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Anti-thesis: When Your Worst Moments Become Your Best Work

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Abigail Williamson

Anti-thesis: When Your Worst Moments Become Your Best Work

Working under Susan Shapiro's Humiliation Essay Prompt

Honors Capstone Project, 2024

In Conjunction with ENGL3170: Successful Journal Writing

Abstract

My honors capstone project expands the creative work of a major writing assignment in English 3170: Successful Freelance Magazine Writing, which was modeled after Susan Shapiro's "Humiliation Essay." Shapiro's signature assignment encourages students to write about an embarrassing or upsetting moment with the aim to force sincerity and humility. She writes, "It encourages students to shed vanity and pretension and relive an embarrassing moment that makes them look silly, fearful, fragile or naked." The humiliation essay, she claims, often leads to publication because the conflict of the assignment inspires writers, and the narrator's self-insight that occurs during the process of writing is appealing to editors and readers. My Humiliation Essay, "Poor Thing" is about the narrator's experience with a date gone wrong, which inspired considerations of personal growth and identity.

After I completed the essay, I wrote a reflection concerning the writing process and information on publication. Sections include goals I had in mind writing the piece, what the publication process is like, and why one would feel incentivized to publish as an undergraduate. I apply some of these concepts to the essay I wrote and discuss my future goals as well.

The Essay

Poor Thing

I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine.

-Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

With my chest catching and throat tightening, I drove around the corner of Aksarben Village to the opposite side of the movie theater, where I knew I wouldn't be seen, and finally released a gasping sob. My hands pounded against the steering wheel the way they wanted to against my skull. I rocked back and forth in my seat, furiously wiping tears from my eyes with the backs of my hands, then wiping the hands on my pants, shirt, anything that would absorb the tears, snot and sweat that would make visible the mess of myself I tried to hide. Every time I felt I could catch my breath, the memories from moments ago would send me reeling again like the movie I'd just come out of, *Poor Things*.

In 2024, the movie *Poor Things* won multiple Oscars for its surrealist design and was nominated for many more. Though the Oscars take care to evaluate films based on an appraisal of their artistic merit (or so they say), many casual movie watchers use other means of evaluating a film's quality. For one, whether the movie caused its viewer to shed a tear. Shockingly in my Lexapro-fueled, emotionally blunt state, I did in fact cry after watching *Poor Things*, though certainly not due to the movie's cinematic achievement.

The plot follows Bella, a woman whose brain has been replaced with that of a newborn child. Though she still behaves like a baby in her speech and curiosity, she acquires language and motor skills quickly. Her creator allows her to run off with a questionable man to see the world, which in this universe is a sort of mirrored, bizarre, whimsical examination of our own. Eventually Bella proves to be highly intelligent, reading books, discovering different philosophies about society, morality, and government. With this account of the plot alone, it struck me as a wildly interesting prospect and certainly different from the franchises and blockbusters that so often fill the theaters.

But *Poor Things* gathered as much controversy as it did acclaim, and not just in the ways that skeptics tend to spurn a film overly saturated with metaphor as being so avant-garde it borders on elitism. This film has satire, yes, but it is also a violent depiction of a woman whose life is practically defined by sex, and who also spends all of the movie with the brain, mannerisms, curiosity, and innocence of a child, though the writers attempted to bypass her mental age by establishing “rapid development.”

There are moments that are surely meant to be uncomfortable. The man she leaves home with is presented as predatory and hedonistic, touching her unprompted, and the audience is forced to watch what is a bizarre presentation of a child able to experience the sexual pleasure of a fully grown woman. This is certainly not acceptable and it seems like the audience isn't expected to treat it as such, until the movie shifts from a perspective where she is being taken advantage of, to one where she is in charge of her own sexual experiences. To make money she turns to a prostitute house, but instead of framing this as a desperate move spotlighting Bella as the victim of the system, she comes to enjoy the job and defend it as a real occupation. It's clear to me the movie wants to make a statement about sex

work that I don't necessarily disagree with, but it's crucial to remember that during all this, Bella is still very much only a few years old. All of the sex she has in this movie, no matter if it's framed as empowerment, still can't escape being child abuse.

Unfortunately, those elements were not advertised to me, so when I saw the short and harmless movie summary online, promotional photos, and critical acclaim, I saw the film only as potentially interesting. The vintage-colored, science-fiction elements inspired from gothic, pre-code films were clearly pulling inspiration from *Frankenstein*, one of my favorite classical books. In recent months I had begun developing a hobby for watching more independent and creative films. I was content to go alone, but I remembered a recent conversation.

