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English 400
2 October 2006

Voice Exercise

One discussion about voice focuses on the ways in which writers use different voices for different projects. The following exercise is designed to explore the ways in which we use our voices in various forms of writing.

On Wednesday, please bring two pieces of your own writing to class. The first piece should be academic (although it can come from any stage in your career); there are no restrictions for the second piece. All genres are welcome, including poetry and fiction. Feel free to bring in writing that was the result of a collaborative effort. Additionally, neither of the writing samples has to be in final form. Drafts are welcome, because we should consider how we use our voices at different stages of the writing process.

Please consider the following questions in regard to your two pieces. No written work is necessary, but please make notes if it will help you remember important points for the class discussion.

1. Which piece do you feel best represents your voice? Do both possess this characteristic to the same degree?
2. If you feel there is an imbalance between the two pieces, consider the reasons for the discrepancy. Did you write these pieces at different points in your life, and would that explain the differences in voice?
3. Which piece did you enjoy writing more? Which challenged you more? What was particularly difficult or fun? Do you think either of these factors had an effect on your voice? When writing, did you have a sense of when you were using your voice and when you were not?
4. Do you consider one piece to be better than the other? Why? Is this the piece that best illustrates your voice?
5. Do you think you have one voice, or do you employ different voices for different projects? Has your voice changed over time? How so? What events or experiences in your life might have influenced this voice? What parts have stayed the same?
6. If one (or both) of these pieces was a collaborative effort, how did working with other people influence your individual voice and the overall voice of the paper? Is your voice still apparent in the writing? For pieces that were not collaborative, is it possible that interactions with other texts and people nonetheless affected the voice you used? What do you make of the idea that all writing is collaborative?