I’ve always loved reading and writing stories, but I was never certain if I could do it. I felt like I didn’t have the capability. But after taking Writing 2, not only did I learn the basic elements of writing, but I also gained some confidence in my ability to write. Now, I can identify the conventions in multiple genres that I’m interested in, including the open genre I chose to write in for Writing Project 3: comics. During this project, I was able to utilize numerous conventions that I used both consciously and subconsciously.

I chose a narrative style comic because I love to tell stories and draw, and I wanted to see if I could do a big project like this. As one could guess, this type of comic incorporates both story and artwork together. It has one main character talking from his point of view with visuals to support what he’s saying. However, the story is the base for the comic, so I addressed and refined it before I created the concepts for the main character and the setting, drafted the comic panels, and, finally, outlined and colored the finished version.

Since the story is so important, I had to be a writer first and an artist second. With that in mind, I started drafting the text beginning with my audience and purpose. People with low self-esteem were my target audience that I wanted to inspire. I know what it’s like to have very little confidence, so I hoped this would help bring back hope for people. Writing a narrative story allowed me to convey my ideas. Showing what the character experiences as he’s facing his trials and as he’s overcoming them are the biggest means of inspiring readers who have similar problems. In order for readers to relate with his feelings, I filled the script with the character’s thoughts. The character’s feelings of comparison and lack of belief in himself are the most important because the audience will be able to understand and associate with him. These relations to the character and his emotions were a huge basis for this whole story; without them, the plot would disinterest the reader and, therefore, diminish the purpose. So, it is important that many conventions emphasize emotions clearly. I used a Japanese anime/manga drawing style and story type because they suited emotional stories well with exaggerated facial expressions and allowed me to create a more fantastical setting.

Because I also had to address what I had learned about in Writing 2, I wrote about genre and literacy practices first to help incorporate it into the rest of the story. Then, I planned out the plot, which introduced the character (his love for stories and dreaming about writing them), explained the issue he deals with (difficulty with academic writing), confronted his depression (belief that he is a bad writer), and showed him overcoming his depression (understanding his strengths and weaknesses and becoming a better writer). The last two points were crucial because the audience might feel the same way, and they have to show that it’s possible to overcome that feeling. However, identifying the source of the character’s troubles beforehand is necessary. Depending on the author’s intention, a narrative story shows the source of conflict before or after the character faces it. If it is left unaddressed, then it leaves readers confused.

Next, I began writing the plot. This was set up as if the character was speaking, so there was semi-informal word usage using simple syntax. This included lots of personal thoughts using the first person, but didn’t include anything extremely informal like emoticons or slang because they weren’t necessary. If he talked too sophisticatedly, it would have made him sound like a more confident person, which would conflict with the purpose and oppose the audience. A simple vocabulary kept the character realistic and prevented him from being overwhelming for the reader. Furthermore, the simplicity helped connect every idea the character spoke about to the ideas before and after it, keeping a steady flow without interruption. For instance, on page five, the advice the main character received frustrated him because it didn’t help him
understand what he did wrong with his paper or how to improve it. The next point was his insecurity in his ability to write and his trying to cope with it. Finally, he came to the conclusion that he isn't a good writer and stopped trying to be one. Like cause and effect, the previous event caused the following event, and it continued like that for the majority of the comic. Because of the easiness in reading and the flow, most people will be able to read without difficulty. This prevents distraction from the story or pictures, making sure every element is equally represented. I emphasized a lot of emotion and personal thoughts in the text. This allowed him to be a believable and relatable person, causing an attachment from the reader. Without attachment, the audience might not easily perceive my message. I integrated Writing Project One and Writing Project Two topics after the character had learned everything from his class. The generalization also keeps readers who don't know about genre conventions or literacy practices from being confused.

