English 10; Ms. Kamrass
Writing Assignment: How You Learn

Overview: For your second writing assignment, you will write something very different than a Regents-essay. The piece is a self-reflection about your learning experiences.

First: Before writing, first read The New York Times article "Learning to Learn: You, Too, Can Rewire Your Brain." By the time you get to the end of the text—especially the "Know Thyself" paragraph—you should reflect about the way you think and learn.

Task: Write an informative essay or narrative piece that explores the way that you learn. This can apply to anything in or outside of school. You have freedom when it comes to subject and format: You may write a traditional essay, complete with thesis, body paragraphs, etc. You also may write a narrative (story) that illustrates how you learn: include dialogue and other storytelling techniques.

More explanation:
- You can write about how you learned to do anything: math problems, the most difficult climb at Mohonk, compromise with parents, etc.
  - Oftentimes, a specific moment is your best focus
- This should be a first-person piece—you should include "I"—that explores your individual process, or processes. (By the same token, don't use "you.")
- Make it interesting: explore with rich and relevant details that you explain when needed. Don't just write a list or summarize events: include imagery, dialogue, and action to bring it to life. Describe any epiphany you experienced.
- No matter what format you choose (informative essay or narrative), ensure that your written piece makes sense: a combination of clear and precise writing, organization (beginning-middle-end), specific examples and explanation usually accomplish this.
- You do NOT have to include any information from the article in your writing. However, if you choose to, be sure to clearly reference the article.

Process:
1. Read the Times article
2. Write a first draft
3. Complete a peer review in class
4. Write a final, typed copy (TNR, 12; staple it atop the peer review sheet, first draft, and this rubric)

Due dates:
First draft is due Friday, March 6; we will complete the typed (MLA style) teacher draft during the second half of the block on Tuesday, March 10. *Your first draft may be hand written or typed,* **but be sure to have access to any digital copy you create at home so that you can print your completed essay at the end of lab time.**

Learning to Learn: You, Too, Can Rewire Your Brain

By John Schwartz   August 4, 2017

The studio for what is arguably the world's most successful online course is tucked into a corner of Barb and Phil Oakley's basement, a converted TV room that smells faintly of cat urine. (At the end of every video session, the Oakleys pin up the green fabric that serves as the backdrop so Fluffy doesn't ruin it.)

This is where they put together "Learning How to Learn," taken by more than 1.8 million students from 200 countries, the most ever on Coursera. The course provides practical advice on tackling daunting subjects and on beating procrastination, and the lessons engagingly blend neuroscience and common sense.

Dr. Oakley, an engineering professor at Oakland University in Rochester, Mich., created the class with Terrence Sejnowski, a neuroscientist at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, and with the University of California, San Diego.

Prestigious universities have spent millions and employ hundreds of professionally trained videographers, editors and producers to create their massive open online courses, known as MOOCs. The Oakleys put together their studio with equipment that cost $5,000. They figured out what to buy by Googling "how to set up a green screen studio" and "how to set up studio lighting." Mr. Oakley runs the camera and teleprompter. She does most of the editing. The course is free ($49 for a certificate of completion — Coursera won't divulge how many finish).

"It's actually not rocket science," said Dr. Oakley — but she's careful where she says that these days. When she spoke at Harvard in 2015, she said, "the hackles went up"; she crossed her arms sternly by way of grim illustration.

This is home-brew, not Harvard. And it has worked. Spectacularly. The Oakleys never could have predicted their success. Many of the early sessions had to be trashed. "I looked like a deer in the headlights," Dr. Oakley said. She would flub her lines and moan, "I just can't do this." Her husband would say, "Come on. We're going to have lunch, and we're going to come right back to this." But he confessed to having had doubts, too. "We were in the basement, worrying, 'Is anybody even going to look at this?'"

Dr. Oakley is not the only person teaching students how to use tools drawn from neuroscience to enhance learning. But her popularity is a testament to her skill at presenting the material, and also to the course's message of hope. Many of her online students are 25 to 44 years old, likely to be facing career changes in an unforgiving economy and seeking better ways to climb new learning curves.

Dr. Oakley's lessons are rich in metaphor, which she knows helps get complex ideas across. The practice is rooted in the theory of neural reuse, which states that metaphors use the same

neural circuits in the brain as the underlying concept does, so the metaphor brings difficult concepts "more rapidly on board," as she puts it.

She illustrates her concepts with goofy animations: There are surfing zombies, metabolic vampires and an "octopus of attention." Hammy editing tricks may have Dr. Oakley moving out of the frame to the right and popping up on the left, or cringing away from an animated, disembodied head that she has put on the screen to discuss a property of the brain.

