
Writer's Statement about "Getting Level 99 in Research: What Lies beneath the Online Mask in RuneScape"

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When I discovered I would be conducting my own research project in my ENC 1102 class, I realized immediately that the first major hurdle I would encounter would happen before I even began to write: I had to find a topic I enjoyed. I am a person who can easily become discontent with things—sometimes even those I enjoy—simply because I have to do them. I knew it would be important to find a topic that I really loved. . . especially since I would be spending an entire semester researching and writing about it.

I decided to focus around the MMORPG RuneScape because I have enjoyed playing the game for years, but I needed a more specific topic. With direction from my professor, Adele Richardson, I was able to put an academic name to a concept I was curious about already: the online mask. I was already aware of the ways in which I took advantage of this phenomenon, but I was curious to find out why and how other RuneScape players used the mask. While I knew very basic information about the online mask prior to my research of it, as a long-time RuneScape player, I consider myself to be knowledgeable of how the game and its players operate. I thought my experience with the game would make writing this piece easier; little did I know that this reasoning would actually create a much bigger struggle later on.

The next step in my writing process consisted of research, some more research, and meeting deadlines. At first, knowing I was responsible to meet the deadlines outlined by my professor seemed to be overwhelming and demanding. In retrospect, they were helpful; they broke the project up into more manageable tasks and actually made it less daunting overall. Additionally, I found it useful to create my own deadlines in order to meet those assigned by my professor.

After completing the arduous research and preparation necessary for the piece, I reached the ultimate impediment once I began to write. I struggled to find my voice in my paper and it was furthermore incredibly difficult for me to exude self-confidence in my prose. During one of my peer critiques, I was told that my paper was lacking "me." I had to work to figure out why, where, and how to correct that. I believe the difficulty stemmed from my topic choice; I was able to rely substantially on my knowledge of the game in order to apply my understanding of the online mask to the gameplay of others. While I conducted several interviews with other players, their answers often confirmed my suspicions. This often made me feel like I was missing citations and at the time, I lacked the confidence to consider myself an expert on the subject. I had to overcome this in order to succeed with my paper.

A majority of the obstacles could only be overcome by my own self-determination, but I could not have done so without the guidance of my professor, my classmates, friends, and my first editor—my mom. I cannot thank them enough for their feedback and am duly grateful to them for my success.