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21W.730-5 Writing on Contemporary Issues: Culture Shock! Writing,
Editing, and Publishing in Cyberspace
Fall 2008

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WRITING AND READING PROFILE

Due Tuesday, September 9

As a starting point for the semester, I'd like you to spend some time thinking and writing about yourself as a writer and reader. In other words, I'd like you to compose a profile or portrait of yourself as a reader and writer, including your reading and writing history and habits. This is the time to tell me, please, if you have or believe you have any particular problems or difficulties with reading or writing. I would also like to know if English is not your first language.

Here are some questions to get you started. Feel free to include any other information you think important.

What do you remember about being taught to write or being asked to write in school? What were your successes, pleasures, problems, or confusions? What memorable things, positive or negative, have people said to you about your writing? What feelings are associated for you with your memories of learning to write or with the activity of writing? What role does writing play now in your life, and what are your present attitudes about writing? What goals do you have for yourself as a writer, for this course and for the future? What has your experience with writing at MIT been like so far (if you are not a first-year student)?

Now think about the process you go through whenever you face a writing task. What kinds of pre-writing activities do you engage in—reading, jotting, note-taking, daydreaming, procrastinating, munching, meditating, jogging, napping, preparing a place to write, gathering writing materials, talking with friends or colleagues about the writing you are about to do and your ideas for it? What sort of materials or surroundings do you prefer when you write? Do you draft in longhand or at a keyboard? Do you write successive drafts and revise heavily, or do you produce a more nearly finished version as you go along? Do you re-read your writing, silently or aloud, during the process of composing? What reference guides do you usually use—handbook, dictionary, thesaurus, spell checker? Where do you go for advice or response to your writing?

Are you a reader? Do you read for pleasure? What kinds of reading do you most enjoy? What do you remember as the best book you ever read? Do you have a favorite author?

Finally, I'd like to know what led you to take this course. What are your expectations of the course, of me, of yourself, of other students? What do you hope to learn and to accomplish this semester?

Your profile of yourself as a reader and writer (typed and single-spaced, please) is due in class on Tuesday. We'll talk about some excerpts (anonymous) in class next Thursday. I look forward to reading what you write.