I felt emotions of gentleness and pleasure, that had long appeared dead, revive within me. Half surprised by the novelty of these sensations, I allowed myself to be borne away by them...

Every woman I know hates dating apps—that is, every woman I know that's trying to use them for a more long-term commitment. (I've heard Tinder has its other uses). If it's not completely blank profiles asking "what's ur snap?" it's the profiles you wish were blank claiming that they don't "believe in" Hellen Keller or that pineapple on pizza is a controversial enough opinion to be worth talking about. So when the only guy I'd ever dated in person, let's call him Ben, reached out to me three years after our last date asking if I was interested in starting again, I figured it was a good opportunity. Not only for my romantic life, but to prove to myself that I had experienced personal growth. I could show someone how much I had changed for the better, prove somehow that I was worthy of love more than

ever. After all, I'd been going to therapy and learning who I was. I had overcome biases about myself and the world. I was ready to see how a partner could compliment my life, and understood that my life was complete on its own. From the last time we had met, I was renewed and felt that the whole thing had just been "right person wrong time."

Our conversations were always so interesting. When we first met three years ago, he didn't ask me if I had any pets or what my favorite color was. He asked what I was passionate about, what I believed in, what I wanted out of life. We debated literature, religion, and philosophy—which may sound horrible to some but intellectual conversation to me is just as good as a pick up line. In hindsight, interesting conversation was not the unicorn I felt it was, but with the standard I'd dealt with, can you blame me for thinking this was rare?

Three years later, I found myself on the phone with him again (he preferred phone calls), sitting cross legged on the bed in my parents basement. I felt the need to hide from my family when it came to conversations like this, as they got uncomfortably excited any time they found out I was talking to a guy. The sheets and comforter were bunched up around me, and the sagging mattress hurt my back to sit on. I had been leaning on the headboard, but the excitement surrounding the situation wouldn't allow me to relax back into it again.

I thought it might be uncomfortable at first to figure out what to talk about, but yet again Ben was an easy conversationalist. We updated each other on where our lives were headed; he was applying to MBA programs, I was applying to law schools. I carefully chose my questions so as not to let on how much I remembered about him from several summers ago. I didn't want it to look like what it was. I hadn't significantly dated anyone since.

The conversation turned to discussing our favorite books—a frequent topic in conversations past—and I had described what I liked so much about *Frankenstein*: the themes it included about identity, femininity, and religion.

“The monster never really gets to speak for himself. His story is filtered through what Frankenstein recalls of him, and then what the man on the ship says, and then through the letter written which introduces the whole story. Though he has so much to share and contribute he has no voice. I always felt like that was influenced by Mary Shelly’s feminist upbringing.”

He told me he had never really analyzed books like that before. “Tell me more,” he said. “What else is between the lines?”

Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam...

Instead of going to the movie alone, I told him the premise and asked if he wanted to go with me as our first in-person meetup in years. I curated an outing based on the fact that we had recently been talking about *Frankenstein*, which the movie preview seemed to show connections to, and dinner and a movie seemed like a tame beginning to (re)test the waters.

From the minute he entered the food court I felt a sense of vindication: he didn’t recognize me. I didn’t want to be seen as the same person on the inside, and that seemed to have carried over onto the outside. Last he saw, I had just cut off my Covid hair growth, which was down to my elbows, to the shortest it’s ever been in a small French bob. Now it was dyed a natural-looking red, the color I’d favored the last few years, and long again with waves. The moment I moved out of my parents’ house I

had taken my appearance further into my own hands and celebrated my independence with hair dye and new ear piercings. A change on the outside that was so minor compared to the changes in the mind.

Ben walked in and almost walked right past me. I waved him down and smiled, and he seemed sort of confused, like he wasn't sure I was waving at him. He looked somewhat the same, if just a bit older, with tanned skin, short brown hair and crinkles by his eyes when he smiled, which he did often. He was wearing a plaid button-down shirt, like the last time I saw him and every time before that. He was the sort of person that wanted to look nice but wasn't interested in curating a whole outfit every day, so therefore limited his wardrobe to mostly button downs for a consistent tidy-but-casual appearance. In some ways, I thought this was charming, for someone to know exactly how they wanted to present themselves, but on the other hand, it felt like a missed creative opportunity for someone to never have to think about how they looked.

