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# Writing to Be: Mindful Composition to Promote Writing Transfer

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**Writing to *Be*: Mindful Composition to Promote Writing Transfer**

by

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A Thesis

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of

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### **Abstract**

This culminating project investigates the effects of keeping mindfulness journals in connection with being-centric awareness in composition to promote understanding transfer. Through analysis of journal logs using Burke's terministic screen theory and exploratory research methodology, the study concludes that writing can be a potential mindfulness practice when coupled with freewriting and meditation. It elucidates that freewriting when done as a part of meditative practice has the effect of lessening the worries and tensions that continually surface in the mind. The study also underlines the significance of critical thinking even in terms of taking a break from thinking.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1

### What Comes to Mind: Our Sleeping Self Awakens Our Inner Writer

My thesis investigates the practice of keeping a mindfulness journal to investigate the influence of writing transfer in composition practices.

Mindfulness is a phenomenon that has always intrigued me ever since I started learning English as a second language in a country where English is only part of school curricula. However, for my especial penchant to this language, I was always “mindful” of English when I studied it as for academic success and also while watching English movies or cartoon when I was in high school. To me, mindfulness to me was just paying attention to the language. I remember I used to encourage my students in Bangladesh to be mindful about English. In hindsight, I more or less warned them about the dangers of lack of mindfulness. Back in those days, I was not quite aware about the awareness aspect of mindfulness. In other words, I was not quite mindful about the mindfulness phenomenon in its full spectrum. However, my interest in this phenomena doubled when I saw the same trend (lack of mindfulness) in first-year writing students (as well as some graduate students) in the USA. Just like my Bangladeshi learners/students of English, the first-year writers here, native or non-native speakers of English seem to engage in a writing *process* that appears instinctual and unconscious—an automatic *motion* in which writing “just happens.” Professor Heiman has referred to this seemingly mindless way of writing as “going back to eighth grade,” harkening the time when they first learned how to write in a way accepted by the educational system.

What complicates the problem in both cases where it is the first-year writers in the US or second language learners in Bangladesh is their attitude towards English. By showing an attitude that they do not really need to write or learn English, they actually manifest the lack of exigence.

Many of these learners/ writers they have already learned what they need to—an attitude that limits their ability to be aware of their role as mindful learners/writers.

An article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled “Students Come to College Thinking They’ve Mastered Writing” (an informal study conducted by faculty through CCCC, TWTYC, and CWPA with 2200 students) reinforces this idea: “Eighty percent of faculty members said ‘some,’ ‘most,’ or ‘all’ of their students described feeling well prepared for writing in college” (Berrett). Despite successful attempts to motivate students to read college-level writing textbooks, arrange lessons on learning elements and methods of expository and argumentative writing, and require students to evaluate their peers’ work using these new writing tools, many students appear to make minimal, surface-level alterations to their long-standing writing process (if they make any changes at all).

Borrowing a phrase used by David Foster Wallace in his 2005 Kenyon College commencement address (which, not by accident, is a text we read and listen to in ENGL 191), students’ attitude regarding “how to write” or “how to learn English” may be described as a *natural default setting*. Though perhaps not “natural” in the same way as one’s genetics, the writing process is *normalized* and taken for granted as finished, complete, achieved. Consequently, students do not actively *act*, as Burke may say, but passively *move*—they are critical of neither what they write about nor how they write about it.

CWPA have provided composition directors and teachers with a concrete understanding of the “rhetorical and twenty-first century skills” that our students need from FYC in its “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing.” These skills—curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition—are characterized as *habits of mind* that inform future success. The eight habits of mind are

essentially ways of being that improve students' performance in other courses, enhance efforts in the workplace, enrich experiences within their personal and social communities. Collectively, these eight habits of mind translate as a singular expression of mindfulness, aspects that go beyond a self-centered, self-interested focus, inspiring growth by altering one's perception to see more of the world that surrounds them. Mindfulness, then, shifts away from a singular vision toward one that is multiple, peripheral, and transcendent in dimensions.

