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### Self Assessment

At the beginning of the semester, writing felt like walking on eggshells. I second guessed my ideas, hesitated to take risks, and often questioned whether I could really balance my personal voice with academic writing. I knew I had a lot to say, but was not sure how to say them in a way that would “fit.” Still, somewhere along the way while capturing my classmate’s voice in the cultural op-ed, unpacking the coquette aesthetic in my subculture essay, and descriptively narrating the everyday life of a college student in the “Culture is Ordinary” essay, I found myself shifting. I stopped writing to be perfect and started writing to be more honest. These assignments did not just ask for analysis, rather they gave me the space to reflect, explore, and actually enjoy the process. In doing that, I began to grow more confident, not just in my writing, but in my ability to express and argue.

This growth became especially clear as I reflected on the four course learning outcomes: Formulate, Strengthen, Enhance, and Engage. To be honest, formulating a cohesive point was the most difficult for me. Early in the semester, I struggled to clearly define what I wanted to argue or explore, and I often found myself getting lost in interesting side points that had little to do with the actual claim. The cultural op-ed was a good example of this. I wanted so badly to

represent my peer's ideas accurately that I overwhelmed the essay with every possible detail and thought. I found myself scrolling back to the introduction constantly, trying to remind myself what the main argument even was. Each paragraph felt like it was swerving off, like I was chasing ideas instead of guiding them. I learned from this experience that having a strong foundation, an argument I believe in and can clearly articulate, is what gives structure to the essay itself.

In contrast, I felt much stronger when it came to strengthening my essays, especially through integrating and analyzing evidence. This has always felt like one of my strengths, but over the course of the semester, I became more intentional about it. Instead of just inserting quotes, I began to really work with them, to introduce them with purpose, cut them down when needed, and analyze them in a way that tied directly into my thesis. In my subculture essay, for example, I used a mix of direct quotes and paraphrased ideas to build a complex analysis of how conservatism and hyper-femininity interact in the coquette aesthetic. I found myself thinking more critically about how each piece of evidence boosted my argument, and I became more confident in letting my own interpretation lead.

That said, my relationship with enhancing my writing is still evolving. Revision used to feel daunting to me, almost like a chore, or worse, a reminder of what I did wrong. But this semester helped me see revision differently. Especially with the subculture and "Culture is Ordinary" essays, I had to go through multiple drafts, returning to field notes, refining ideas, and restructuring paragraphs. With the subculture paper, I constantly circled back to the same question: how can I stay informative while keeping the tone engaging and true to my voice? And with "Culture is Ordinary," I wrestled with Raymond Williams' text and struggled to connect it to the student life in a way that felt clear and meaningful. My first few drafts felt vague and

scattered, especially the thesis. But through revision and feedback, both from peers and professor. I began to understand how a strong argument holds down everything else. I now view revision less as correction and more as clarification.

Lastly, when it came to engaging with sources and ideas, I grew more comfortable seeing myself as part of the conversation. At the beginning of the course, I treated texts and quotes with caution, almost like they were too overbearing to challenge. But over time, I started seeing how I could push back or bring in my own lens, again, in the “Culture is Ordinary” essay, where I explored how ordinary routines on a college campus hold layers of cultural meaning. I realized that academic writing does not always mean silencing your voice. It means intensifying it through engagement. This shift made research and analysis feel more collaborative than intimidating. Looking back, it is clear that I made meaningful progress with all four learning outcomes. Some were tougher than others, but each pushed me in different ways. More importantly, I did not just learn how to write better essays, I learned how to trust my voice, reflect more deeply, and be open to change. I am still growing, still refining, but I am not afraid of the process anymore. Well, at least for now.