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Writing 101
Mr. Marc Watkins
Reflective Essay

Reflection on Audience

Throughout my entire semester of Writing 101, I have studied in order to write a variety of prompts on different topics. For my reflection paper, I have decided to pay most of my attention to “Purposes and Audience” as the subject of this essay. I have chosen my argument paper “China's One and Only Chance” as an example of how this learning outcome has changed and improved my writing style and skills among my overall improvements in this course.

The first step in revising my essay was to understand what this learning outcome means. As I look back to the beginning of this semester when we talked about the five learning outcomes in class, I did not properly understand the meaning of “Purposes and Audience” and how important they are for an essay. This caused my argument paper to have many flaws. However, after all the revisions I have done throughout this semester, I can clearly say that “Purposes and Audience” simply means: “Why do you want to write this?” and “Whom are you writing this for?” By figuring out what I needed to do to revise my paper, I actually was able to begin working on improving my argument. Additionally, I think having a specific reason to write and understanding the audience of the article were not only important for my academic life in college but also for my future career.

When I chose my topic for the argument paper, I was insistent on discussing the college entrance exam in China. I got through my stressful high school life and the difficult
exam before I came to America, so I have a lot of personal experiences and feelings concerning this topic. I sincerely know that there is something wrong with the whole education system in China, a system that pushes high school kids to commit suicide, and it needs to be changed and reformed. When I was a freshman in high school a tragedy happened in my school right before the exam was held that year. A senior student jumped out of a tall building across the street from my school after he finished cleaning up his dorm and classroom that morning. I was shocked by this event. Since then, I began to think about why Chinese students commonly have varying degrees of depression, and why suicide cases among high school kids are not rare at all.

The purpose of the essay was to argue that China's college entrance exam needs to be changed and reformed in order to reduce the strong pressure felt by high school students, which they receive from their parents. As a consequence of the test, so many negative side effects have been generated: students became “study machines,” they may believe that they do not need any other skills except learning how to study, low grades on tests drive students to depression and perhaps suicide, and the frequency of suicide cases increases every year. However, my personal emotions became especially strong when I began to write about this topic and that made my paper really ambiguous.

The most difficult part of the writing process was managing all the information I wanted to display in my essay, put it in a logical order, and make it support my thesis and argument. Considering the college entrance exam in China is not a typical topic to talk about in America, I had to give an introduction about it in my essay. It is not hard to find sources online about this serious issue in China. I actually found many articles that discussed this
exam. However, the imbalance between information I put into my essay and my weak argument began to appear as an obvious issue. I noticed this, but I confused myself with all the sources I had in the essay, and I did not have a clue how to solve it.

When I got my graded paper back a while later, I was surprised, but not surprised. I was surprised that my grade was not all that bad considering all the weaknesses I thought it had, but not surprised that I got a C for my “Purposes and Audience” subject. I looked over my paper again, and I found some mistakes that I should have avoided. Obviously, I did not have a specific thesis statement in my introductory paragraph, so that was a really important part that I needed to revise. For every body paragraph, I also did not have a topic sentence at the beginning to give my audience a guideline of what I was talking about, and that made my essay unclear and hard to follow. My argument in the paper was really weak. I had way too much information, and there were sources in the essay that existed for no reason and did not work together with my essay as a whole.

I also realized that I had too strong of a personal opinion about this topic and that caused my paper to become imbalanced and biased. My audience consists of various kinds of people who may have different opinions than mine. As an informative essay that argued about education problems, I talked too much about how sad the reality is, how bad the student experience is, and how often suicide cases are happening, because as a Chinese student who went through this process, I did not enjoy it at all. However, in reality, there is no doubt that the exam changed a lot of students' destinies. For many students who come from the poorer regions of China, trying their best to do better in the exam may be the only way for them to go to cities and study, instead of staying in the countryside and becoming farmers or factory
workers. Staying in America and staying with my friends here always reminds me of my high school life in China, when my classmates talked about their high school lives. I cannot tell which education process is better, but obviously driving students crazy or to suicide is not really good.

