

Dear Writer,

Hi. My name is Whitney McLaughlin, and I am a soon-to-be-graduate of the University of Denver. I am a sister, friend, oh, and a writer. You may have come across this piece because you are curious or forced to read it by one of your professors, and if that is the case, don't hate me too much—either way, welcome. I am writing this letter to provide some easy or comfort to anyone who is thinking of joining the writing minor at DU, Or maybe you want to be less afraid of writing in an academic setting. I hope this helps. More importantly, I hope you gain something from this because I know I would have if I read this at the beginning of my college writing career.

There used to be a time when I didn't consider myself a writer... I used to be scared of writing. I never felt confident. Turning in a writing assignment made my heart race. There were many requirements I had to abide by, and my professors always criticized me in a way that felt discouraging. Never start a sentence with "and." Don't write incomplete sentences. Don't do this. Don't do that. Your paper isn't long enough. My mom was a journalism major in college and has always talked about how important writing is and how crucial it is to be a good writer. So, I had some outside pressure as well. I never even shared my writing with her. I was too scared - that was a common theme in my academic career.

*When will my writing ever be good enough? Will I ever get there? Will I ever become a writer?*

You may be feeling this way too. I want to say this feeling is normal, and I felt like that for a long time. Writing in school has become an obligation for most people. It is just another item to check off the list. You type as many words as you can to match a word requirement – whether or not the words fit together or not. I am sure you try to make sure you try to write the

traditional 5 paragraph paper and think you've got the APA style down. But writing doesn't have to be mundane. It doesn't have to be intimidating. You need to discover what you love.

Writing is meant to be empowering and fun. It is a way to express yourself. Practice. Try new things. Become comfortable with your voice. And feel excited to break conventional rules. I would have never developed my style without leaping faith in becoming a writing minor. I have come to learn that you have to get uncomfortable to become comfortable. That is what the minor writing program at DU did for me. The hours of class and assignments taught me what I liked and what I didn't like. What worked and what didn't work for me. I discovered my love for writing on social media during my time spent in my Writing and Digital Media class. The creative freedom and loose rules allowed me to share what I was thinking, and I had the opportunity to design myself as a brand through writing.

The class that changed everything for me? Style and Rhetorical Grammar with Keith Rhodes. I had no interest in taking it, but you know the drill, I had to fill a requirement. But the class pushed me out of my comfort zone. What I thought would be traditional grammar and style worksheets turned into creative freedom to find who I am as a writer.

One assignment, Alternating Styles, caused me a lot of anxiety at first but also uncovered a lot of who I am as a writer. The class was forced to write in one style of writing. I picked the vernacular. I wrote an entire paper as if I were having a conversation, and throughout the process of writing, it felt normal and natural. I realized for years I had been forcing myself to write the most correct way, but from that point on, I did not try and be someone I wasn't when I wrote my assignments. Of course, I followed the requirements, but I stopped overthinking all of it – the rules. And eventually, I wasn't hesitant to share my work with the class. Peer review – bring it on! I was excited to write, and I never thought I would say that.

Now I hope you are inspired, and you are willing to try something new. Open your mind to new ideas or new ways of thinking about writing. Maybe you are still intimidated – I am not sure when that will go away, and it might never. Even if you don't join the writing minor at DU, promise me one thing – you will keep on writing. Keep on practice. And keep on pushing your boundaries.

Best,

Whitney McLaughlin