Sitting in the Oakleys' comfortable living room, with its solid Mission furniture and mementos of their world travels, Dr. Oakley said she believes that just about anyone can train himself to learn. "Students may look at math, for example, and say, 'I can't figure this out — it must mean I'm really stupid!' They don't know how their brain works."

Her own feelings of inadequacy give her empathy for students who feel hopeless. "I know the hiccups and the troubles people have when they're trying to learn something." After all, she was her own lab rat. "I rewired my brain," she said, "and it wasn't easy."

As a youngster, she was not a diligent student. "I flunked my way through elementary, middle school and high school math and science," she said. She joined the Army out of high school to help pay for college and received extensive training in Russian at the Defense Language Institute. Once out, she realized she would have a better career path with a technical degree (specifically, electrical engineering), and set out to tackle math and science, training herself to grind through technical subjects with many of the techniques of practice and repetition that she had used to let Russian vocabulary and declension soak in.

Along the way, she met Philip Oakley — in, of all places, Antarctica. It was 1983, and she was working as a radio operator at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. (She has also worked as a translator on a Russian trawler. She's been around.) Mr. Oakley managed the garage at the station, keeping machinery working under some of the planet's most punishing conditions.

She had noticed him largely because, unlike so many men at the lonely pole, he hadn't made any moves on her. "You can be ugly as a toad out there and you are the most popular girl," she said. She found him "comfortably confident." After he left a party without even saying hello, she told a friend she'd like to get to know him better. The next day, he was waiting for her at breakfast with a big smile on his face. Three weeks later, on New Year's Eve, he walked her over to the true South Pole and proposed at the stroke of midnight. A few weeks after that, they were "off the ice" in New Zealand and got married.

Dr. Oakley recounts her journey in both of her best-selling books: "A Mind for Numbers: How to Excel at Math and Science (Even if You Flunked Algebra)" and, out this past spring, "Mindshift: Break Through Obstacles to Learning and Discover Your Hidden Potential." The new book is about learning new skills, with a focus on career switchers. And yes, she has a MOOC for that, too.

Dr. Oakley is already planning her next book, another guide to learning how to learn but aimed at 10- to 13-year-olds. She wants to tell them, "Even if you are not a superstar learner, here's how to see the great aspects of what you do have." She would like to see learning clubs in school to help young people develop the skills they need. "We have chess clubs, we have art clubs," she said. "We don't have learning clubs. I just think that teaching kids how to learn is one of the greatest things we can possibly do."

Video
A lesson from the course "Learning How to Learn." Published On Aug. 4, 2017

Four Techniques to Help You Learn

FOCUS/DON'T The brain has two modes of thinking that Dr. Oakley simplifies as "focused," in which learners concentrate on the material, and "diffuse," a neural resting state in which consolidation occurs — that is, the new information can settle into the brain. (Cognitive scientists talk about task-positive networks and default-mode networks, respectively, in describing the two states.) In diffuse mode, connections between bits of information, and unexpected insights, can occur. That's why it's helpful to take a brief break after a burst of focused work.

TAKE A BREAK To accomplish those periods of focused and diffuse-mode thinking, Dr. Oakley recommends what is known as the Pomodoro Technique, developed by one Francesco Cirillo. Set a kitchen timer for a 25-minute stretch of focused work, followed by a brief reward, which includes a break for diffuse reflection. ("Pomodoro" is Italian for tomato — some timers look like tomatoes.) The reward — listening to a song, taking a walk, anything to enter a relaxed state — takes your mind off the task at hand. Precisely because you're not thinking about the task, the brain can subconsciously consolidate the new knowledge. Dr. Oakley compares this process to "a librarian filing books away on shelves for later retrieval."

As a bonus, the ritual of setting the timer can also help overcome procrastination. Dr. Oakley teaches that even thinking about doing things we dislike activates the pain centers of the brain. The Pomodoro Technique, she said, "helps the mind slip into focus and begin work without thinking about the work."

"Virtually anyone can focus for 25 minutes, and the more you practice, the easier it gets."

PRACTICE "Chunking" is the process of creating a neural pattern that can be reactivated when needed. It might be an equation or a phrase in French or a guitar chord. Research shows that having a mental library of well-practiced neural chunks is necessary for developing expertise.

Practice brings procedural fluency, says Dr. Oakley, who compares the process to backing up a car. "When you first are learning to back up, your working memory is overwhelmed with input." In time, "you don't even need to think more than 'Hey, back up,' " and the mind is free to think about other things.