In conclusion, I believe “Purposes and Audience” helped me to understand my essay better and revise it in a more efficient way. I know I still need to learn how to manage a sentence, a paragraph, and a whole essay, in order to use fewer words and make more sense to my audience. I will keep working on this challenge in my other essays in my future courses. Additionally, the most important thing I learned from this writing class throughout the semester is that there is no perfect paper. There is always space for a smart writer to make progress and improvements. I thought my argument paper was perfect when I turned in my final draft. However, after I reread it, I could start to see my mistakes and the disadvantages of the paper. I can always revise and edit my paper in order to make it better. I can always use more specific vocabulary instead of simple words in order to make more sense in a sentence. Looking forward to my next semester of academic study and learning, I believe I will use all the experience and skills I learned from this class in my future writing processes, and I will be more confident about writing the next time I sit down and begin to type in on my computer.
Chuqi Min
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Argument Essay

China’s One and Only Chance

China's National College Entrance Examination has a long history, and we still need to know that the disadvantages still exist and need to be changed or reformed. I believe that China will have a better future, and students in China will have a better environment to study in which they have less pressure. I hope the education department would to do some experiments in order to find a better way for students to get into college and pay more attention to high school students' mental health instead of only the grades. As an examination, the college entrance exam's drawbacks and overly restrictive policies offload a lot of stress on China’s students, with suicides happening all over the country during the exam time each year. The pressure high schools and parents put on their students of studying and getting higher grades are causing students to have psychological problems and suicides. Anxiety and depression are pretty common among high students, and the number of teenage criminals are also increasing day by day. Some of the students cannot bare the stressful study life anymore, so they quit school and began to do damage of the society.

Every year, the suicidal cases appears frequently during the exam period in high school seniors nationwide. According to the New York Times article, Putting Chinese Students to the Test, the author Mark McDonald told people a sad story of a Chinese student: “In 2011, on the first day of National Higher Education Entrance Examinations, Lu Pin, an eighteen year old high school student in Hunan, China, killed himself by jumping off of the sixth floor of his dorm building”
(McDonald, 2012). According to the article, the reason that pushed him to do it is that he was fifteen minutes late for the Exam and was refused entry. Moreover, the most insidious thing is that local police said Lu ended his life just to avoid his exam. As a matter of fact, Lu Pin is not the only student to take his life. In the article *School Tests Blamed for Suicides*, the writer Zhao Xinying said: “The Annual Report on China’s Education (2014), also known as the Blue Book of Education, looked at the apparent causes of 79 suicides by elementary and high school students last year.” 

(2014). According to the report, 93 percent of student suicides happened after arguments with teachers or were associated with the intense pressure to study  

Overall, what is the National Higher Education Entrance Examination? More commonly been called as the college entrance exam and as known as “Gaokao” in China, this exam is held once a year that gives students the chance of getting into some of China’s most prestigious universities.

Compare with SAT, the college entrance exam has its own flaws that from my perspective of a former high school student, the form of the exam should be changed. Unlike the SAT held in the United States, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is only held one time each year. While students in America or overseas can retake the SAT as many times as they want to get a higher score, Chinese students do not have a second opportunity to retake the exam if they fail their first time. “But unlike students on this side of the Pacific, Chinese students have been preparing for this moment their entire high school careers, and in some cases, half their lives” (2012). This means that for them, their first chance is their final chance. To some extent, this is a valuable chance to change one's life. “For Huang Zhimin, a senior at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China, there was only one way out of the small town in Guangxi where he was raised:
three days in the summer of 2004 in a stuffy city testing center, sweating over the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. 'I'm the first in my entire family to go to college,' says Huang, 'and the National Higher Education Entrance Examination was incredibly high-pressure’” (Siegel, 2007)

As a consequence of the purely academic requirement of taking the exam, some experts hold a negative view of the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. “Passing one’s exam, changing one’s destiny...” influenced by this stereotypical impression, these experts believe it is the only “fair” chance for everyone, regardless whether individuals are wealthy or live in poverty, intelligent or mediocre. For this reason, in their opinion, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is perfect and should not need to be reformed. However, although the phenomenon of “the National Higher Education Entrance Examination changing people’s lives” holds true, the Exam still gives students intense stress. Huang was successful, but if we can only look back on his and few others’ testing experience with satisfaction, people know that his joy is far from universal.

The reformation of this test is difficult. As a national college entrance examination, the exam was created 1952. The test has continuously been reformed since then, but after over half a century, the development of it still moves slowly. The exam has its benefits in the fact that is is a tool for demonstrating students’ academic skills and professional knowledge, but it is unfortunate that people cannot ignore the malpractice of the exam. Additionally, because of the academic requirements, high school education in China has become utilitarian: subjects in school are all prepared for the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. For example, high schools in Anhui province canceled their art class and music class in order to make more time for the students to learn biology, politics, chemistry, or geography, and so on. Since it is the only chance for most
of high school students to pass and get into college, another report stated: “In Tianjin, China's third-biggest metropolis, doctors reportedly prescribed birth control pills to female test-takers whose parents feared that an untimely period would prove distracting” (Siegel).