After completing the plot, I drafted the character and idealized the visuals. Since the anime style allowed me to stretch my imagination, I decided to represent writing as robots. To fit the concept, I placed the setting in a run-down area of a futuristic tech era. Using robots as symbolism not only keeps the reader interested, but it also helps conceptualize essays in a more mechanical way. This is meant to visually illustrate how essays are built. Normally, I would draw concepts of these essay-robots and the setting for reference, but because of limited time, it was left for panel drafting. However, concept art for the character was necessary because he was drawn so many times; it becomes troublesome to keep going back a couple of pages to see what he looks like. He is the only important character in the story, so he had to have defining features that would imprint his image in someone's mind. The anime style lends itself to more extreme visuals, allowing me to draw a unique character with a lot of emotion shown. This was important because the story is so emotionally based, and readers will have those same feelings. Again, it comes back to relatability and attachment to the character. Most concept art for other comics has at least 6 to 8 head angles drawn, 4 to 5 full body angles with additional details on the clothes, and a page or two of expressions and actions the character does. But because of the length of my story and simplicity of the clothes, most of this process was condensed down to three head angles and frontal views of his outfits with base colors added when sketches were done.

Once I finished both the plot and character, I moved on to drafting comic pages. This was an extremely lengthy process because of how much thought it required. I read a lot of comics when I was younger, so I had a feel for how I should draw the panels. I first looked at the script I had made and visualized how the pages would work with each sentence. Then, I cut sentences up for each page. Generally, short stories like mine are about 20-30 pages long, which are about as long as a chapter in a more drawn out story; mine turned out to be 19 pages total. After that, I began to draw the panels for page. The panels that had important text or an impactful visual had a bigger box to help leave an impression on the reader. Text boxes often linked or lead into the next panel that is supposed to be read, keeping the reader on track. Like panel size, bigger text size will give a greater impression and show importance. I kept the images in the panels very simple (like squares, circles, or stick figures) to speed up the drafting process. Camera angles and body poses correlated with the emotion of the character in that panel. Both help emphasize that emotion, which, as said before, helps the readers feel for the character. Using facial expression alone wasn’t enough, as it would make the character stiff. In comics, an artist often depicts elated characters with their heads up high and chests out and the viewer’s perspective looking up at them, giving a powerful image. If the character is depressed, the artist might draw them with his backs bent over and their heads down with the viewer’s perspective looking down at him, making him seem small. These tactics are important tools for artists to create more interesting visuals. After finishing the sketches of the comic, I drew in the details. This included drawing the character and his surroundings, outlining, and, finally, coloring and shading. This was also a lengthy process. All the details of the setting were tedious, but it helped build the setting and feel of the story. This also helped me incorporate the citations visually, like how I made Mike Bunn’s “How to Read Like a Writer” a book that the character reads. I also drew Kyle Stedman’s “Annoying Ways People Use Sources” and the excerpt from Scott McCloud’s “Making Comics” as posters about armadillo road kill and the five elements of a comic. Once completing the sketches, I drew darker outlines, which is something artists typically do. These outlines help solidify the objects and make sure the pictures are clear for the reader to see. Coloring and shading were the most important since they gave more clarification and depth to the panel. Like camera angles and body poses, color and shading will emphasize emotion. I used bright colors in the beginning and end when the
character is optimistic with light brightening up his face. Darker colors are used in the middle of the story when he is experiencing low self-esteem. Most of the light source will be behind him, keeping the character's face in the dark. After all of these steps, the comic was finally finished. In the end, I was extremely surprised how much planning I had to do and how much time everything took, but that feeling of accomplishment was worth it. Now I know that if I plan to do this in the future, I will have to dedicate a lot of time and plan accordingly. This also applies to all types of writing. Without proper planning or resources, an argument will often fall apart. Proper conventions for the considered audience and purpose are also important. Their lack of presence will lose readers. And there are many conventions that come with making comics that I have to consider—I may find even more as I continue to practice. But for now, I hope I had made a successful story that would help inspire others.

WORKS CITED


My name is Grace Kusuma. I'm a third year biochemistry major. My dream is to create stories using comics or video games.
—Grace Kusuma