

An Invitation to Talk on Paper

Whatever your style of talking, whatever the variety of English you speak, I hope you feel free to find your own language as you write. Whatever the range of your vocabulary, whatever the values that have shaped your life, I hope you feel free to say whatever you're thinking.

One of my students once told me, in writing, "The best thing that happened to me in this class was learning to respect my own writing."

That student, that writer, had discovered that writing is not a dreary, sometimes painful academic routine. For him, writing had become talking. In his own voice, with his own everyday language, he was saying something, in writing, for me, his tutor, and classmates to read. Saying something that was worth saying because it was important to him. And as I read his writing, as I listened to the personal knowledge of human experience that he was sharing, his ideas became important to me.

Though a sense of failure may sometimes diminish your self-respect, you can rediscover a sense of self-worth through writing. If you're saying what you think and feel, and if your reader is hearing and responding, with understanding, to what you're saying, then writing enables you to define your individuality, and your relations with others.

With the language you know and use every day, with the voice that expresses your individuality, you can be your own self. And you can become the writer you want to be.

As soon as you finish reading this invitation, I hope you'll start talking. On paper. Just as you do when you leap into a light-hearted conversation, or cautiously edge your way into a heavy discussion to add your knowledge and opinions to what other folks say.

Maybe you'll want to begin by responding to what I'm saying on paper to you. But that is not an assigned topic. You can't begin with your own everyday language unless you begin with your own personal knowledge, and with your own ideas about something you want to talk about with your tutor.

If you feel your mind turning off when you pick up your pencil to respond to this invitation to write, just remember that writing--like talking--is human behavior. Human communication and interaction. People talking and relating to each other.

So forget the "rules" you've learned about topic sentences or introductions and just start talking--on paper. Don't worry about the surface errors you sometimes or always make in spelling and punctuation. Don't stop to correct your "bad" grammar. And don't cross out the "inappropriate" words that you depend on to say what you feel. If you talk like that, write like that. So your reader can hear the sound of your own voice. Talking on paper.

As your pencil moves along the empty lines, try to say what you're thinking and how you're feeling at this very moment. Try to say, as honestly as you can, what's going on inside your own head. Right now.

Just talk on paper. For 30 or 40 minutes. Longer, if your mind and pencil are still spinning off words.