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Cover letter: One thing that you do, ██████████, is that sometimes you fill up space with unnecessary repetition of words. You did that in your cover letter. I would have liked to hear more about, for instance, how writing more makes writing enjoyable. You say that in the first quote, but you fill up the rest of the space with things like “I think you chose this quote because it relates to writing.” But, of course, I *told* you that they relate to writing. I know that’s a holdover from a writing habit where you fulfill the assignment by just writing a lot of words—regardless of what they actually say. But you are smarter than that! I’m calling your bluff. More substance and fewer empty words. This cover letter is at its best when you talk about how you can’t fear mistakes—they are just a part of writing. And it fits with what you say about the spring training quote and revision. Revision, more writing, as you’ve discovered, is practice. And practice helps us be better writers. The best answer is where you talk about trying hard. You said it: you only put in enough effort to get by. This cover letter shows that in many ways, while other aspects of your performance in our class show me what is possible when you really try. Cover letter/portfolio: B-

Reading Journals: I feel like I could almost say about your reading journals what I say about your cover letter. There is evidence of you just writing enough to pass and there is evidence of how you are much smarter than that. You wrote acceptable journals all semester long. I think that you have a few where I was kinder than I should have been—you avoid taking a guess at a thesis sometimes (grrr), but you *do* do the assignments, always. Reading journals: A

Revision of Top Five: ██████████ you didn’t include your original draft of your first paper so I can’t really evaluate the success of your revision—or even that you did any revision at all. As I read this draft, I find myself liking the same things before—the good details, the care you take to explain the scenes, etc. Where this paper falls short, is, again, thesis. You tell me that you are quiet, but that’s only really half of the thesis of this piece—which is also a lot about when you are *not* quiet and *why* you are not quiet at those times. And, even more than that, you are more complex person than your quietness might suggest—and that’s really what this essay is about. You really are “more than a quiet guy” and while the paper does a fair job of proving that, your opening paragraph doesn’t do that at all. Your last paragraph focuses more on the music and not on what it should focus on, which is that you are, again “more than just a quiet guy.” Your paragraphs, too, could have a sentence—just one—that says that. Some sort of do. Some don’t. I think this could have been a much stronger revision. Top Five Revision: B-

Alumni Interview: I like the idea of the first paragraph, though if you read the last two sentences in that opening paragraph, they sort of say the same thing. But you’ve got an idea for a thesis here—his life went off-script. My question is, for the better? What is strong about this draft is that you have a lot of information about Mohammed. I would have liked to hear more about the “cultural expectations” that his family placed on him. And I would have liked to hear more about how the NCUR application changed his path. And you have the possibility of a strong thesis. However, you don’t *use* the information to create an argument. You just list things. It is on you as a writer to develop the information into an argument. You need to actually write the sentences that make the argument for the reader. And those are missing here. If you had one more revision, I would tell you to thicken up your thesis, organize your information into chunks that show him changing his path. Decide if that change was for the better or the worse, and write the sentences for each paragraph that convey that information in a way that shows how it proves your thesis. Alum Paper: B-

██████████, you’ve got so much potential. Don’t squander it. Give everything your all. Semester Grade So Far: B-/B

Cover letter: you've identified what I think about when I read that quote about "the rehash"—revision makes things better. We agree on the second quote as well: mistakes happen, and, more than that, mistakes are often a place to learn things. They are actually good. And the fear of making mistakes shouldn't keep us from writing down our ideas. That's a big change and a hard one to make when we think about writing because so often our mistakes are punished. I was really interested in what you had to say about purpose in that last quote. You talk about trying hard, yes, that's a big part of what I want folks to get out of it, but I like the idea of purpose too. Hitting the ball is the actual point, so knowing what it is you are trying to do and writing your work to get there, that's nice. Cover letter: A

Top Five Revision: I appreciate that you took the time to attend to most of the grammar and punctuation (and capitalization) issues that I pointed out to you. I also value that you tried to make sentences I identified as confusing more clear. I think that is a more polished draft. I also see that you made the effort to craft a more complete thesis and to develop sentences in the body that connect that thesis to these stories. I think you were not as successful as you could have been, but I know that understanding what a good thesis is and how to successfully write it into a paper is hard. So credit where credit is due. Top Five Revision: B

Reading Journals: I know that these have been hard for you to keep up with. I only see three in the portfolio—American Hunger, Joey Coyle, and Mixed Blood. I don't see Why I Ride or Somehow Form a Family. I'd really like to give you full credit for reading journals. Reading Journals: B-

Alumna Paper: This is actually a pretty successful paper. You've got a thesis. Your opening paragraph is a little all over the place—you kind of say the same thing over and over. But you've got a thesis: Taylor didn't really have any role models and she did have a lot of responsibility, but she figured out college on her own and now she helps others do the same. More than most of your colleagues, you've got some organization too. I think you want to read your paragraphs and see where you repeat. You do this because you don't stick to one timeline. If you start with before school and her family, then move to during school and her family, then after school—and keep the same kind of info in the same paragraph and only use it once, you'll see you have a stronger argument. I like your concluding paragraph a lot. We also still have to work on those sentences. You still have a lot of fragments and you still have a lot of issues with verb tense. We should actually sit down, you, me and Luminda, and talk about sentences. Alumni paper: B/B+

█, you know I'm on your team. You've had a difficult first semester, but I can tell you are learning, even though it is hard, how to manage all of this. Your sentence level stuff needs work. And we've got to figure out a plan to you two girls to campus for classes. But I've got no interest in failing someone who wants to be here that bad.

