience. My supervisor asked me, “can you notice any difference between your major project writing and you recent writing?” My reply was “forget major project writing, there is a night and day difference between the draft I sent in July and the paper I am working on.” Unbeknownst to me, I was beginning to view writing as a social practice (Paré, 2011; Starke-Meyerring, 2011). By listening to their comments and making the necessary changes to my writing and how I articulated ideas, I was improving my writing and conforming more to the writing practices of the discourse. This explains why my second paper was easier to write.

I recommend the university’s writing center to graduate students. They pointed out my long winding sentences (I could not believe how often I did that). They drew my attention to my overuse of commas and semi-colons. The interesting thing is that in the United Kingdom, I was taught to embrace the use of semi-colons. Here, I am told “do not use semi-colons, use commas or colons instead.” I will try my best, but I still think semi-colons have their place in academic writing. Much of the literature from the United Kingdom employs the use of semi-colons. Writing is cultural in the sense that certain disciplines have certain expectations which may not be required by other disciplines (Starke-Meyerring, 2011). The expectations in the United Kingdom were different than Canadian expectations. The helpers at the writing center helped me see how restructuring a sentence made better academic sense. Receiving help from others is not something to be ashamed of, but a means of growth. I had the mindset that the

writing center was for those who struggle. The first time I went I felt really vulnerable. Hearing someone comment on your writing is not a very pleasant feeling. What we write is an extension of ourselves. When someone rejects or accepts our writing we feel they are accepting or rejecting us (Badenhorst, 2018). But I kept going because they were helping me become better. I intend to keep going and attending writing retreats that they organize. Writing is a social process; you need the support of various people to aid you along the way. One helper at the writing center commented about how my thesis paper was clear, logical, and interesting. To which I replied, "it is not a thesis, it's an annotated bibliography." She was shocked. She complimented me on writing the paper as a thesis. Replying on her comment about the clarity and logical nature of my paper, I replied, "you needed to have seen the first (final) draft, you wouldn't be complimenting me." Pare (2011) wrote "in a very real sense, doctoral supervisors are writing teachers" (p.59). This has certainly been the case in my writing journey. My supervisor was shaping my writing to meet the standards of what a doctoral student's writing should be. What I saw as gruelling, was actually making me become a scholarly writer.

Writing the second paper was not as difficult as writing the first paper. As Can and Walker (2011) explain, when given with respect and politeness feedback can help improve academic writing for doctoral students. In my case, the written feedback was helpful, but I understood better when my supervisor could articulate what the problem was by explaining what she meant in the written feedback. As Paré noted, supervisors struggled to find words to help graduate students correct problems with their texts. My supervisor managed to find ways to connect with me by providing explicit examples which I applied in other ways in my text. The suggestions and feedback I had received from the first paper were applied to the second paper. I did not receive any feedback from my supervisor when I emailed her the second paper. This made me very nervous: is no feedback a good thing or a bad thing? However, I received positive feedback from the writing center. There were a few corrections here and there, but nothing major. The helper was impressed. Hopefully, my supervisory committee will note the improvements in my writing.

November 15, 2017

This was the email I received from my supervisor:

Congratulations, after a review of your papers and discussions, a grade of -- was submitted.

I felt total relief and gratitude. I had passed.

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest one of all? You my queen. You made it. You passed your ED 701. You will make it!

If I could go back in time

If I could go back to when I started my academic journey, I will tell myself to enjoy the journey. This is something my supervisor keeps reminding me: "you have to view this as a journey." Academic writing is a process which can be acquired through communication in a specific context and practice. It takes time. I will tell myself not to be too hard and critical. I will tell myself that academic writing is social in nature. The more I engage with people in my discourse the better I will get at academic writing. I will tell myself to be vulnerable, to ask for help, to view emotions as part of the journey. I will tell myself to embrace feedback; people are not trying to hurt me, they are trying to make me better. I will tell myself, I am not alone, if others have overcome their challenges and made it, I can too. I will tell myself to stop procrastinating. I will tell myself, be very proud of the writer you are becoming. Just keep on writing.

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