

## HOW I LEARNT TO WRITE

In order to describe my experiences of learning to write I need to first clarify with my audience what learning means in general. Learning is defined by Merriam-Webster as modification of one's behavior based on experience and also involves the acquisition of knowledge and skill based on exposure to conditioning. Hence, this is why I always say that **“Students can always be taught but getting a student to learn requires much more effort”**.

Based on what I know now, I will boldly state that I was taught formally at kindergarten to community college but I hardly learnt concepts for life. It is only now that I am undertaking ENG 204 that I see the relevance of the literature-based approach to the teaching and learning of the language arts. Therefore, I learnt to write in the classroom using mostly rote and abstract methods which were devoid of the (5 Cs), purpose, relevance and timely feedback-if at all. I just went through the motions doing what the teacher asked of me but was very often not moved by what I learnt in writing classes.

Goals of instruction in the English Language classroom should focus on:

1. Communication
2. Culture
3. Connections
4. Comparison
5. Community



leads to

### AUTHENTIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES

\* Acquisition of new knowledge and skills in the context of real-world life experiences.

\* Ability to draw from background knowledge and experiences to reflect upon new concepts and ideas, figure out explanations and consider critical perspectives of those concepts and ideas. Additionally, sifting the big ideas from the text and using them to explore higher levels of content

**BUT**...



**80's and 90's**

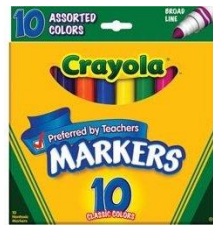
**ROTE LEARNING RULED**

Thank God for my mother, an avid reader and world traveler. She believed in the value of a sound literacy especially being able to express yourself in the way that you really want to (communicative competence). She thought I would need to know words and phrases in terms of meanings- what they actually mean and how they should be used as well as grammatical structures etc (linguistic competence). So I grew up in a very print-rich environment, blessed with an abundance of tools to develop in my own writing abilities.

Here are some of the tools my mother provided-financed by my father- and stimuli- to develop my writing abilities in an authentic context:



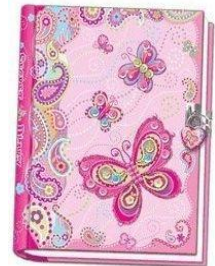
decorated pencils



markers



comic strips



diary with a key



construction paper



old typewriter



list of chores



magazine



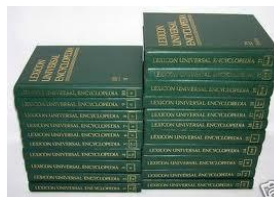
sketch pad



card set



legal Pad

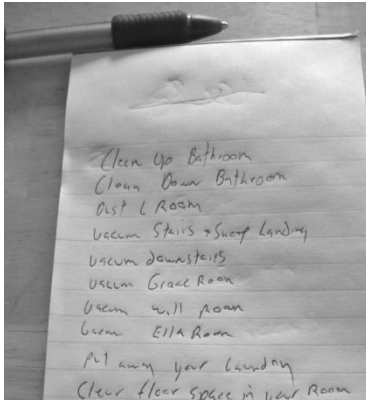


set of encyclopedias (mine)



travel for summer vacation and travel brochures

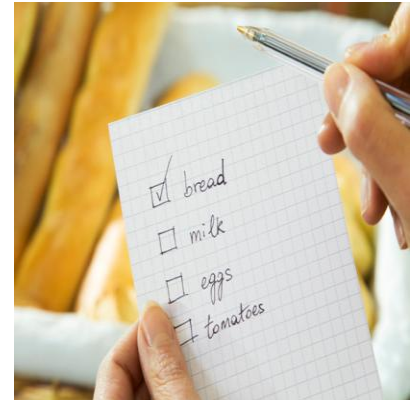
This led me to look within myself and to attempt practical uses for writing in the quiet, comfort of my home or any other place. Here are actual and similar examples of text I produced from adolescence to young adulthood:



list of chores



card for a special occasion



grocery list

**NOTHING**

Nothing to live for

Or to die for

Nothing to be enthralled about

Or to dwell upon

Nothing to conceal

Or to monologue

Nothing to redeem

Or to reminisce about

Nothing to be thankful for

Nothing's splendidiferous

Nothing's all I have.

J. Cherubin

poem

*Hey, Honey,*

*I miss you and I'm just here thinking about you, like I always do. I hope you're as happy as me cause I have you to think of. The thought of you in my arms right now sounds so good to me. I just want you to know how much I love you.*

*Ever since the first time I heard you on the phone and heard your cute voice, I miss you every second of my life. I know I have found someone special. I will always remember how sweet you are and how every time my phone rang and I heard your sweet voice I would smile and I was happy from that point on....*

*Thinking of you still*



love letter

Evidently writing in school was not aesthetically appealing for a child who read beyond her cognitive level. I was “dumbing down” for years because I felt that the teachers would not appreciate ‘the big words’ and the ‘flowery imagery’. But did they ever realize that they could not cater to the needs of a student with a photographic memory, a visual learner? So I took the knowledge from school, guidance from my teacher, parents and older aunts and cousins and created pieces of writing that were purposeful and gave me self satisfaction.

Writing was not always solitary at home because there were times my uncle who was my age and my younger brother and cousin would lay on the carpet with a huge sketch pad and draw cartoons. Other times we would draw pictures and label them. The older ones in the group including myself edited and revised what the younger ones wrote. My mother of course proofread when she came home from work. There was also shared writing with my uncle and that happened at the old typewriter. This involved a hunt for discarded ribbon and begging for typing paper but it was worth it- a way of bonding with my aunt and relieving boredom on summer vacations. My aunt who attended secretarial school sometimes modeled our introductory sentence of the short story and stood behind us watching as we typed. She guided us on spacing, punctuation marks and spelling. She then left us alone and waited for the final product. A little later she provided feedback on the content, sentence structure, word choice, paragraphing and punctuation. She was doing what my teachers back then should have done in a teacher-student conference.

I often ask myself, **“Why does my writing appear to the average reader as coded or complex?”** Well it started with my younger brother barraging through my personal diary by breaking the lock. My love letters and so forth were revealed to my mother who teased me and gave me some lectures about boys I did not appreciate. Thereafter, I turned to strictly poetry on file sheets which emphasized the use of literary devices such as metaphors and visual imagery that my younger brother would surely not understand. I won-the digging and tattle telling stopped and once again I could enjoy writing for myself.