

First lecture

Course book: *Research Writing Simplified* by Raymond H. Clines & Elizabeth R. Cobb

Dear students, the following course is supposed to help know the concept of academic research, consulting sources, quoting correctly, and organizing research paper. For the time being, I am going to concentrate on certain passages taken from your course book. You need to read these passages very carefully.

First chapter: The Research Process – choosing a topic

Being an *author* means being an *authority*. Sometimes our authority will come from personal experience, and sometimes it will come from reading, research, and careful thinking. Being an author also means being *authentic*; that is, presenting our ideas with an honest and genuine commitment to the topic itself and not merely for the sake of completing an assignment. Usually we do not do things very well unless we are sincerely motivated to do them, and this seems to be especially true with writing. In deciding on a topic, it is important to find something of interest and significance to us. When the topic is assigned, we will write better if we see it as relevant to our lives in some way. Without a personal stake in a topic or a commitment to the ideas of our writing, we are doing little more than following instructions, and our purpose for writing may be inauthentic; for example, to please a teacher or to get a reasonable grade. To find your best topics, always look within yourself first.

Good writing consists of two equally important elements: a *thesis* and an *authentic purpose*. The *thesis* is what you hope your readers will learn from your writing. It is the public issue or point of the writing. The *purpose*, if it is authentic, is the reason the topic is important or interesting to you. Your thesis connects your topic to the reader and an authentic purpose will connect you to your topic. Good writing exists at the intersection of our personal lives and the public world. In choosing a topic, we need to consider two types of knowledge: knowledge of the self and knowledge of the world.

- 1- Knowledge of the self: we need to consider what we already know, think, or care about. This knowledge is the basis of all good writing because it is here that we are the most *authentic* and *authoritative* – essential prerequisites for being an author. The best writing starts inside ourselves with an issue of significance to us and works outwards toward a public issue that will be of interest to others. So in choosing a topic the first place we need to explore is inside ourselves – our own passions and interests. What are the things you care most deeply about in life? What are the things you know most about? What life experience have you had? We need to explore and respect that knowledge.
- 2- Knowledge of the world: although good writing begins with a strong personal connection to a topic, there must also be a public dimension – some way to connect the

readers to the topic. Our personal experiences and interests may have limited value to a general audience; therefore, they need to be enriched by knowledge *outside* ourselves. How can our personal interests be used to instruct or persuade other people? How are our personal experiences similar to and different from others' experiences, and how are they influenced by outside issues being debated in the public sphere?

As we begin making connections between public issues and our own lives, we will enrich our learning and we will express through our writing, not only a thesis, but also an authentic purpose with a unique and authentic voice.

Sometimes instructors will want you to write about topics related to specific readings and class discussion – topics with which you may not have a personal connection. There is nothing harder than trying to write about a subject you know little about and for which you care even less. If this happens, what can you do? Assigned topics may seem limiting at first, but they always offer plenty of room for individual expression to the student with imagination and determination.

To succeed as a writer you must push yourself to link whatever public issue you may be assigned to your own personal experiences or interests. In other words, how can you relate the topic to your own life? Where does your life intersect with it? If you are asked to do a research on a famous person in history, do not pick someone at random. Find an historical figure (even a minor one) who has a direct impact on your life in some way, and discuss that impact in your paper. If a teacher assigns a poem, short story, or other work of literature, begin your writing with the place in the work that matters to you, and then move outward toward a public, reader-oriented significance. Writing about Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for example, can be far more rewarding if you discuss the play in terms of personal motives or emotions you may have had, such as ambition, fear, or overconfidence. Identifying a common human experience in a literary work can produce excellent writing.

That will be all as a start. Please read the above passages thoroughly. Thank you.