To better achieve a mindful state of being in the FYC classroom, I explore in my research project how the use of journaling—in this case described as a mindfulness journal—may instill in students' awareness of the limitations of their writing practices and thought processes contrasted with the value of what is taught in FYC to address those limitations as well as an invitation to meaningfully engage in the act of composition with an understanding of writing transfer.

Drawing from rhetorical perspectives on mindfulness practices in Buddhism, composition studies, psychology and Burke's concept of terministic screens theory and exploratory research, my culminating project is built to answer two primary research questions. First, how can journaling be done as a meditative practice? Second, how might this practice (of journaling) impact the ways (a) students practice/experience mindfulness and (b) apply their writing transfers as a result of such practices?

Accordingly, in the thesis, I explain the initial motivation behind my research topic; explore the current mindfulness practices in composition studies and theories in psychology; analyze how mindfulness journal logs may rhetorically operate as a mindfulness-practicing tool; and describe how such practice deepen understanding of writing transfer.

Besides generating some helpful insights regarding my research questions, this culminating project, and more importantly the process of it has deepened my own understanding about mindfulness and how it relates to writing. What I have found to be true from this study in relation to my research questions and my original hypothesis are writing (in the form of mindfulness journaling) can be an awareness-inducing activity when coupled with a proper journaling procedure. Also, I have come to realize the distinction between mindfulness and awareness. I see that one can be aware without understanding that he is not actually aware—a type of awareness, manifested in my initial journal design. Metaphorically speaking it is like looking at the picture for a while and understanding later that we were actually looking at the frame the whole time.

Mindfulness, more than anything else, is observation, at least in the context (writing) that I have looked at it. Lack of mindfulness can be referred to as “motion” as Burke would put it—manifested in my initial journal design. I was going with the motion (while designing journal procedure) thinking that I was doing the right thing as originally planned. Motion manifested in the design in the shape of, kind of an automaticity—journaling means writing responses to the three journal specific questions (Where am I right now?, What is going on in my mind?, Am I attentive to the present?). Also, the familiar design of journaling (just writing responses to questions) probably gave me some sense of satisfaction and complacency. However, “act” induced by critically observing my journals and the procedure (or lack thereof, at that stage) changed my perspective to what I was doing. After careful observation (also, with some very insightful advice from my project supervisor) I altered the method of journaling and produced different, so to say, the intended effects—raising some awareness regarding writing.

The takeaway from this study is that mindfulness does not arrive through sheer willpower. In other words, one cannot “be” mindful just because he wants to be—that rather is kind of mind-fool-ness! Mindfulness is rather a way of being—long, tedious and sometimes discomfoting and to some extent, certainly disorienting and last but not the least, continuous process of *becoming*. I learned that writing can help induce mindfulness when one reflects on his writing. In other words, when somebody observes what he writes—he is being mindful of it—or at least, engaging in a meditative practice. Also, when writing (journaling in this case) is coupled with a meditative activity, which may be a traditional sense of meditation, silent sitting, or some other non-Western form of being still; from an academic sense, it helps to take a break from thoughts and also help test out the being-centric awareness. In the next few chapters, I relate how I arrived at these understandings by way of developing mindful writing practices.

## Chapter 2

### The Journey from *Motion* to *Act* through Composition

Research on the conceptualization of mindfulness phenomenon helps me internalize that mindfulness is not primarily about thinking but about awareness of the self—the very *being*. As someone who has been interested in the mindfulness phenomenon from my background in learning a second language, I used to think mindfulness is all about paying attention to the thoughts going on in the mind. However, what lies at the heart of *mindfulness* conceptualization are two major characteristics that both the fields share: *awareness* of *self* and the subsequent *regulation* of attention triggering/leading to action. Buddhist scholarship, for example, looks at mindfulness as a clear *awareness* of one's inner and outer worlds: thoughts, surroundings as they exist at any given moment and how this awareness regulates attention and the following actions. Even though as a language learner I used to note how my thoughts in Bengali (my first language) got translated to English, I did not quite become a mindful person as a result of noticing those thoughts. I think the reason why my habit of thinking about thinking did not transform me quite as a mindful person is because my focus was always on the thinking part instead of the awareness of *myself/being*. And once I became proficient in the target language (English), it became automatic and I did not have to notice it/pay attention to it anymore. Also, while learning English just as a part of school curriculum, I did not start paying attention to English from the very beginning. My English studies rather started quite inattentively and un-aware.