Once he sat down, we began with some small talk before getting food. There was something awkward surrounding it. I had decided it was first date uneasiness, but that really wasn't it. I had enthusiasm, an outward expression that I was excited to see him, despite some nervousness, but he just treated the experience with a mild expression, as though he were at work or doing a school project, something I ignored at the time but see clearer in retrospect.

I was so eager to display my flourishing, and there's nothing like watching someone you're meeting do a double-take as you wave timidly at them. As the night went on, however, I felt more and more inadequate. Our discussions moved from my interest in studying international and human rights law, to exactly what human rights issues I was concerned about. I tried to describe some of the

international conflicts that came to mind, but the more specific the questions got the more I had to say I didn't know.

“What do you think the solution is?”

“I don't know, sanctions are one thing but it's hard to decide when another country has the right to step into another country's affairs.”

“So you think the U.S. and other countries should do less or more?”

“I'm not sure, I'm not an expert... yet. But less doesn't seem like the answer. I guess it depends on the situation?”

He neither expressed agreement or disagreement with much of what I said, just more questions. It felt like I was taking a test and I was failing. I had been so sure that I was smarter and better than when he last knew me, but I was certainly doing a poor job of showing it. I had changed, but it wasn't coming across as starkly as it felt to me.

Growing up evangelical, I knew exactly what I would and wouldn't accept from a partner. I knew what my role was, and what his role would be, as defined by the culture surrounding me. Most importantly, I knew that he would have to be Christian like me, or it was simply not going to work. In the past I had dated someone very dedicated to a different religious following. It created a significant rift in our two-year relationship, and ultimately made it impossible to continue. Dating someone outside of the faith was simply out of the question anyway, according to all the religious mentors in my life.

And Ben had grown up Catholic, which even that was almost too much for me years ago, but when conversations about religion became deeper, and he confessed that he was moving away from the

religion towards atheism, it was really more than I could handle. At least at this time, when questions came up about what I believed and how I justified it, I always had the answers. This was a test I succeeded at every time. When he asked if I believed Old Testament events literally happened, I said yes. When he asked what I thought of other religions, I said I thought they were false, or just misinterpretations of the true religion I believed in.

There was a conflict inside me. I loved the religious and philosophical conversation. I was fascinated by questioning faith, but the anxiety it awoke in me was destructive to the relationship. Something felt consistently awkward. I couldn't get comfortable around this person, despite him being polite, intelligent, and kind, something felt off.

Now I would just chalk it up to lack of attraction. Anyone who has dated knows these relationships happen frequently. Having a handful of positive qualities isn't enough to make someone your person. It takes much more to light a spark. Yet all I had at the forefront of my mind was a neon sign blinking "ATHEIST!"

With everyone around me telling me I should date someone with my same faith, and the fact that I didn't feel much romantic feelings about him, I thought I knew exactly what this was. When he sensed me becoming distant, I told him what I truly believed, that this was divine intervention. The lack of attraction must be God's way of telling me I shouldn't be with a person who is distancing themselves from religion.

...but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.

He really took it quite easily, didn't mock me or laugh, which I appreciate, but I still find it strange that this is sincerely what I believed at the time. Years later, having reevaluated and abandoned some principles, I felt a little embarrassed by my behavior, though some would think it's perfectly acceptable. My friends and I giggle about students at religious universities who get married within months, and who define themselves by their Christian relationships. The fact that I once felt this way made my old self the sort of person I would find so difficult to understand, and it also made me harder on her than she deserved.

I developed freedom from the religious beliefs that controlled so much of my life, and decided for myself what I felt was really important. I slowly gained comfortability with myself as a sexual being, and lost judgment for others and their own sexual lives.

We left the restaurant to walk across the street to the cinema, and I mentioned that I had been hearing things about this movie since we booked the tickets. Most people didn't give me a lot of detail, just told me that it was a strange choice for a date and the movie was very weird. I thought this was deserving of a disclaimer that I chose this movie before I knew anything much about it, so whatever the context of it was, it shouldn't be looked at as an endorsement.

Once we had settled into our seats and the movie began, it started off unusual but not outlandish. The film began in black and white, reminiscent of old monster movies. We met the characters, including Bella and it didn't take long before things went downhill fast.

