1 We Write Because We Care: Developing Your Writerly Identity

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Overview

Many college students write for one reason and one reason only: to complete a class assignment.[1] But students who subscribe to this view of writing—writing as merely a means to an end, a tool to achieve a grade—are seriously limiting themselves. In this chapter, a writing teacher and three recently graduated writers argue that writing can be used as a tool to build personal agency, develop resilience, and achieve social goals. In doing so, we introduce you to a variety of concepts that you can use to construct your writerly identity. Ultimately, we ask you to reconsider the role of writing in your life, and invite you to take that first, radical step of calling yourself a "real" writer.

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Introduction: What *Is* Writing, Really? (by Glenn Lester)

A few semesters back, I was working with a student in a writing class. The student, who I'll call Ana, was searching for a topic for an upcoming research project. The topic had to be related in some way to writing, and Ana was struggling. Ana claimed they had *no* experience with writing. Literally none.

A few minutes into our conversation, however, Ana told me about an art therapy program they had participated in. They had written some things there. Ana had found it helpful to write down what they were thinking and feeling.

> "But that's not *really* writing," Ana told me.

> "What do you mean?" I asked.

> "That's what I do for me," Ana said. "That's not real writing."

> "And you aren't real?"

> "But this is different," Ana said. "You're talking about *real* writing. Writing for school."

Does Ana's experience sound familiar to you?

It sure sounded familiar to me. For years, I've observed that many of my students write for one reason and one reason only: to complete a class assignment. Like many other student writers, Ana found it difficult to connect the writing they did for a grade with the writing they did for individual satisfaction. And because of this, it seemed that Ana's definition of "writer" did not include Ana.

But once Ana made the connection between personal writing and school-sponsored writing, their research project suddenly opened up. They could research and document the value of writing for therapeutic and healing purposes—a value they had personally experienced. Ana ultimately realized that they had *already* developed a writerly identity—and they could further define who they were as a writer *through* school-sponsored writing.

In this chapter, we want to help you make the same conceptual leap as Ana: from thinking that writing is merely a tool to achieve a grade to understanding how you can use writing to achieve personal and community goals. Ultimately, we want you to be able to articulate your own identity as a writer.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each written by a recently graduated writer— someone who very recently sat in your shoes. Each author will share their expertise and experience with an aspect of writing that is not school-sponsored. We explore three types of writerly identity:

1. Writing for *agency* (writing is a cognitive process you can adjust and control)

2. Writing for *resilience* (writing is an expressive tool you can use for self-discovery)

3. Writing for *social engagement* (writing is a way you can get things done in a particular time and place)

Throughout the chapter, each author will explore one of these writerly identities in more detail. As you'll see, each of these critical concepts of writing aligns with the ideas and findings of writing researchers and scholars from the 1980s to today. We introduce some of these concepts and theories, not to bog you down with jargon, but to help you begin to understand and define who you are as a writer. In doing so, we want to suggest that *who you are as a writer* depends much more on *your own reasons for writing* than on any outside definition or standard.

If you are a student who has already recognized the power of writing for building personal agency, resilience, and social engagement, then great! Come along as we explore ways to use writing for these purposes. But if you are skeptical of the value of writing outside of school—or if you just plain don't like to write—then please trust us, and keep reading.

Personal Agency and Self-Expression (by Taylor Lucas)

It wasn't until my first college writing course that the concept of a writer's identity came into play. Like Ana, I wasn't sure it was possible to think like a real writer and do "real" writing. In fact, the biggest lesson that introduced the concept of a writer's identity—and why writing mattered—was when my English teacher required students to get approval of their thesis statements before they could begin working on writing analytical essays. After careful consideration of the essay prompts and drafting and redrafting a thesis statement, I would finally, hesitantly, approach her with my thesis statement. She'd read it, hand my paper back to me, and ask me a question that sticks with me to this day: "*So what?*"