“The cow is a gentle animal. It has four legs. It gives us milk. It lives on grass...” –these are few sentences from an essay (The Cow) I had to memorize during my early school years for English tests. Some other essay titles were The Horse, Journey by Boat, A Tea Stall and such. The essay topics for middle and high school English during the late 90s or early 2000s were not

much different in Bangladesh. The practice of writing (in English) used to call for nothing but rote memorization of some topic-related basic information and some sentence level knowledge of English. Such requirements and expectations were intended for the writer to have the ability to add a sentence or two in case he/she forgets part of what he/she memorized from the guidebook—this was middle plus high school scenario for *writing* in English. Such guide book essays all had one thing in common: they were written for memorization for passing the English tests. Growing up in the 90s in a country where English was just a part of school curriculum, I did not think about English at all neither did feel the necessity to do so.

First year undergraduate English *foundation* (foundation after twelve years for formal instruction!) class in Bangladesh introduced us to five paragraph essays which still did not explicitly require any substantial engagement of *mind* or better put, *critical* thinking from rhetorical perspectives as far as writing is concerned. This may sound like I am discounting my previous education backgrounds, but I am not. I am pointing out at these issues as problematic aspects of English education or language instruction as a whole, which was (probably still is) devoid of the focus of *language* itself or how it works.

The undergraduate literature courses I enrolled in were not particularly focused on the *writing* aspect. My Master in Literature from Bangladesh also did not focus much on writing either. My most-recent Master degree in teaching English as a second language (TESL) was understandably geared towards the language *learning* and *teaching* theories and not so much on writing. The TESL classes here also did not touch upon the rhetorical aspects of writing. I am not saying that I did not learn anything from my previous education in English. However, I am trying to articulate the different focus that I was exposed to before I enrolled in rhetoric and writing program. Writing the seminar papers for TESL, or going through comprehensive exams for

literature had me thinking more from pedagogical or literary perspectives of language, than from point of view that elaborates the connection between writing and rhetoric or the symbolic power of language as a whole.

With my long familiarity with English, almost automatic skills in the language and a couple of Master degrees in it (English) had me thinking that classes in the new program (Rhetoric and Writing) and another culminating project for this (program) will be a walk in the park. However, I was quite unaware about the discourse community and ways about addressing them in this new concentration/program. In my papers and the drafts of culminating project (proposals), I felt that something is missing in them. I was not noticing what and how what I was writing for this major is different from the writings I have done previously. In other words, I was writing like I was writing for my TESL Master program, very methodically which often lacked a personal narrative and rhetorical aspects like exigence. Therefore, my prior knowledge about writing or the pattern of it manifested in my writing without my conscious efforts. The writing transfer, thus, was happening unconsciously.

When I became aware of this unconscious transfer, I looked at the scholarship of transfer. David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon are two educational psychologists who have been studying knowledge transfer for nearly three decades. In their 1992-piece *Transfer of Learning*, they note “the transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials.” Perkins and Salomon state that students’ ability to transfer knowledge depends on one key phenomenon—thinking about thinking—metacognition—in other word. To apply *prior* knowledge which is central for transfer, students must be able to *notice* similarities or dissimilarities (for that matter) in between contexts. The Ellon Statement about writing transfer developed by 45 writing researchers also

talks about this metacognitive aspect of transfer, “Writers consistently draw on prior knowledge to navigate within and among various contexts for writing and learning.” As a writer, I was drawing information from my previous writing background. However, there are two problems happening there, first, I was unaware that I was writing like before, and second, I was not quite aware that my previous writing style does not apply in context of my new program. Therefore, the *unaware* transfer caused the issue of misapplication of transfer something that is talked about in transfer scholarship. FitzGerald notes about the importance about the application versus the *misapplication* of transfer.