On my own, I would have been completely fine watching as many sex scenes are in *Poor Things*, if I wasn't sitting next to someone who last knew me as consumed in purity culture and fundamentalist beliefs. It must have caused whiplash. I didn't dare turn my head to even glance his way

as we sat through what felt like an hour total of Bella's sexual escapades. Her discoveries of self-pleasure, her wild tosses with partners and experiences with prostitution and other women all were displayed with no fade to black, few cuts, and deeply disquieting sound effects. Just when I would think, "I can't take it anymore, this scene has to be over now," it would go on another fifteen grueling seconds before any reprieve. Each affair went on and on, scene after scene until the movie had stripped me of any hope left for this date and left me sitting there a total creep who had taken her date to a porno. We both sat within our own bubbles, lacking any of the physical closeness a movie date might bring and instead committed to a contrasting, rigid isolation.

We left the theater and I laughed awkwardly, trying to make light of what we had both just experienced in that dark cinema, "Maybe you should pick the movie next time... if you even want a next time, after that."

He didn't really laugh. I could sense something was wrong. We walked in silence for a minute before he hit me with what I felt coming a block away, "Look, you're moving away to grad school soon, and you said 'date' so I just... don't know where your expectations are."

I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other.

Of course I said date. This was a date. He had reconnected with me using Hinge!

I felt the frustration that had begun way back with my former self, carried over into my poor choice of a movie, and now was beginning to bubble over into something that could not be contained.

We muttered some awkward goodbye as I hurried to get into my car, drove it around the corner, and let the hot tears overtake me.

It's funny how something someone says so casually can consume your psyche and self-confidence. Had I misinterpreted the situation? Had I sat through a rather triggering movie for nothing? I just couldn't handle the feeling of overwhelming inferiority. Most ironic of all, I had just sat through a story that was supposed to be about female confidence and discovery, and I had never felt worse.

I had been so confident in myself. So sure that a partner in life would be a complimentary element of my journey, and yet when I slid into the seat of my 2007 sedan, it felt like an inescapable fact that I hadn't been kissed since I got that car when I was 17. To top it off I just watched a movie full of uncomfortable but nonetheless exciting physical intimacy, and I would once again be going home alone.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature.

Though the creators of *Poor Things* and I may not see eye to eye on their creative choices, Bella has become a character sympathetic to my own experiences. When she first entered the world, she went through many phases of exploration, discovering the world around her and how to be a part of it. Though she does not connect with the world through religion, she learns about various philosophical theories, from anarchism to socialism, before becoming comfortable in her own personhood, much like Frankenstein, and much like me.

I called a friend and went to her place to recover, feeling relieved by the emotional release that came with relaying the story. Not to mention I was stressed by many other things that likely built up the outburst of tears: finishing my degree, the transition to law school, managing my constantly shifting mental health. I had many reasons to feel pressured and inadequate that night. With time, distance, and more therapy, the story has become a funny bad date tale, but in the layers of my self-awareness, it has become much more.

The me that allowed religion to dictate my relationships was earnest and sincere. She was true to her beliefs and communicated that thoughtfully. She navigated a challenging situation with grace. And yes, in hindsight she can still make me cringe, but much like Bella, she was young and was just beginning to learn.

Reflection

As a final creative effort for my undergraduate degree, this thesis paper serves as both a senior paper for the English department, and a capstone project for the University Honors Program. This paper was written to expand on the major writing assignment in English 3170: Successful Freelance Magazine Writing, which was modeled after Susan Shapiro's "Humiliation Essay." I also wanted to include an informational attachment outlining some major takeaways from both the class and the project.

As an English major with a creative nonfiction concentration, the submission and publishing process of my work reflects a culmination of disciplined writing exercise and revision throughout my undergraduate education. In this section of the paper, I'll outline what I've learned about the publication process, reflect on publishing as an undergraduate, and draft some goals I have moving forward with the above personal essay.

Composing and revising the essay was a thorough process over several weeks involving reading published humiliation essays, brainstorming and pitching an idea, drafting, peer workshopping, professor feedback, and visits to the writing center. Deciding to use a topic so vulnerable for my first experience sending work to editors was like leaping off of a cliff, as opposed to bouncing on the trampoline safety net confined to just the classroom. However, it helps to just dive in right away. Many who submit essays to publishers are nervous about rejection or negative feedback. It may cause writers to hold back in their writing, especially about what's embarrassing or vulnerable. Additionally, it can be difficult to write about topics that might upset one's family, or expose someone's inner thoughts they'd rather keep to themselves. By doing all these things in one fell swoop in a humiliation essay, it

may be easier to do it again and again in one's writing career. After writing and submitting The Humiliation Essay, I have fewer reservations about practically any topic I could write about and far less fear of rejection.