What she meant by that, of course, was that I needed to consider and clarify the implications of my argument, but I found the question *So what?* to be intimidating. *So what?* suggested that I had to center my focus solely around what the audience should do with my topic. I'd spent class periods carefully considering what angle and argument my teacher would want to read, hoping to write something that would please her, as she was my sole audience. Of course, the audience is important, but it is easy to forget that one of the most beneficial things that writing does is allow the writer to gain personal agency. It was easier to see the obvious answers to *So what?* I was writing for a grade, responding to predetermined prompts. As a beginning writer, it was difficult for me to accept that what I said held value

beyond percentage points and grades. I knew how to strategically meet my teachers' expectations, and I knew how to tailor my message to an audience. But *So what?* encouraged me to think about how writing could benefit me, personally, in addition to my audience. Through practice, I learned that part of writing is considering what I wanted to accomplish from my work and what I wanted the words on the page to mean to me; asking these questions allows you to start developing personal agency through the act of writing.

Even if you don't feel like a writer, it is imperative to understand that, like me, you will benefit from writing, firstly by developing personal agency. Educational psychologists Barry Zimmerman and Timothy Cleary define personal agency as your "capability to originate and direct actions for given purposes" (45). To me, "originating" and "directing actions" for a purpose sounds a lot like answering the question *So what?* So, because writing helps writers develop knowledge about themselves, their interests, their goals, and how they fit into the world around them, writing contributes to personal agency. In fact, you might not even know that the writing you're doing, whether you think it's "*real* writing" or not, contributes to your identity as a person, student, and writer. According to writing scholar Peter Elbow, writing can help students discover hidden meanings, explore their feelings, and communicate (2), all of which build personal agency. The development of personal agency can be broken down into several sections, including feelings/self-expression, thoughts, and actions/goals. What you'll notice is that all of these topics can be found in all sorts of writing that you do, whether for class or for personal purposes.

Part of developing personal agency means to discover and understand your own feelings. Writing theorist James Berlin suggests that the world around us "provides sensory images that can be used in order to explore the self… Authentic self-expression can thus lead to authentic self-experience for both the writer and the reader" (485). And when the writer *is* the reader, in a sense, then the writer can gain more perspective on their own, well, perspective. In other words, using language to describe your experience helps you understand your opinions and emotions regarding your experiences. Writers do this in several ways, including journaling, blogging, and even posting on social media, in addition to the more "predictable" types of school-sponsored writing like articles and essays. While you've probably been assigned a personal narrative at some point during your education, other forms of writing that you likely do frequently and by choice have helped you learn to express yourself too.

Sometimes the thought of consistent, assigned writing can sound difficult or overwhelming. Students might think that consistent writing means that they need to sit down for hours to write an eloquent piece of work that accurately describes and portrays exactly what they want it to. This may seem intimidating, but it is not necessarily true. Even writing a few paragraphs in your journal every day can help you process your emotions and retrace your thoughts. Berlin suggests that "discovering the true self in writing will simultaneously enable the individual to discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing" (485). In other words, change occurs on the individual level when you discover your own voice.

Writing also teaches you how to express your thoughts and feelings to others, including family members, friends, classmates, and even potential employers or professional colleagues. Writers face the challenge of explaining their opinions and ideas by blending passion and research. I call this a challenge because producing eloquently written work with the goal to inform/entertain/persuade the reader is not an easy task. First, writers have to learn to do research, which in turn teaches you how to evaluate sources and select critical information. Then, you have to relay that information, as well as expand upon it in a way that your readers can understand. This process of selecting pertinent ideas and communicating them efficiently is helpful in classroom, casual, and professional settings.

