

Self as Writer

There are two versions of the "Self as Writer" invitation; the second is intended for ESL writers.

Self as Writer #1: If you want your writing class to begin where you are, then you must let your tutor know how you see yourself as a writer. In fact, I would say you cannot become a better writer unless you're willing to take a careful look at writing abilities you already have. So please talk a while, on paper, about your concept of self as writer.

How do you feel, what thoughts fill your head, when you sit down to write what a teacher has asked you to? When you sit down to write a letter you want to write? A letter you don't feel like writing? Do you ever write simply because you feel a creative impulse? If so, what form does that writing take? What do you like about all, or some, of your writings? What do you see as occasional or recurring problems? Do you remember any specific writing experiences that left you feeling like a success—or failure?

Of course, these questions are not offered to test your memory as exam questions do. Instead, the intent is to help you see that your attitude toward writing is directly related to the continuing development of your writing abilities. So please hear and respond to them, in writing, just as you would if your tutor were asking them while talking with you face to face.

Since all your writing experiences are an important part of your concept of self as writer, your tutor may also wish to know something about the kinds of school writing you've done, and how frequently and how much you were asked to write. What kind of writing instruction do you remember? Did your teachers respond to your writing with compliments or corrections?

Whatever you remember about your previous writing experiences, whatever you feel as you try to respond to what I'm saying to you—just talk about it. On paper. Keep your mind and pencil moving until you've said whatever you think and feel about self as writer.

Self as Writer #2: In your native country, you have probably had many experiences with writing in your first language that have shaped the way you think about writing. It's important for your tutor to know about your previous writing experiences and writing instruction so s/he can be of greater assistance to you.

So, using the following questions as a guide to get you started, please spend this hour talking about your experiences writing in your native language.

- When you were taught to write, did you learn any particular organizational structures or formats for your writing (for example, the four-part essay or the five-paragraph theme)? If so, please describe these formats in as much detail as possible.
- In your country, what qualities make a piece of writing good? What qualities make it beautiful?
- In school, were you encouraged to write about personal experiences or were you encouraged to write "objectively"? How did you feel when writing an assignment for school in your own language? A letter or something you chose to write? A diary or journal entry? A poem?
- What kinds of writing processes were encouraged in your country? Were you usually given a topic to write about or did you choose your own topic? Were you encouraged to make an outline or list before writing? Were you encouraged to pre-write or free-write first? How many drafts did you usually write for an assignment? Were you encouraged to revise your first drafts? What kinds of changes did teachers usually ask you to make? Did they ask for changes in ideas? In structure? In grammar? In phrasing?
- For students who have been at a U.S. college for a semester or more: Besides language, what do you find most different about writing a paper for a teacher in the U.S. compared with writing one in your native country?