The issue of noticing or not noticing similarities and differences and hence being *mindful* in anything from academia to personal life hardly happens perhaps because we are always busy doing, thinking, prioritizing, noticing something over the other. We hardly ever focus on our self, our *being*. That is perhaps why we might notice writing or language in context while in other, we are completely (at least I was) oblivious of required awareness for a different setting.

I am not alone with this issue of awareness. Awareness or lack thereof has been an issue in the field of composition rather for long. Crowley’s article about the student writers’ “unawareness” issue dates way back in her 1975 piece, “Many students, *unware* of this relationship, concentrate on a paper as an isolated entity, as a product with an end to in itself—a one-shot deal—and not as an ongoing communication process. (Crowley).” What is interesting in Crowley’s assertion is how students see the papers they write—an *isolated* entity. As if the papers are not a part of them. They do not have any relationship with it. Crowley seems to be getting at the *missing* connection between the *product* and the *producer*. Or, in other words, students are simply *unaware* that such connection exists or can be forged.

Students' *unawareness*/lack of awareness about the connection between their papers and them is still a problem. Discussions about and around this issue circulate in different fashion. For example, in 2011 writing faculties nationwide publish a document called framework for success in post-secondary writing where they voice their concerns about students' *writing* awareness which ultimately becomes a question of their "college readiness". To resolve this issue (lack of college preparedness) two-and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide have presented a framework that identifies the "rhetorical and twenty-first century skills" and *habits of mind* and experiences to be critical for success in college (Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, 1).

The *habits of mind* referred by the concerned advocates of the framework as "ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students' success in a variety of fields and disciplines". Such *habits* are characterized by eight habits: Curiosity, Openness, Engagement, Creativity, Persistence, Responsibility, Flexibility and Metacognition (Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, 1). Attention and awareness are the two main foci in each of these habits. The framework suggests the teachers to develop appropriate assignments and activities "to foster the kind of *thinking* that lies behind these habits... (4).

When I came to learn about the habits of mind and composition studies' concentration on awareness or lack thereof, as a field, I was more curious into finding out what compositionists say in particular regarding this issue. I learned that some prominent compositionists do advocate for meditative/mindfulness practices like yoga to instill *awareness* in the students. For example, Wenger have her students practice yoga at the start of every writing class to cultivate *attentiveness* where students can be relaxed and attentive at the same time (Wenger). Meditative

practices like yoga or expressive writing tap into students'/writers' awareness grounding them in the *current* moment. Raising the level of attention is then the focus of what these meditative practices in composition studies generally try to address.

Wenger teaches yoga lessons to her writing students at the beginning of every class and how these lessons/sessions are mostly about paying close attention to breaths—as an attempt to ground her students in mindfulness. She, along with her students, goes through this procedure of mindful breathing known as *pranayama* meditation in her writing class to cultivate *attentiveness* as she shares in her piece. As part of the procedure, she first asks her students to close their eyes, notice their breath mindfully and work on them (breaths) to be relaxed and attentive at the same time. When students have worked on their breaths and been free of any tensions, she asks them to *think* about an intention and free-write for some time. After such meditative procedures, she and her class feel ready to be “plunged into” their “classroom work with mindfulness”. In Wenger’s own words, “Students who use *pranayama* as a regular composing ritual begin to appreciate as a site of learning and to understand writing as a somatic experience that occurs with and through the flesh. And students who self-consciously engage in these embodied writing practices develop, in turn, a greater metacognitive awareness of the writing process, reflected in their writing about writing (12). It is therefore, clear that Wenger’s central concern in the practices that she does is raising students’ metacognitive skills, the ability to *think* about thinking. This objective of hers is very much in line with that is proposed by the WPA framework and resonates with the habits of mind that it suggests as it works on honing students’ attention skills.

