One of my favorite quotes begins “Birth is a beginning, and death a destination.” I like to think of life as a book, the front cover represents our birth, the back cover represents our death, and the pages in between represent our journey through it. I think our lives have chapters the same way a book does. Each part of our lives is like a chapter; elementary school, middle school, and high school each had their own chapter. Now I am in college, the current chapter in the book of my life. I have had my share of struggles, as everyone does, but I didn’t give up. As my freshman year comes to an end I look back and realize how far I’ve come, and how much I’ve grown, and I am amazed. I feel I have grown the most this past semester, not just as a person, but also as a writer. This portfolio has given me the opportunity to look back over my work, and in doing so I realize that my writing process has definitely changed.

          This class was unlike any class I had ever taken before. It really challenged me as a writer, thinker and as a student. In high school, everything was spelled out for me. The topic I was supposed to write about, the number of pages it needed to be, and the number of sources expected. It was a roadmap with specific directions on how to get from point A to point B. This class didn’t come with a roadmap, which really frustrated me at times. I wasn’t told how many pages it needed to be, or how many words or sources. I wasn’t even given a topic— I was able to pick one! At first, I enjoyed my newfound freedom of writing, but it proved much more challenging than I had originally thought it would. Sometimes the problem was coming up with a topic, and other times I had trouble deciding whether I had written enough because I didn’t have an assigned page length. In retrospect, I realize that I had never learned to have confidence in my own creative judgment; I used the rubric to measure whether or not I had completed the assignment successfully. This changed gradually, in part through the peer critiques we often did in class. Critiquing other students’ writing assignments and listening to their critiques about mine, helped me trust my instincts; a valuable lesson indeed.

          One of the most useful lessons to my development as a writer came midway through the semester, when the class read Anne Lamott’s “Shitty First Drafts”. Something Anne Lamott wrote really stuck with me, *“Very few writers really know what they are doing until they’ve done it.”* I truly understand what she meant. It’s kind of like a surprise, you don’t know what it is until you’ve gotten it. For example, I didn’t know what I was doing when I started this portfolio. I didn’t know what journals or class readings to include. I didn’t know what to write about; I didn’t even know what I wanted it to look like! I actually changed the layout about eight times before settling with the one you currently see. I decided to go with the mountainous background for a couple of reasons, but the main reason needs a bit of an explanation. After reading my portfolio, you know that I am Jewish. You also know that I lost my father 21 months ago. There are many prayers about giving a grieving family comfort, but there is one in specific called *Esa Einai*. The Hebrew translates to “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” So in thinking about the meaning of the prayer, and the loss of my father, you might now understand why I chose the mountains as the main background. The other pictures I chose for the “subpages” were to help give a visual as to what was on that specific page. For example, if you go to the page for [Journal 2](http://weebly-link/495373669710739962) you can make the connection between the pictures I chose, and the journal, which is about some of the ways I write.

          I never thought about how big of a part writing plays in our daily lives until I wrote Journal 2, which was literally all about the things we write, where we write them, and why we write them. Writing is everywhere! Someone wrote everything we read. Signs, posters, text messages, emails, it’s really mindboggling to think about. Sometimes when we write, we just get stuck. We can’t always see errors, or know what information we’ve left out, so it can be very beneficial to get a different perspective. Another reading that I thought was extremely useful to my development as a writer was Richard Straub’s “Responding—Really Responding to Other Students’ Writing.” This reading not only helped me better my way of responding to my peers’ writing, but it also helped me discover a new way of critiquing my own work. Getting classmates to look at your work can give you a point of view about something you may have not thought about, which can drastically change the tone/direction of the paper you’re writing. For example, I wrote a draft of my paper about NFTY, and had a [peer review](http://weebly-link/913852311200797318) it. One of her comments was that she could not get a sense of what the group meant to me. When I read her comments, I thought about what she said, and made some changes, such as including a couple personal experiences I had with NFTY in my [second draft](http://weebly-link/945265386763175071).

          However, over the course of this semester, I have figured out ways to do this more on my own. I’ve realized that my thought process has changed. Before I write something, I find myself asking a lot of questions that I didn’t even think about before, such as “Does this matter?” “What does it represent?” “What’s its purpose?” “How does this affect the story?”, and ultimately “Is it important enough to be included in this paper?” Asking these sorts of questions help me do the same sort of thing that listening to my classmate’s critiques accomplished—they provide me with an alternative viewpoint to consider. In a way, asking myself these questions helps give me a different perspective. One of the journals we wrote, [Journal 21](http://weebly-link/545959265484438882), was a list of questions to ask when analyzing artifacts for the final paper. And you can see in my [artifact analysis](http://weebly-link/319730559448179042)**,** that I used some of the questions from the list I generated to help me analyze them. I think that because I have begun asking these questions, when I do get peer reviews, I’m able to better understand some of the things they may say because I may have considered them before.

          Overall, I think that my experience in English 1101 was very beneficial because it helped me approach writing in a different way. Before taking this class, I used to write to meet the criteria I was assigned. Being able to pick my own topic allowed me to write from my heart in this class; now I just write until I decide that I’m done. It is like being full… I eat until some internal sensor says “That’s enough”… I now try to write to please my own internal muse. It is much more challenging to please myself than it ever was to meet the specific confines of an assignment… but even if this new process is frustrating at times, I take great satisfaction in knowing that I am growing as a writer.