Chunks build on chunks, and, she says, the neural network built upon that knowledge grows

bigger. "You remember longer bits of music, for example, or more complex phrases in French." Mastering low-level math concepts allows tackling more complex mental acrobatics. "You can easily bring them to mind even while your active focus is grappling with newer, more difficult information."

KNOW THYSELF Dr. Oakley urges her students to understand that people learn in different ways. Those who have "racecar brains" snap up information; those with "hiker brains" take longer to assimilate information but, like a hiker, perceive more details along the way. Recognizing the advantages and disadvantages, she says, is the first step in learning how to approach unfamiliar material.

Tips for Writing a Personal Narrative

Purpose and Audience

Personal narratives allow you to share your life with others and vicariously experience the things that happen around you. Your job as a writer is to put the reader in the midst of the action letting him or her live through an experience. Although a great deal of writing has a thesis, stories are different. A good story creates a dramatic effect, makes us laugh, gives us pleasurable fright, and/or gets us on the edge of our seats. A story has done its job if we can say, "Yes, that captures what living with my father feels like," or "Yes, that's what being cut from the football team felt like."

Structure

There are a variety of ways to structure your narrative story. The three most common structures are: chronological approach, flashback sequence, and reflective mode. Select one that best fits the story you are telling.

Methods

Show, Don't' Tell

Don't tell the reader what he or she is supposed to think or feel. Let the reader see, hear, smell, feel, and taste the experience directly, and let the sensory experiences lead him or her to your intended thought or feeling. Showing is harder than telling. It's easier to say, "It was incredibly funny," than to write something that is incredibly funny. The rule of "show, don't tell" means that your job as a storyteller is not to interpret; it's to select revealing details. You're a sifter, not an explainer. An easy way to accomplish showing and not telling is to avoid the use of "to be" verbs (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been).

Let People Talk

It's amazing how much we learn about people from what they say. One way to achieve this is through carefully constructed dialogue. Work to create dialogue that allows the characters' personalities and voices to emerge through unique word selection and the use of active rather than passive voice.

Choose a Point of View

Point of view is the perspective from which your story is told. It encompasses where you are in time, how much you view the experience emotionally (your tone), and how much you allow yourself into the minds of the characters. Most personal narratives are told from the first-person limited point of view. If you venture to experiment with other points of view, you may want to discuss them with Miss Burke as you plan your piece.

Tense

Tense is determined by the structure you select for your narrative. Consider how present vs. past tense might influence your message and the overall tone of your piece.

Tone

The tone of your narrative should set up an overall feeling. Look over the subject that you are presenting and think of what you are trying to get across. How do you want your audience to feel when they finish your piece? Careful word choice can help achieve the appropriate effect.

RULES FOR WRITING DIALOGUE

The following rules should help you learn to write dialogue properly. Notice the punctuation in the following examples, especially. In addition to these hints on form, please remember that dialogue should be <u>natural</u> for the characters speaking (be sure to keep in mind your characters' personality traits).

1. Use quotation marks around the words which the character says:

   "It's sure cold out here, " Mark said.

2. Begin a new paragraph each time a different person speaks – this can help to cut down on the number of dialogue tags required.

   "Did you say your prayers tonight?'
   "I meant to, but I got to trying to cipher out how much twelve times thirteen is, and –"
   "Oh, we are lost beyond all help! How could you neglect such a thing at such a time as this?"

Remember to <u>indent</u> the beginning of each dialogue paragraph, just as you would in any other type of writing.

3. Only the <u>exact</u> words of a person are in quotation marks. Also, when splitting a quotation with a dialogue tag, do not capitalize words which do not begin new sentences.

   "I really don't know," he said, "whether she loves me or not."

4. When several sentences are quoted together to form a paragraph, put just one set of quotation marks around the whole quotation. (except for dialogue tags).

5. Periods and commas are always placed <u>inside</u> the quotation marks.

6. An exclamation point (!) or a question mark (?) is placed <u>inside</u> the quotation marks when it punctuates a quotation, but <u>outside</u> the quotation when it punctuates the main sentence.