Garretson tried mindfulness practices in her ESL classes to work on students’ attention and focus. Garretson explores the probability of the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation in

ESL classrooms to accelerate different aspects of writing practices as well as reading that, according to her remain ignored in the traditional pedagogies (Garretson, 52).

As kind of a way to test out how effective mindfulness turns out to be in the free writing process, she performs a special “ritual” which is different from that of Wenger’s. Instead of calling focus to breath, students in her class, focuses on the *sound* of a chime. Garretson’s “ritual” includes students being ready with pen and paper, their feet on the ground and most importantly, their focus on the sound of the chime which marks the beginning, continuation and end of free writing exercise. She claims that this chime aided the students in the writing process by helping them remain *focused* in their writing. She used the chime sound for the reading activities as well.

According to Garretson, the use of chime kept the students focused on their *task* in that it helped students to be more observant of their readings. She sees a direct connection between the sound of the chime and students’ ability to “shift and mold” their attention. She claims that her “mindfulness” practice entails primarily to the idea of *noticing* among other things which in effect assists students grow their *reflective* abilities to write and better comprehend reading, too. In terms of the practices that Garretson had their students go through it is also clear that she also aimed at having her students practices their *meta-cognitive* (thinking about thinking) skills.

I found Carillo’s recent study on “mindfulness” very interesting since it seemingly focuses on reading in terms of the intentional and attention-related aspects of mindfulness phenomenon rather than awareness facets of the concept. What got me particularly curious about her piece is her denunciation of the spiritual “connotations” of the phenomenon, “...I emphasize its [mindfulness] metacognitive associations as opposed to its spiritual connotations (11).” For her, *mindfulness* in reading, “describes a particular stance on the part of the reader, one that is

characterized by intentional awareness of and attention to the present moment, its context, and one's perspective". Interestingly, I noticed that even if she kind of denounces the spiritual aspect of mindfulness which she does not elaborate on in what or how she defines spirituality, she does acknowledge that mindfulness "is a way of being." What was confusing to me was Carillo's stance on mindfulness. Even if she clearly acknowledges that mindfulness is primarily about the "being", "...the concept of mindfulness highlights not just the task that one does mindfully but the individual, the reader, who is learning *to be* mindful (11)", she stresses on the metacognitive, aka, the *thinking* aspect of the phenomenon.

Other compositionists, in my findings, show a similar pattern of stressing the thinking aspect of mindfulness. Compositionist Keith Kroll, for example, advocates for "...a (writing) classroom that values thoughtful silence, requires meditation and in-class writing, offers no grades, and asks them to reflect (Keith, 76)." As for meditative purpose/practices Keith asks his students to write personal essays which in his opinion "to be present and pay attention to their own lives (73)." Therefore, Keith seeks to root *mindfulness* in his students through the *reflective* practice of personal writing. Reflection, again, at its core, is about thinking.

My research about mindfulness in composition studies reached me to interesting and rather very-recent work by compositionist Elizabeth Wardle. The reason I was particularly interested in her work is not only because hers addresses aspects of mindfulness but writing *transfer* issues, as well—a problem/issue that resonates with me (my writing-related issues). In her work, she addresses a unique problem—the issue of *genre* in first-year writing curricula. According to her, the writing that students do in FYC often do not pertain to any particular genre of writing which gives rise to the problem of *mutt-genre*—something Wardle addresses in greater length in her paper (the term *mutt-genre* is originally coined by professor Jamie Heiman,

Wardle). She proposes—the Writing about Writing (WAW) framework to be adopted to solve the mutt-genre problem of the first-year composition curricula across the nation. It seemed to me that this framework basically asks the students to be *mindful* about the content and practices of writing. She makes her assertion very clear, “...the nature of that content nearly *requires* students [reflect] on their own writing practices and the writing practices in courses across the academy.” When students *notice* what they write for different classes and how those assignments across the disciplines vary or match—that’s when they learn *about* writing. According to her, such writing practices will raise students’ awareness about writing process and better help them “transfer” their writing knowledge in other contexts and probably after college (Wardle).