In addition to learning about self-expression and strong communication, writing teaches you to go out of your comfort zone and reach tangible goals and offers proof of self-growth. As I mentioned earlier, journal entries or casual social media posts can provide you with a physical trail of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In fact, any writing can provide this trail of evidence of your thinking as long as you keep track of it. Writing teaches you to challenge yourself to meet goals; completing a 5-7 page essay by the deadline shows you that you were able to achieve a goal. Continuing to meet goals, both in and out of the classroom, builds your confidence. You can take this one step further by submitting your work to literary magazines and conferences. Actions like this force you to brave the next step and share your hard work with others in your field. This provides you with tangible proof that you've written work worth being shared, and in doing so, sharing your thoughts and feelings with others.

So what? You've tried your hand at writing. You're starting to recognize that any form of writing counts as "*real* writing." And now you understand that any attempt at writing, whether it be an article or a journal or a personal narrative, or creative writing story, can help you develop your personal agency. Now it's time to begin considering your identity as a writer.

You might be thinking, "There's no way I'll ever be as good of a writer as my peers," but it's important to realize that everyone's writerly identity will look different. Comparison is a normal part of many fields, writing among them; when you catch yourself comparing your work to the work of your peers, remember to ask yourself, "*So what?*" What are you learning about yourself and the communities you engage through your work? What you're likely to learn is that there's no one way to be a good writer, and there's no such thing as a perfect writer, either. Simply putting your best foot forward will be the best way to start your journey towards calling yourself a writer and developing your own personal agency. As you take this first step to calling yourself a writer, you'll see personal growth not only in your writing style but also in your personal life. Perhaps your passions might flourish as you write about them, or maybe your ability to express yourself emotionally, creatively, and critically will expand as you learn to write consistently. As you build your personal agency and start to see your voice grow through all of the writing you do, you'll learn that writing also teaches you resilience, both academically and personally. In our view, "*real* writers" ask themselves, "So what, for me?"

Building and Maintaining Resilience (by Sydney Doyle)

Personal agency acts as a stepping stone towards understanding resilience and its role in personal and academic writing. What sparked my understanding of resilience in writing was a metaphor from one of my first college writing classes: *writing is a lot like training to run a marathon.* My professor went on: "Runners have to build stamina slowly to multiply their miles while minimizing their minutes—writing, and learning to write, involves the same kind of stamina." Sounds simple enough, right? It did to me. All it would take to have me acing essays and finessing fiction would be to write as much and as I possibly could—easy! But I quickly realized that, much like training for a marathon, developing my writing skills didn't mean simple repetition. Instead, I needed to develop resilience. After all, you're not a prepared marathon runner if you spend all your time training on the treadmill at a single speed.

Don't believe my metaphor? That's okay! Instead, take wisdom from writers David Bayles and Ted Orland, who remark that what is needed to write well is "a broad sense of what you are looking for, some strategy for how to find it, and an overriding willingness to embrace mistakes and surprises along the way" (21).

So, there are in fact concrete steps you can take as a writer yourself to build the resilience I'm dwelling on, and experts agree. Stephen Koch, an experienced scholar and writing teacher, suggests these steps:

1. *Begin*. In my experience, this is the most important yet hardest part of developing writerly resilience. Whether you're brainstorming for a school assignment, tinkering around with a flashy social media post, or even journaling for yourself, no writing happens unless you start writing. This is something that requires a bit of planning. One suggestion is to set a timer. Commit to writing for 10 minutes—*all* 10 minutes. No matter why you're writing, your timer will give you 10 minutes worth of writing that you didn't have before. And it's likely that, with repetition, you'll keep going beyond those 10 minutes. Looking back at our marathon metaphor, this is a lot like planning to set your morning alarm an hour earlier than usual so you can get out the door for a training run.

2. *Work and Rework*. While I'm sure you'll be taught lots of technical advice on what makes revision work well, from a resilience perspective, I like what Elbow presents when he advises us to "[eat] like an owl: take in everything and trust your innards to digest what's useful and discard what's not" (Elbow 264). Make sure to give yourself time to avert your eyes and mind from your first draft for at least a day before you come back to revise. Having some time away allows you to make some of the tougher choices you need to make during revision. For example, discovering the need to delete filler words or add supporting evidence doesn't usually come unless you've taken this necessary break. Think of it like resting your writerly muscles so you can get up and train again tomorrow. Revision is your "innards," and it takes a lot of resilience to learn to trust yourself enough to decide not only what your writerly innards are but also what this means for your sense of self.