   She looked at me and asked, "Are you alright?" (? punctuates the quote)
   Did the teacher really say, "Finish this today"? (? punctuates the main sentence)

INFORMATIVE Description	5 Exceptional	4 Skilled	3 Proficient	2 Developing	1 Inadequate
Focus: The text focuses on a topic to inform a reader with ideas, concepts, information, etc.	The text clearly focuses on a compelling topic that informs the reader with ideas, concepts, information, etc.	The text focuses on an interesting topic that informs the reader with ideas, concepts, information, etc.	The text focuses on a topic to inform a reader with ideas, concepts, information, etc.	The text has an unclear topic with some ideas, concepts, information, etc.	The text has an unidentifiable topic with minimal ideas, concepts, information, etc.
Development: The text presents relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and examples. The conclusion ties to and supports the information/explanation.	The text provides significant facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations that fully develop and explain the topic. The conclusion provides insight to the implications, explains the significance of the topic, and projects to the future, etc.	The text provides effective facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and examples that sufficiently develop and explain the topic. The conclusion provides the implications, significance of and future relevance of the topic, etc.	The text provides relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and examples that develop and explain the topic. The conclusion ties to and supports the information/explanation.	The text provides facts, definitions, details, quotations, and examples that attempt to develop and explain the topic. The conclusion merely restates the development.	The text contains limited facts and examples related to the topic. The text may fail to offer a conclusion.
Audience: The author anticipates the audience's background knowledge of the topic.	The text consistently addresses the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the topic. The text addresses the specific needs of the audience.	The text anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the topic. The text addresses the specific needs of the audience.	The text considers the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the claim. The text addresses the needs of the audience.	The text illustrates an inconsistent awareness of the audience's knowledge level and needs.	The text lacks an awareness of the audience's knowledge level and needs.
Cohesion: The text uses appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, creates cohesion, and clarifies the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.	The text strategically uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of text. The text explains the relationships between the topic and the examples and/or facts.	The text skillfully uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text identifies the relationship between the topic and the examples and/or facts.	The text uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text connects the topic and the examples and/or facts.	The text contains limited words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text attempts to connect the topic and the examples and/or facts.	The text contains few, if any, words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text does not connect the topic and the examples and/or facts.
Language and Style: The text presents a formal, objective tone and uses precise language and topic-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.	The text presents an engaging, formal, and objective tone and uses sophisticated language and topic-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.	The text presents an appropriate formal objective tone and uses relevant language and topic-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.	The text presents a formal, objective tone and uses precise language and uses topic-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.	The text illustrates a limited awareness of formal tone and awareness of topic-specific vocabulary.	The text illustrates a limited or inconsistent tone and awareness of topic-specific vocabulary.
Conventions: The text demonstrates standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).	The text intentionally uses standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).	The text uses standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).	The text demonstrates standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).	The text demonstrates some accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.	The text contains multiple inaccuracies in Standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.

NARRATIVE				
Description	5 Exceptional	4 Skilled	3 Proficient	2 Developing	1 Inadequate
Exposition: The text sets up a story by introducing the event/conflict, characters, and setting.	The text creatively engages the reader by setting out a well-developed conflict, situation, or observation. The text establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or complex characters.	The text engages and orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or well-developed characters.	The text orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one point of view and introduces a narrator and/or developed characters.	The text provides a setting with a vague conflict, situation, or observation with an unclear point of view. It introduces a narrator and/or underdeveloped characters.	The text provides a setting that is unclear with a vague conflict, situation, or observation. It has an unclear point of view and underdeveloped narrator and/or characters.
Narrative Techniques and Development: The story is developed using dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines.	The text demonstrates sophisticated narrative techniques such as engaging dialogue, artistic pacing, vivid description, complex reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.	The text demonstrates deliberate use of narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.	The text uses narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, and reflection that illustrate events and/or characters.	The text uses some narrative techniques such as dialogue or description that merely retells events and/or experiences.	The text lacks narrative techniques and merely retells events and/or experiences.
Organization and Cohesion: The text follows a logical sequence of events.	The text creates a seamless progression of experiences or events using multiple techniques—such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.—to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.	The text creates a smooth progression of experiences or events using a variety of techniques—such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.—to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.	The text creates a logical progression of experiences or events using some techniques—such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.—to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.	The text creates a sequence or progression of experiences or events.	The text lacks a sequence or progression of experiences or events or presents an illogical sequence of events.
Style and Conventions: The text uses sensory language and details to create a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters.	The text uses eloquent words and phrases, showing details and rich sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.	The text uses precise words and phrases, showing details and controlled sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.	The text uses words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.	The text uses words and phrases and telling details to convey experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.	The text merely tells about experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.
Conclusion: The text provides a conclusion that follows from the course of the narrative. The conclusion provides a reflection on or resolution of the events.	The text moves to a conclusion that artfully follows from and thoughtfully reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.	The text builds to a conclusion that logically follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.	The text provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.	The text provides a conclusion that follows from what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.	The text may provide a conclusion to the events of the narrative.