The Prompt

Susan Shapiro is both a writer and a writing professor. She's published many essays and several books, including *The Byline Bible*, a text used in my freelance writing class. The inventor of the "Humiliation Essay," she explains why the prompt has such success for her students in a *New York Times* article, "Make Me Worry You're Not O.K." She writes that the essay is so successful for students because "It encourages students to shed vanity and pretension and relive an embarrassing moment that makes them look silly, fearful, fragile or naked." For Shapiro, this has led to her students and even her physical therapist receiving offers of publication. This kind of vulnerability in writing engages readers and, if done well, also reveals a larger universal truth about what it means to be human.

As for myself, I found it difficult to decide on a subject of my own humiliation. Surely, I had been through moments of fear and embarrassment, but none of them felt as impactful as some of her own students' examples: war, addiction, financial ruin. For example, one author wrote about his tumultuous relationship with his mother and his attempt to reconnect with her, despite her dislike for him, which is complicated by her dementia diagnosis.

The essay also has deeper things to say about parental relationships, especially with those who have hurt us, and the impact that can have on our lives. Another essay discusses the author's experience raising a child with OCD. This essay parallels teaching the audience about what it's like to experience

OCD with the way the author's daughter was exposed to the OCD tendencies. The essay is not only about OCD but about the way religion can play into mental health issues, and highlights the way that having a child can really teach a person about themselves, as children recognize in us what we may not recognize ourselves. These essays were illustrative examples of how to layer larger meaning into personal experience.

I thought that perhaps at 22, I just hadn't lived enough life to have been through a humiliation at the level Shapiro was fishing for. However, I couldn't stop thinking about something embarrassing that had happened recently, that I soon realized was rich with deconstructable elements that had made it so emotionally overwhelming. Even if the essay didn't end up being my favorite thing I've ever written, it would offer some self-exploration.

While writing the essay I attempted to create interest by starting in the middle. My hope was that this creates mystery as to how the author found themselves in the situation and captivates the reader. During the process of revision, I paid close attention to the structure, moving elements around to analyze flow of the piece, defining areas where word choice can be improved or description is thin, and sometimes rewrote entire paragraphs or sections from memory for a fresh take.

Another problem Shapiro emphasized which I struggled with was finding the "balance between humiliation and humility." As I attempted to expose my humiliating thoughts, feelings, and actions, I felt naturally defensive, leading to writing things in earlier drafts that were potentially insulting, generalizing, or harsh. I wanted to be confessional about my shortcomings without an audience immediately disliking me because of those shortcomings. That, I think, is one of the hardest elements of an essay like this.

The second most challenging element personally was the ending, since it's a bad strategy to leave the reader with nothing but self-deprecation and disaster then disappear. "My favorite essays begin with emotional devastation and conclude with surprising metamorphosis," Shapiro writes, and as we discussed elsewhere in my writing class, the narrator has to experience something in the essay and be changed by the end of it. After going through a full grieving process with this essay—pretending it didn't exist, trying to bargain with the length and subject, eventually hating it and never wanting to see it again—I do think I came out the other side having learned a few things about myself, and eventually say the value in my work, as well as in the process of revising it. Writing is often used as a therapeutic exercise for a reason.

Publishing 101

One of the best things about publishing freelance writing is that anyone can attempt it without a specific degree or previous publishing experience, as long as they have the determination and skill. While some have found a whole career in writing, many people do so as a second gig in addition to their regular jobs. If you have something to say and write it well, you can get it published—you just have to follow the right steps. For example, if I wanted to publish the essay written for this piece, I would have to follow the same steps as anyone else, even those who have been publishing for a long time. (As an aside, for the purposes of this project, my essay is quite long, but Shapiro advises that 700-900 words is often the most successful for commercial magazines and personal narratives.) What feels like a mystery can really be broken down into finding a publication, writing a pitch/cover letter, and staying on top of whatever happens after that.