3. *Finish*. Finishing what you start helps you end on a note of confidence. In your final draft, Koch advises to "keep up the momentum, but festina lente [make haste slowly]" (190). Make your hard, final choices here. Do your best not to let your masterpiece become over-manicured, and keep the finish line in sight.

If you take anything from this crash course on writing resilience, take the idea that resilience is not something specific to your writerly abilities. Practicing resilience in one aspect of your life tends to flow outwards,

making this something useful to you regardless of how you feel about writing. In fact, the experts agree again here. Recently, a group of scholars at the University of Michigan conducted a six-year study of how students wrote in college, ultimately concluding that "writing led students to various forms of personal and social development," especially when students took an active role in navigating their own writerly identities (Gere 320). Writing breeds resilience, and resilience breeds writing.

But, this leaves us to wonder: isn't personal resilience a very different thing from resilience in the classroom or a social setting? What does developing writerly resilience have to do with your identity as a person outside of writing, or in your community? We see some possible answers to these questions in our next section, which discusses writing for social engagement.

Writing for Social Engagement (by Alison Overcash)

My co-authors have shown how writing can build personal agency and resilience, which are two valuable intrinsic benefits that I have experienced as well. When I was in high school, I started writing in my journal every day to help me cope with my mental illness. Journaling allowed me to explore my emotions and personal goals while developing my skills as a writer. I also enjoyed writing for school, but ultimately, I found myself wishing that my words could actually make a difference in the world. I couldn't help but compare myself to my favorite authors, who seemed to have been born with a destiny to change the world, while I was simply writing into a void. While the personal benefits alone make writing a worthwhile endeavor, I didn't fully embrace my identity as a writer until I started writing for audiences besides myself and my teachers.

Once I started studying English in college, I learned that writers have the power to educate, persuade, and empower their readers by practicing the art of rhetoric. As you study composition, you will learn, just as I did, how to harness the power of language to engage with the world around you. To be a "real" writer, one must understand the rhetorical situation at hand, which encompasses the speaker, audience, and purpose. Even when the speaker and audience are the same, the act of writing that text is still powerful. Even when your audience only includes your teacher, that's still "real" writing. However, expanding this audience beyond yourself and your teachers can help you understand your own writerly identity and decide how you want to wield this unique power.

You may feel distinctly aware of your position as a student, meaning that you might feel more like a "writing student" than a "real writer." How-

ever, the writing that you do in your everyday life is just as valid as writing a novel or essay, and as Taylor points out, personal or self-sponsored writing has just as many personal benefits—and, I would argue, additional social benefits—as any piece of school-sponsored writing. You probably already practice various forms of digital writing, which involves applying the skills you learned in class to create creative arrangements of multimedia and text. Social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, etc. frequently use the same rhetorical strategies as an argumentative essay, even if this isn't done intentionally. In the *Writing Spaces* essay, "Four Things Social Media Can Teach You about College Writing—and One Thing It Can't," Ann N. Amicucci argues that the rhetorical strategies that students use on social media can also be effective in an academic setting. As with any essay, a social media post requires the writer to understand and appeal to the rhetorical situation at hand.

During my first semester as an English major, I wrote a personal narrative about my experiences with depression. After receiving some great feedback during a peer review activity, I revised the essay extensively and eventually got to a point where I was truly proud of what I had created. My peers encouraged me to share the essay with the people close to me that were mentioned in the essay. Every time I shared my writing with someone new, I was showered with compliments and deep conversations, and it felt like I was exposing a little piece of my soul every time, but it gave me a rush of excitement to show people what I was capable of doing.

