

Ellianah Burgess

Dr. Maureen Gallagher

First-Year Seminar

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Final Portfolio Introduction & Reflection

Dear Dr. Gallagher,

Last one, best one.

Humor is my foremost coping mechanism. Even after three consecutive seizures and a trip to the hospital, I laughed at the nurses and complained about how the urine all over my clothes made me cold (of all things). They couldn't believe I was so nonchalant. I believe that humor is not only important to me, but also significant to Americans because it improves our health. I mean, making jokes at the hospital helped to diffuse the tension from my situation. My fiancé always tells me to "smile for ten seconds." And guess what? It works. I could be absolutely emotionally distraught, yet smiling immediately boosts my mood. In *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Martin & Ford discuss how "we are experiencing an emotional high that is rooted in the biochemistry of our brains" (7) when we laugh. I hate to be cliché, but laughter truly is the best medicine.

Humor seemed a lot more straightforward before I took this course. Through my writing, I learned that humor truly depends on perspective and situational circumstances. I also never

realized that it serves as an opportunity to teach valuable life lessons; for example, how Hannah Gadsby utilized their comedic stage in *Nanette* (2018) to shed light on self-depreciation and the negative nature of comedy. I explored and came to some of own social enlightenment in Essay 2 after revising Essay 1—you inspired me in your feedback to take a more personal stance by including how I felt about relationships with boys/men in my life, and it led me to considering how different people exploit humor in their own way. After all, “Shitty First Drafts” does say “very few writers really know what they are doing until they’ve done it” (Anne Lamott, 2). I loved this essay too much to not include it in my portfolio. My Essay 3 was pretty rough. I felt confident in my process, but your comments revealed a lot of misconception of the source I synthesized. I was pretty disappointed in myself. I did, however, choose to include it in my final newsletter. Why? I needed to do better. I can’t guarantee I got it all right this time, but I wanted to bring clarity to the subject, and hopefully I actually discussed Caplan in the way she deserves. From Essay 4 to Essay 5, I had an issue with cohesiveness. I’m super proud of the labor I dedicated to both assignments, but I felt stuck. For my final portfolio, I had to come to terms with the fact that some of my writing material needed to go, and I took a risk by writing more deeply about the sensitive relationship I have with my father. The fourth course objective for Seminar in Composition is to “revise your writing by rethinking the assumptions, aims, and effects of prior drafts” (Gallagher, 2). The few essays I just mentioned are a testament to how I’ve grown to accomplish this goal; I really had to learn how to cut unnecessary materials, revise my claims for accuracy, and expand my messages in order to provide final products.

Aside from the obvious nuances such as a title and description, I really took the idea of our final Substack newsletter being in a format addressing potential readers to heart. I wanted my

portfolio to have an obvious theme, and for my posts to be relevant. For example, I wasn't going to include my writing about Pittsburgh Ballet Theater because it has a much less satirical tone. Since band is a huge aspect of my personality, I set my profile picture to one of me in uniform looking like an absolute geek. From there, I decided on a Pitt color scheme just so everything could match (I'm picky; I can't help it). Do you like how I made variations of the "Not Funny" logo? I'm very proud of it. I actually was inspired by a logo designer on Instagram who recommended having a less detailed, bolder design that can be read from afar in addition to the regular logo. Cool, right? I think I definitely fulfilled the visual element requirements. All of my included essays—as I already discussed—were altered and polished before adding them to my final portfolio, which satisfies the remaining requirements. You're obviously allowed to disagree, but personally, my labor for the final and during the semester deserves an "A."

I'm writing this in Whiskey Joe's Bar & Grill in Tampa, Florida. (Let's go Pitt Volleyball!!) I tried to complete it several times preceding this trip, but I couldn't get over my writer's block. Thus, my greasy burger fingers are typing on my keyboard in order to finish this reflection on time. My environment is making it difficult to focus on the task at hand; someone just slung ranch on my screen. Aside from overcoming the challenges in revising my essays after your comments, I'd say the adversity I currently face is completing this final project without biting the heads off of the other band kids. Anyways . . . I found it very motivating to revise my works and put them into Substack—I couldn't wait to see the aesthetic product and revisit writings I hadn't read in weeks. Especially after turning some pieces completely around, I'd count that as a success. The reflections I completed throughout the semester were great guides for this

newsletter, and they reminded me of the freedom I'm afforded in my writing. I hope my quirky commentary made you laugh.

It truly was a pleasure being your student. Thank you.

Signing off from Tampa Bay, FL,

Ellianah Burgess