Semester Grade So Far: B-

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Cover letter: Well, I haven't read everyone's portfolio yet, but I've read enough to know that I will not read a better cover letter than yours. You really put a lot of thought in to it. It might be one of the very best cover letters I've ever read from 101—ever. And I'd like a copy of it to show what a really great cover letter can look like. I appreciate how you talked seriously about how writing, in terms of revision, changes a paper from one draft to the next. And I really appreciate how you wrote about how writing, in terms of reflection, can help us to rethink about lived experiences. A teacher can't ask for more to have happen in a class. Your cover letter expresses, as well, the attitude that mistakes are part of the learning process and that, while we can always get better, it is in practice that we learn how to get over some mistakes—and learn how to make new ones and learn new things. Really interesting reading of the last quote—about evidence and thesis. I mostly think about that quote as being about effort—which you always give—but your reading is a really good one too. Cover letter: A

Reader's Notes: I don't really have much to say about reader's notes. You are a strong reader, and even when you are not sure about the thesis, you give the reading your all and make the best attempt. Your reading skills have actually gotten stronger over time. Reader's Notes: A

Alum paper: I think Libby would be so pleased to read the paper you wrote about her. You have a strong thesis that connects to ideas you open the paper up with. If you revised this paper, I would say that your focus should be on revising the organization of your paper—where your information goes in each paragraph, how the paragraphs are arranged, to prove your point. I would keep all like information together in the same paragraph. So a paragraph about seeming to have it all together in school but then school anxiety derailed her and not finding help at school. Then a paragraph about how her family supported her through it. See how that would unify info and make for an easy paragraph split? Then a paragraph about her first days at school and about giving up almost. Then a paragraph—a separate one—about how she found her place at school and decided to give it her all. Then a paragraph about her work outside of school in the after school program, focusing in on how she developed this work ethic (like she saw in her family), then her life after college—one paragraph about her personal life, then the important paragraph about how she became the person she needed way back when. Then move that paragraph about regrets and then your strong last paragraph. See how that would change things? Then you could think about the right sentences to transition in and out of this organization that would make your thesis stand out. Alum Paper: A-/B+

Top Five Revision: I like your new first sentence a lot. I think that you didn't need the *last* sentence of that paragraph, what you wrote there before it is really your thesis, and it's a really strong and complex one. What's changed the most about the body of this paper is your effort to tie your stories in to the thesis you are writing about. And I think you are mostly successful. It added length to the essay and if I had one more revision out of you it would be to rethink what you absolutely had to say and what, now that you've really clarified what you wanted to say, you could cut. But this paper shows tremendous care with revision and it is also super honest and real. It's a success. I'd love a copy of this as well. Top Five Revision: A-

You are a great student, and I wish you had a collection of classmates that not only liked the class but tried as hard as you do. I appreciate the chance to work with you.

Semester Grade So Far: A-

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Cover letter: I think you generally get the sense of what I'm trying to communicate: writing is hard and it requires real and serious effort to get better at it. We all make mistakes, and that can't keep you from trying, from putting words on the page. That's a kind of practice, and that practice will help you to be a better all-around writer. I like that you talk about fear—fear of mistakes does keep us from many things, and that is true about writing as much as life. To be comfortable with making mistakes, knowing that it is in our mistakes that we learn things, is to learn a lot. Cover letter: A

Reading Journals: you've been very successful with reading journals. You turn them in and you always try to find a thesis and use evidence to back it up. Sometimes more successfully than others, but, still, you get that that is the job here. Reading Journals: A

Alumni Paper: I'm glad you gave me this in our meeting yesterday. I had in my notes to ask where it was, and having it now makes this much easier. The strength of this paper is that you have a lot of information. You have a thesis as well. The thesis is a little cliché, and I would suggest to you that you think carefully about whether you are actually proving all the parts of it. Another strength is that there are real moments of you analyzing the information you got from him. But what is problematic is that the writing is all over the place. You have no organization. You need to group like information together in one paragraph at a time, and then you need to organize those paragraphs according to your thesis—you literally have *no* paragraphs. Your thesis seems to be the first sentence of your opening paragraph. Everything else in the paragraph just repeats it. That should be the other way around: your opening paragraph should build to that thesis sentence. Your conclusion works—but, again, it needs to be its own paragraph. Alumni Paper: B