"You should post this on Facebook," my mom had suggested.

I had laughed at the idea initially, and responded, "Nobody wants to read my homework assignments except for you, mom!"

However, I was so proud of my work that I eventually decided to rewrite it as a blog post, which I published on Medium and shared to my Facebook and Twitter accounts. Several friends and family members reached out to me to thank me for putting their own complex thoughts and confusing feelings about mental illness into words. Multiple people reassured me that my voice was important, and my words were valuable. By repurposing my personal narrative as a blog post, I was able to connect with people in ways that I never would have been able to if I hadn't stepped out of my comfort zone. Anyone can become a strong writer by simply considering their own position, their audience's expectations, and the specific purpose for composing the text, but actually entering the rhetorical situation requires you to share your work with the audience you are writing for.

In studying rhetoric, I discovered that the writers I idolized were held in such high esteem because of their ability to say the right thing, the right

way, at the right time. The next time you write something for a school assignment, a journal entry, or a social media post, I encourage you to reflect on the rhetorical situation as well as your own motivations for addressing that situation. These motivations may be a culmination of those we have discussed thus far, or you may have your own reasons entirely. Some writers choose to harness the transformative power of writing for personal growth, while others, like myself, use writing as a tool to promote social change. Now, it's up to you to figure out what motivates *you* to write.

Conclusion (by Glenn Lester)

I'm a writing teacher. And at this point in my career, I've worked with several hundred writers—all of them "real writers" in my book. But it's not my book that counts—it's theirs.

And yours.

Taylor, Sydney, and Alison are just three of my former students (who are now friends and colleagues). In this essay, each has discussed their own reasons for writing, and the moments, experiences, and readings that led them to construct their own writerly identities. Specifically, these concepts about writing that helped Taylor, Sydney, and Alison develop their identities as *real* writers. We hope that reading our stories will inspire you to discover your reasons for writing, and that you might try out elements of their processes and concepts as you construct your own identity.

For instance, in our "Personal Agency and Self-Expression" section, Taylor points out that she had plenty of practice writing in high school, but it wasn't until she began to consider the purpose of writing *besides* to earn a grade that she began to understand what writing meant to her. Having been challenged to go beyond her initial assumptions, Taylor began to see writing as a cognitive process that she could adjust and control. Soon, writing became a tool for Taylor to build her own personal agency. You might compare Taylor's experiences with your own as you move ahead in writing.

Likewise, Sydney's section on writing and resilience raises a series of interesting questions that you might attempt to build on in your reflections and discussions about writing in your college classes: Does writing, as Sydney suggests, provide an occasion to develop resilience in other areas of your life? If so, *how* does writing help us become more personally resilient? What does that resilience-building ability have to do with treating writing as a "series of concrete steps," as Sydney describes? Does the personal resilience built through writing act as a bridge to engaging in social action and solving the problems you want to solve?

Alison, in our "Writing for Social Engagement" section, offers a different perspective. Alison describes an early experience using writing to build resilience through journaling. But they did not *truly* construct their own identity as a writer until they discovered the power they had to affect readers through their words. The act of sharing their writing with others changed Alison's relationship to their own writing and its purpose. You might take note of how sharing your writing with peers, classmates, and friends—whether through an in-class peer review exercise, a campus literary journal, or some other informal publication—changes your thoughts about who you are as a writer.

Or take my former student Ana, who I discussed in the introduction. Ana didn't see themselves as a writer—even though they had a good deal of experience with writing—because they didn't see the writing they did "for Ana" as "*real* writing." But by conceptually reframing their experiences, Ana took the first step in the journey of understanding who they were as a writer.

So, constructing your identity as a writer is not as simple as selecting from a list of three, or five, or ten possible reasons for writing. You certainly can't learn your writerly identity from an online quiz or the Hogwarts sorting hat. What you *can* do, however, is experiment. Embrace the new. Try out a variety of purposes, genres, audiences, and processes. See if you can't alter your approach for each assignment, in order to discover what works for you—and to learn what helps you feel that both the writing you do and the writer you are are *real*.