Even though her framework is really unique in more ways than one, it is also very much thinking-centric. This trait is evident in her own assertion when she comments about the efficacy of this proposed and tested framework. According to her, the students will learn about writing by writing and thus, “...move students’ ideas about language and writing from the realm of the automatic and unconscious to the forefront of their *thinking* (v)”. She does not explicitly address mindfulness in her later works like the *Writing about Writing: A College Reader* book even though she cites Solomon and Perkins emphasis on mindfulness in connection with transfer knowledge. Her references piqued interest in me about these two early theorists of transfer of knowledge.

When I looked at Solomon and Perkins’ seminal work entitled “Transfer of Learning”, I found that they list mindfulness as a condition for transfer of learning which in their words, “...would foster both of those [explicit abstraction and active self-monitoring]” (6).

Mindfulness, therefore, is crucial for writing, for awareness and for transfer of learning. However, the mindfulness practices that is advocated in the field by the prominent

compositionists demonstrate one common flaw—they all focus on thinking aspect of the phenomenon, even though some compositionists (like Carillo) admits it (mindfulness) is centrally about a way of *being*. It turns out to me that even though we want our students (and perhaps ourselves, too) to be mindful, to be aware, we consciously or un/subconsciously skip one major step—looking at the inner/own selves, our own *being*. None of the compositionists discussed above make awareness at the forefront of the practice. Even though such attempts are noticed in yoga practices that Wenger does or Garretson’s chime sounds, they are centrally motivated by *thinking*-centric mindfulness.

The practices and framework like yoga, chime sound or WAW are all good but they lack the *being*-centric awareness/mindfulness. It looks like I am not alone in discovering this ongoing trend or caveat if I may call so, in the field of composition. Mathiues’ statement in this regard weighs in very relevantly: “In still other words, as writing teachers we have mostly been teaching the thinking parts of the brain, but that is only part of the mental apparatus that our brain conduct (17).” Mathieu’s observation that writing teachers “mostly” *teach* the thinking part of the brain is spot-on and explicitly correlates with what I have discussed about the existing works and mindfulness practices in our field.

Mathieu’s article intrigued me more about the importance of *being*-centric mindfulness as she reiterates/reconfirms what I earlier found out about mindfulness when I looked at Buddhist scholarship and psychology to learn about it (mindfulness). To relate how Mathieu taps into the core component of mindfulness, aka, awareness and how that is central to understanding the concept and its relation to writing transfer, I should, perhaps, present my synthesis about what I found about this phenomenon in these two crucial sources (Buddhist scholarship and the field of Psychology).

Basically, referring to the “presence of mind” as a mode of consciousness, the term “mindfulness” derives from Pali language word “sati” which means “to remember” (Bodhi; Nyaniponika). Generally, the concept of *Mindfulness* is rooted in Buddhist psychological traditions and, also discussed extensively in empirical psychology. What lie at the heart of *mindfulness* conceptualization are two major characteristics that both the fields share: *awareness* of *self* and the subsequent *regulation* of attention triggering/leading to action. Buddhist scholarship, for example, looks at mindfulness as a clear *awareness* of one’s inner and outer worlds: thoughts, surroundings as they exist at any given moment and how this awareness regulate attention and the following actions (Brown et al., 212). When a person is *mindful*, he is aware of his own thoughts and surroundings and this *awareness* enables him to regulate his attention and following actions. When it comes to empirical psychology, its attempts to define the concept in clear terms are evident. All these definitions, primarily by psychologists, however, clearly share some characteristics of *mindfulness* as conceptualized in Buddhism. For example, Olendzki defines mindfulness as “a capacity to be aware of internal and external events and phenomena, rather than as the objects of a conceptually constructed world (253).” A mindful person, in Olendzki’s term then, will not just be in immediate contact with events as they occur, he will also be flexible and objective about them as he is attentive about his psychological and behavioral responses regarding them. Brown and Ryan’s also emphasize on the same point where they describe mindfulness as “a receptive attention to and awareness of the present events and experience.” Quite in similar line of thoughts, they also reiterate the mindful person’s consciousness of the things happening around him and his inner reactions to them. Similarly, Bishop et al identify *awareness* and *attention* as the determining components in conceptualization of mindfulness: “mindfulness begins by bringing awareness to current