Top Five Memoir Revision: I appreciate that you made your thesis more specific. I don't know that just changing what was literally two words actually convinces me that you've changed your thesis, but it's a start. Your opening paragraph is not really that different from before and doesn't actually get me to understand how this paper is going to be about learning leadership and perseverance. I can sort of say the same about all the other paragraphs. Much of the paragraph stays the same, but you make the effort at the end of each paragraph to say something about leadership or perseverance. I wish I had one more revision out of you to really develop these ideas and do serious revision on each of the scenes, but this was probably more revision than most of your classmates did, and it does show me that you know what you are supposed to do with a thesis. Credit where credit is due. Top five memoir: B+

Semester Grade So Far: A-

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Cover letter: ██████ I could not find a cover letter for the portfolio. Not in the envelop and not in the email.  
Cover letter: incomplete

Reading Journals: ██████ I have in your portfolio two of the five reading journals. You indicate that you've given me three, but I can't find the third. More than that, the two you've given me were U for unacceptable, and so that means that, as of right now, you have 0 of 5 acceptable reading journals. Toniza, you need to make the effort to revise these journals and complete and submit the other three. Failure to do so will mean that you have 10% of an F for the class.

Top Five Memoir: ██████ I looked online to see if you sent me a revised draft. I get a lot of email and so there is a chance that you sent me something but I can't find it now. I can't assign you a grade for your work on this paper unless you turn in a revision. You can turn this in with your final portfolio. BUT I WANT IT IN HARD COPY. I do not want you to send me an email that I have to print out. Top Five Memoir:  
Incomplete

Alumni Paper: ██████ when I click on the link you sent me of your Alumni paper, it says file not found. Here again, I can't give you a grade on your alumni paper—nor can I give you feedback on it so that you can revise it—unless I get it. AND I WANT IT IN HARD COPY. So you need to print out the draft you have and give it to me. I will give you an extension on the final portfolio until Wednesday of next week (19 December 2018) to get this together and to me. I will read an online draft for you to have feedback, but I want the final IN HARD COPY. Alumni Paper: Incomplete.

██████, you attend class. That is not your issue, but you don't do the written work of the class. I know you are afraid of doing it wrong, but the first step in learning to do it right is to turn it in and get feedback. This was the safest class you could have been in to do this work. I don't think you'll find other teachers who will be this understanding about late and missing work. This portfolio has next to nothing in it. I am going to assume you are going to get me this work as part of the final portfolio. If you do, you can earn as much as a B- in our class. If you do not turn in all of this material, your grade will drop to a D.

Cover letter: your cover letter was a little thin. It's really actually hard to tell what you mean from the little you wrote. I think you generally get the sense of what I'm trying to communicate: writing is hard and it requires real and serious effort to get better at it. We all make mistakes, and that can't keep you from trying, from putting words on the page. That's a kind of practice, and that practice will help you to be a better all-around writer. That said, you totally ignore one of the quotes and, all together, I don't even know if you wrote a half page. Cover letter: C

Reading Journals: You've only included two reading journals in this portfolio. They were both acceptable, so you didn't need to revise them. I don't know what those half page summaries or revisions or I'm not really sure what they are are supposed to be, and then you are missing American Hunger, Joey Coyle, and Somehow Form a Family. You can still turn these in if you write them or have them written. If you don't, you can't earn a passing grade on your journals. Reading Journals: D

Top Five Memoir Revision: You didn't include your Top Five memoir in your portfolio—not the original draft or a revision. I can't give you a grade unless you include both. If you don't turn those in, you'll have 10% of an F in your final grade. I know that you had a draft. It was not complete—it was really just notes, but I know you have something. So please turn that in with a complete paper. Top Five Revision: Incomplete

Alumni Paper: What I see here Kevin is not really a paper. It is a thesis—which you've put in bold at the top of the page. That thesis is a bit of a cliché, but it does fit Destiny's story so I'll go with it. However, you don't really have a paper, you, again, actually just have a list of things he did. It's almost all just what he said to you. To revise this paper, you need to write actual paragraphs—this paper should be 1500 words. Each paragraph would have one main idea in it, and, your paragraphs should be organized around that thesis. So you'll write how he knew that his road would not be easy—what parts of his life told him that? But he kept going—so what parts of his life demonstrated that he kept going through difficulty. What help did he have? And what hard work did he have to put in? You can't just list, you must develop fully formed paragraphs with introductory sentences and a body with evidence and then a conclusion that transitions out of one paragraph and then connects us to the idea you are going to talk about in the next. Alumni Paper: C

you attend class, but you've not been very successful at completing your work. This is not a strong portfolio. You want to make sure that your work in your final portfolio is strong and that you remedy some of the problems in this portfolio when you turn it in. If you want to turn everything in to me on Monday of next week, I will except your portfolio late.

Semester Grade So Far: C-