Beyond experimentation, you might also find value in what other writers have to say about how they see themselves. For instance, in another *Writing Spaces* essay, Sarah Allen explodes the myth of inspiration by examining "The Inspired Writer vs. The Real Writer." Allen's essay resonates with me because it helps me understand that I can be a "real writer" even when I'm not feeling inspired. And in fact, as Allen argues, part of being a "real writer" might be writing even when—*especially* when—you aren't feeling inspired!

Another *Writing Spaces* essay, "Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters In Our Writing," Sara P. Alvarez, Amy J. Wan, and Eunjeong Lee offer a striking metaphor for writerly identity: "language architects." For Alvarez, Wan, and Lee, a language architect "works" language in order to help build up their community. What an original way to think about who you are as a writer! Or take this quotation from Wendy Bishop and David Starkey's "Keywords in Creative Writing," which describes the therapeutic power of writing: "Not only does writing help authors process the events

of their younger years, it also helps them grapple with the continuing . . . challenges of their lives" (180).

These three conceptions of writing can help me figure out what kind of writer I can and want to be. Like Allen, I want to be a writer who will persevere through adversity without waiting for so-called inspiration to get the writing done. Like Alvarez, Wan, and Lee, I see myself as building something—an architect of language who writes for and with my community. And, as I write, I will take heart from Bishop and Starkey's point that writing is a way of processing both past and present, and that its positive effects on me extend beyond finishing any particular piece of writing.

But just because these three perspectives resonate with *me* doesn't mean they will or even should resonate with *you*. Instead, my point is that you can start to build your writerly identity by taking note of what other writers say about *their* reasons for writing. So, as you explore writing in your college writing courses, take note of the writing advice that resonates with you—especially the writing advice that goes beyond "how to get a good grade" or "how to give your teacher what they want." Try writing it down! And take note of the new concepts you're introduced to—perhaps you'll spend time learning about *literacy sponsorship* or *discourse communities* or *social advocacy*. As you do, challenge yourself to not just learn the concepts, but also to identify which of those concepts can help you discover *your* reasons for writing, your own writerly identity.

As we composed this chapter together, one theme came up over and over: the idea that anyone can be a writer—and that everyone *should* think of themselves as a writer. There is not one "right way" to be a writer, and no one "right" reason for writing. Writing for yourself can be incredibly valuable. And writing for others can be equally valid and meaningful. But recognizing what makes *you* the *real* writer you are means recognizing your purposes and reasons for writing.

And so, we offer this new definition of a writer:
You.
You are a writer.

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Teacher Resources for "We Write Because We Care: Developing Your Writerly Identity"

Overview and Teaching Strategies

"We Write Because We Care: Developing Your Writerly Identity" is best used in an introductory lesson to first year college writing students, or in conjunction with a reflective writing task, such as a portfolio introduction.

The chapter explores what it means to be a writer, both in and out of the classroom, and looks at the benefits of writing, ultimately inviting students to think of themselves as writers by constructing what we call a "writerly identity." We proposed this chapter when we realized that most writing textbooks and resources—*Writing Spaces* among them—lack much consideration of the writing that we do outside of the classroom, and often fail to invite students to take that first, radical step of calling themselves "real" writers.

With that in mind, this chapter could be paired with a class activity in which students reflect on their prior experience with and knowledge of writing. We find that students, especially first year students, often benefit from a great deal of encouragement to find the confidence to challenge themselves to even *think* of themselves as writers. In fact, as Taylor reminded us during our collaboration, one thing that Glenn said in a class has stuck with her: anyone can be a writer. To achieve that goal of helping students consider who they are as writers, we suggest pairing this chapter with other *Writing Spaces* chapters that encourage students to think about purpose, identity, and community, especially Sarah Allen's "The Inspired Writer Vs. The Real Writer," E. Shelley Reid's "Ten Ways To Think About Writing: Metaphoric Musings For College Students," Quentin Vieregge's "Exigency: What Makes My Message Indispensable to My Reader," or Sarah P. Alvarez, Amy J. Wan, and Eunjeong Lee's "Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing."