Finding a publication for your work is a crucial first step, as you don't want to just send writing anywhere and everywhere. For starters, some journals or magazines don't accept work that's being submitted multiple places. Other times, a magazine has a specific topic it publishes or a focus point for its audience where your essay may not make sense. If you've written about something local, it might make more sense to publish it at a local level, such as a city newspaper. A well written piece reviewing a popular restaurant does not make sense in a journal focused on immigration stories. Shapiro also writes in *The Byline Bible* that the writing world can change in an instant, and to make sure that the publication or editor you're sending to is still the current and correct place. It's necessary to look at a journal's circulation rate, editorial staff and process, and its reputation to decide if it's right for your piece. Journals have different aesthetic slants and identities as well, with some being on various political spectrums, or emphasizing various author identities. Some magazines pay, and others do not, which is also a factor to look into if compensation is necessary. It can be an embarrassing experience to have a piece published in a journal who's identity or views do not correlate with that of the author.

After spending time finding a publication that meets your strategic goals, a cover letter or query is the next step. There are important things to consider when drafting a cover letter as well. It's crucial to find the editor's name where you'll be sending the piece, and be certain it's correct, as it will cause publishers to question thoughtfulness and accuracy in your writing if you mess up something like a cover letter. Journals and magazines online will typically have a specific page with information on how to send in a piece, which are referred to as submissions guidelines, and the same applies here. Not following the directions of submission will not leave a good impression. When pitching an essay or summarizing it in a cover letter, remember the editor is an audience as well, and leave some mystery as

to the essay's content and ending. This will help the editor gauge the interest of a potential audience and maintain the essay's captivating story.

Here is a potential cover letter I could use for my piece if I were to submit to a literary journal:

Dear Wendy Oleson,

I hope you'll consider my essay "Poor Thing" for publication in *Split Lip Magazine*. It is a personal essay about a date gone wrong that's rich with vulnerability and pop culture elements. I believe it would find a great home in your publication.

Thank you,

Abigail Williamson

Bio: Abigail is a graduate in Creative Nonfiction from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Previously, she's been published in the University's literary magazine, 13th Floor. In her free time she enjoys shopping with her sister, watching classic sci-fi and reading fantasy books.

(A longer query letter or pitch would be necessary if submitting to a commercial magazine instead).

Finally, there are many things that could happen after publication that Shapiro outlines, but it can be a lot to manage the essays you may have floating out in the publication world. If your essay is rejected, or should you choose to reject an offer, then you may have been waiting a while and want to submit the essay elsewhere right away. If the essay is accepted, it's important to respond to any communications promptly as it may be put out quickly and need corrections or whatever additional things the editor requests (though Shapiro also points out that a piece may be accepted and not run for

months or even years). The author's contract will outline pay and copyright information, which is also important to pay attention to.

Undergraduate Publication

In *The Business of Being a Writer*, Jane Friedman writes, "I do not see creative writing students as too delicate or underdeveloped to handle the business side of the writing life—nor do I view these matters as extracurricular." After all, as a writer seeking publication—for someone to essentially buy their work—one must understand the business practice of publication. Undergraduate study is an excellent time to learn about publishing, as it will be essential to their future in the writing discipline, just like any other area of study should prepare students for their professional future.

Some may consider undergraduate-level students to be too early in their careers to consider publication, but there are many reasons undergraduate students may want to publish. For instance, especially students within my demographic, English majors specifically studying writing, this is potentially a long-term career goal for them. It makes a lot of sense to begin the submissions process in their undergraduate years, if only for practice, but hopefully also leading to forming connections with other writers and publications, so as to begin creating a network that will further their writing careers.

But aside from practical reasons, publication is a way for other people to see your writing outside of the small circle it would be shared with otherwise. As humans, we want to be able to share our stories with others, and publication is one of the main avenues for that, no matter what the age or experience of the person.

Illinois University has an article on their website titled “The Benefits of Publishing as an Undergraduate,” and lists multiple reasons why students may be compelled to publish. Some I have already discussed, such as for practice and experience, or to make connections, but it lists several other good reasons. Firstly, publication will improve a student's writing skills. The more you write, the better you'll get at it, especially with the feedback you get from editors or peer reviewers. Additionally, having published work or experience in publishing your writing adds a level of professionalism to one's undergraduate career. Having publications on a resume shows that an applicant takes initiative and is willing to go above what is typical or expected of an undergraduate student. This not only shows that you have a writing level that is advanced enough to be published, but that you have the drive to seek out publication and be successful in that field.

While my personal endeavors of publication as an undergraduate have not yielded much success, I personally believe it was absolutely worth my time. Not only did I experience the publication process, but it made me a better writer to go through revisions and put my work out into the world. Despite hearing rejections, it gave me more confidence that I was willing to show other people my work. The first rejection I got, I was actually excited, because it was the first time I ever sent to publication, and getting a rejection I felt was a milestone.

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