experience—observing and attending to the changing field of thoughts, feelings and sensations from moment to moment—by regulating the focus of attention” (Bishop et al., 232). Besides activating a person’s attention, mindfulness also permits him to do more with it: regulating the focus of it (attention). Because of activating attention and the subsequent regulation of it, mindfulness, according to other researchers, is an *awareness* that is non-elaborative, nonjudgmental, *present*-centered that acknowledges and accept each thought, feeling or sensation as it arises in the attentional field (Shapiro & Schwartz; Williams & Teasdale).

Mindfulness starts with awareness of *self*. In other words, attention or thinking is not the focal point of mindfulness—something Mathieus rightfully/boldly points at, “What mindfulness practices share in common is that they’re not about thinking. In fact, thinking and the intellect are the very problem they seek to counter (18).” Being just a graduate student may I dare say the reason why students (first year or graduate like me) still lack awareness, misapply writing transfer because we have not hit the jackpot quite yet: *being*-centric mindfulness. Whether I feel I have the agency to do it or not Mathius, already points at this gap explicitly, “...the focus on awareness has remained at the periphery of the discipline (15).” She proposes to bring awareness-centric practices in the forefront of the discipline. She points out that teaching of awareness could be supplementary to teaching to intellectual tools that writing teachers already train their students in. What I found to be the most striking information in her article was the connection between awareness and neuroscience. Citing studies from recently-found information from the field of neuroscience, she informs that awareness resides in a separate compartment of the brain than that of the one that houses thinking. It goes without saying we as writing teachers or students have not done much to tap into that part of the brain.

Mathieu practices *being*-centric mindfulness through practices meditation, mindful breathing, discussion of empathy. While all these practices can be effective for raising awareness of *self*, I proposed a new framework for awareness-centric mindfulness—one that is grounded in writing. In other words, my proposed framework is one that is for being/self but one that is through writing and by writing—*journaling* as a mindfulness practice or keeping a *mindfulness* journal.

The reason why *self* is central to the framework that I am proposing/talking about is not only because awareness of being/self/ self-awareness is a major component of mindfulness phenomenon but also because it (self-awareness) serves to remind that our thought or thinking is just as much a part of us as it is separate (from us). It is a way to reverse Cartesian tradition that permeates traditional writing instruction that values “the writer’s writing” instead of *writer* writing as Yagelski puts it (15). In other words, the journal is a way to shift that writer’s own focus to his physical self/presence and examine what effect that has on the writer and his writing as his being. Yagelski piece also underlines the complexity of the idea of self while we write as he states, “At the moment of writing, our consciousness (both of our self and of whatever we are writing about), our bodies (both in the sense of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of speech as embodied thought and in the sense of the physical activity of writing), and the present moment all merge.” It is probably not very difficult to see from what Yagelski is alluding to that the focus to “self” can be lost while this “merge” is happening (while the writer is engaged in the act of writing).

The mindfulness journal framework that I tested aligns with the idea of “bio-rhetoric”—that James Corder talks about where, each of us as he notes, “is a rhetorician”. What is at the heart of Corder’s bio-rhetoric is each of us has a distinctive style which can be interpreted as our distinctive “rhetoric”. However, we, as he notes, do not often explore that capability (“Often as

not, we don't." 158). To awaken that dormant rhetorician *self*, he proposes us to practice psychoanalysis. "Psychoanalysis consists in talking, waiting, learning and talking again in emerging toward an authentically said self, perhaps after stammers and long silence (168)." Through the mindfulness journal, the students stop, write about their current moment and thoughts and go back to writing again only to pause again to discover/check into their lost "self". In a way, then this journal logs are intended to give students awareness raising breaks which coincides with Mathieu's idea of giving students breaks from thinking "to cultivate awareness". Now what this journal looks like is something I elaborate next.