Our chapter begins with an introduction that addresses a widely shared concern: what does it mean to truly write? The answer we propose is both simple (just write!) and complex (writing is connected to personal identity and community). But we argue that students can count *all* of the composing they do as "real" writing. Diaristic journaling, creative writing, therapeutic writing, researched academic essays—all of it counts as "real writing" in our book. So, a natural place for students to enter into this

conversation is with the question: are we correct? Does any and all composing count as "real" writing? Even texting? What about TikTok? If so, what does this mean for the work students do in their first-year composition courses?

Our next section discusses the personal benefits of writing. Taylor grapples with the question "So what?" and concludes that every student gains knowledge, skills, and a better understanding of the self when writing. This leads into one of the most important traits that we believe writing can teach: resilience. Students face challenges in the classroom and in their personal lives that require perseverance, and the acts of writing and revision are tangible activities that help instill this practice. Sydney takes up this theme in the second section of our chapter. This section could be paired with instructional activities related to growth mindset and resilience. Or, students might be invited to speak back to us by identifying times in which writing did *not* teach resilience.

We conclude with Alison's discussion of socially engaged, community-situated writing. This section of the chapter might assist with introducing a community-oriented or service-learning writing unit, or it might open a conversation in which students discuss how they could apply class concepts to the writing and communication they already do in the communities they belong to. Glenn has seen great success in student engagement when asking his own students to identify and describe complex, ongoing problems or issues that their communities face and using those problems and issues to generate writing and research projects. Responding to these concepts could motivate students to use their writerly identity to engage with their own communities, too.

Finally, all three sections of our chapter tie back to the notion of writerly identity. The most productive use of this chapter that we can imagine is one in which students think hard about who they currently are as writers while identifying possibilities for the writers they want to become.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the three sections of this chapter resonated with you the most, and why? Which section was most confusing or surprising? What does your response tell you about who you are as a writer?

2. What role has writing played in your personal development so far as a student? How about outside of the classroom? What ideas in this chapter do you anticipate using in this course or semester?

3. One way to develop your writerly identity is to compare various writers' reasons for writing and ideas about writing. To that end, read Sarah Allen's "The Inspired Writer Vs. The Real Writer," also found in *Writing Spaces*. Identify the common themes between that chapter and this chapter, as well as any differences in perspective.

4. Create a two-column chart. Label one column "writing for school" and the other "personal writing." Then, use the chart to describe how your experience differs when you're writing for school versus engaging in personal writing. (Remember that personal writing isn't always poetry, diaries, or short stories!)

Recommended Activities

1. To test our assertions about writing as a tool for building your agency and resilience, try this journaling exercise: use a convenient device, like a notebook or a mobile notes app, to document *one notable event each day for one week.* Write about what happened, why it was notable, and how you felt about it. At the end of the week, read through what you wrote about the week you've had and how you've felt. Then, discuss with your classmates how your attitudes about writing may have shifted as a result of using writing to document your observations and experiences. How does having a tangible record of your experiences affect your mindset and sense of your own personal agency, defined as your "capability to originate and direct actions for given purposes"?

2. Think back to the social engagement section of this chapter. Identify one community that you are a part of that is or could be impacted by writing. (Recall Linda Flower's definition of a rhetorical community, which considers how people unite for a variety of purposes around "affinities rather than visible borders.") Identify an issue, question, challenge, problem, or shared goal that the community faces. How could writing be used to approach this issue, solve this problem, or achieve the community's goal? What types of writing would most impact the community, and why? What stands in the way of addressing the issue or solving the problem—both from inside and outside the community?