

## Creative Resistance

I've been working as a writing assistant for about two years now. I've learned quite a bit in that time about how to teach others. By no means have I become an expert in that area, but one cannot tutor people for that long without learning something. One of the things that I'd like to help teach people is to be more of an individual -- more creative -- when they write a paper.

Through tutoring, I've learned that each person who seeks help in this kind of setting is creative. I've learned to respect the intelligence and creativity of the people I help. People all have a unique perspective that can be capitalized on in the things they write about. However, I think a lot of students worry about being "too creative" with their assignments. Often students will come in for tutoring worried about doing something too unusual with the assignments they are working on. Often people will ask "Do you think the instructor will care if I do this?" and point to some part in their paper that doesn't match the exact parameters of their assignment.

Unfortunately, unique techniques are sometimes rejected (harshly at times) by instructors. More often than not, instructors value and appreciate a creative approach, but occasionally an instructor will reject an approach that seems less than standard. For example, Perry Mills, an instructor of Theater Arts 201 at Western Washington University is strict in his idea of how to approach and organize a paper on a movie's theme. Anything that deviates from the standard norm too much is rejected as being a badly written paper by professor Mills.

On the other hand, many instructors would like students to be more creative. I have helped students become more focused in fulfilling the requirements of a loosely structured assignment. More than a few times, students have come in with a generalized essay question and the teacher's request for a creative answer to the question. They ask "What am I supposed to do here? What if I do it wrong?"

I often need to explain to the student, at this point, that the instructor is telling the student to seek his or her own focus, and that there is often no right or wrong way to do this type of assignment. I'll ask the student what opinion s/he has about the subject (and often get a mildly pained look in response) Then, I'll explain to the student that his or her opinion matters. We each have a unique perspective, our own personal lens and language that we view the world through. Certainly, objectivity is important in a formal paper, but all objectivity is selective. It is a small snapshot of a portion of something much bigger, and often figuring out what one thinks and feels about that bigger whole, makes it much easier to decide which part we want to take a snapshot of.

Creativity is all about that unique perspective. When I can help a student to first put their finger on that perspective -- in other words, how they think and feel, and secondly to feel okay about putting their original ideas on paper, then I feel like that student has taken the first step towards being creative. I really believe that if you start on a paper in a creative way, then all the organizational techniques and writing strategies will only enhance that creativity. But, if you start a paper from a dry and bored stance, all the techniques and strategies will only seem like work.

I've seen other students do remarkable things with these kinds of assignments. I almost always learn something new from the content of their papers. When a student is not afraid to be creative and include him or herself in the paper, it can be a sheer delight to read what he or she has to say. And I believe that seeing people do things and think things I never have before are the greatest rewards for me when teaching writing.