Independent proposition is a big issue concerning the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, because it is related with population, education qualities, economical imbalance and so on. Regional imbalance of social and economic development has caused a huge difference in the quality of education all over China, which means almost every province needs to create its own test. However, sometimes the exam is created by personnel that lack experience or are incompetent, which makes the National Higher Education Entrance Examination really hard or extremely difficult. Also, because of its confidential nature, how each province creates its standards each year is always interesting. “With stakes so high, the Chinese government guards each year's questions as if they were plans for nuclear weapons. Exam authors are confined to secret compounds while the test is being written, while the printing is carried out by inmates at maximum-security prisons.” (Siegel).

The regional discrimination of is also a sad, unfair phenomenon that hard to ignore by schools, parents and students in China. A university usually sets a fixed admission quota for each province, in order to attract a larger number of students coming from its own province. For several years, it is argued that people are being discriminated against during the admission process based on their geographic region. For example, compared to the modern cities such as Shanghai, Gansu province has fewer universities per-capita. Therefore, Gansu usually receives fewer admission quotas compared with Shanghai, which makes it far more difficult for a student from Gansu to be admitted by the same university than his Shanghai counterpart.
Overall, the histories and realities of the exam combined together and became the mainly reasons why the exam is extremely hard and the pressure is so high. As a student who got through the process, I am more concerning about the mental problems of some students that caused by their stressful high school lives, and the exam. “There are so many students in China,’ Huang Zhimin says, 'that it's got to be very hard to find a fair and effective way to judge students. I'm enjoying a lot of success now, but some of my close friends have ended up at bad universities. For me, the exam was a good thing — but for most Chinese students, it's really complicated”(Siegel). Indeed, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination changed Huang’s life in a positive way, but also changed a great number of students’ lives in a negative way. Passing the exam does not always mean a better future. The requirement of high test scores not only brings pressure to students, but also to their teachers, making the relationship between teachers and students worse, especially when students receives poor scores - which also leads to some students’ suicides. “The National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China is about the most pressure-packed examination in the world,’ says Ari Wolfe, an English teacher in Guangzhou who tutored students for last weekend's exam, 'given the numbers, the repercussions, and the stress involved”'(Seigel) Ari Wolfe is not the only teacher that feels deeply confused and helpless about the exam. The ossified system of National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China requires students to master too much knowledge that is beyond their understanding at their age. For example, algebra is required in high school in the United States, but is required in middle school in China, which is at the age of twelve for most students.

I think the college entrance exam in China needs to be changed and reformed, not only for the students, but also for a healthier society. According to the article China Exam System Drives
Student Suicides, the author claims: “China’s education system is now undergoing reforms, aimed in part at decreasing the intense pressure it places on young people. One change is to broaden the criteria by which students are selected for universities, moving away from China’s traditional emphasis on simply one test” (Roberts, 2014). In modern times, China is constantly undergoing reformation, but the reform of the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is one of the most important issues. As a student who went through the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, I can deeply attest to the changes that happen every single day. Under these new reforms, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China will become more and more fair in the future. For example, if the examination can be held several times a year, it would be to the benefit of students who have failed to achieve their desired score their first time. It would also avoid driving high school students into hopelessness and depression. We have to admit that in last sixty-three, years the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China has sent a countless number of talented students into colleges. We also cannot deny that because all those students exist. China has developed from a poor and weak country and achieved great progress in various fields and in different areas. People should understand the exam, as the biggest examination to be held in China since 1952. It has supported and is still supporting the huge population of students to reach their dreams and change their destinies. As what I claimed, the problems there are really complicated. Too many elements caused the phenomenon of students’ suicides. Although some of them succeed in the college entrance exam and got their destinies changed, most of the students who did not hold a high grade ended up getting into bad universities and still feel confusing about their future. Nowadays, more and more Chinese students decide to study overseas, in my opinion, part of the reason is to “escape” from the high pressure that college
entrance exam brings to them and the low quality of Higher education in China. This topic related
to education, psychology, culture influence and social values. It is complicated, but still needs
people to pay attention. I am concerned about the reality and the future of Chinese students, overall,
younger generations in China will be educated under this system, and they are the future of this
country. For China, a country with such a profound history and the desire that never give up of an
effort, China has not only one chance, instead of that, it has boundless possibilities.
Works Cited