The mindfulness journal was designed to help students ground in the current moment and making them *become* mindful which hopefully in effect impacts their writing practices. I think writing *mindfulness* journal may have a dual impact: making students' aware/conscious about their-*selves* (thus fulfilling the first condition of mindfulness) and, also honing their transfer skills (as mindfulness is a precondition for transfer of learning).

The mindfulness journal has the following questions with which the students checks in to the current moment, to their being:

1. Where am I at right now? (first check into the present moment, intended to draw bring back attention of the physical *presence* of the writer)
2. What exactly is going on in my mind? (Tracking current thoughts and halting them)
3. Am I *attentive* to the *present* moment? (second check into the thinking-writer's *being*)

These journal questions and possible entries were designed to stop the ever-running *train* of thought in our head, *be* aware of ourselves, *be* in *present* moment and perhaps appreciate it (the current *being*). Thus, the mindfulness this journal intends to achieve an awareness that is

rooted in the current-*being* of the writer. However, the original design of the mindfulness journal was revised and some parts were added to it which I elaborate in chapter 3.

The mindfulness journal was a step towards that direction: company of awareness, a regular and a constant one that reminds us who and where we are, our physical self at the present moment to bring back the lost-self into thinking or perhaps doing. The journal entries, at least in theory (as the practical part is yet to be tested/tried), is intended give the student writers a pause from thinking, observing or doing, even if for a brief period of time and *redirect* our attention to *ourselves*—which remain *unattended*, of which (such *un-attendance*) we remain *unaware* the whole time as we are busy thinking about this or that—an urge Mathieu’s statement holds unequivocally, “...then writing studies must teach not only the thinking mind but also must help cultivate awareness, in the forms of *breaks* from thinking or observing one’s *thinking* (18).”

Journal writing is nothing new in composition studies. In fact, the journal as I proposed it within the scope of this thesis has been talked about in many ways in the field of rhetoric and writing. For example, Ann Berthoff has asked writers at any level to keep the double entry journal to note what they read and write and how they interpret them. She calls it dialectic notebook—one that is “...for all kind of writing, creative and critical... (85).” Journal writing is also suggested for reflective practices in the field of composition. However, what is new in context of this study is re-purposing of journaling: mindfulness. Also, the use of the *term* mindfulness with journal writing can help with certain things as suggested by Burke.

Burke talks about the power of terms in his piece. According to Burke, “...whatever *term* we use, they must necessarily direct the attention to one field rather than another.” The use of the term mindfulness is expected to turn the attention of the writer to the *mind*—core of which is his *being/self*.

## Chapter 3

### The Artifacts: Mindfulness Journals

As for the methodology, while working on this project, I have maintained mindfulness journals throughout the entire period of the writing process and used the entries as the artifacts to rhetorically analyze how the journal entries about the current moment/being-centric mindfulness affected my *awareness* and how this mindfulness practice, in turn, affected writing transfer over the course of this study. During the proposal phase of my culminating project, I did just one mindfulness journal. The purpose was to experience a bit about the link/s between being-centric awareness and transfer. This allowed me to gather some initial ideas at an early phase of study, which I thought, could be indicative of what was rhetorically is happening to evoke an awareness that could inform me about writing transfer.

I continued this process of keeping this mindfulness journal during the later phases of the study. The later analysis of the logs in them served to demonstrate my method and the applicability of the rhetorical theory behind my approach. However, the methodology, journaling or the procedure of journaling, that I proposed during the proposal phase of my culminating project went through some major changes afterwards. The first four mindfulness journals produced after the proposal came with some insightful feedbacks from my supervisor. What was lacking in the first set of journals was a thorough procedure.

The three questions that I initially came up with for the journal writing were the only component in the journals/methodology. The journaling just included me simply sitting down to answer those three preset questions. As thoughts happen in the mind always, it is nearly impossible to just sit down and halt the thoughts. I experienced this apparent impossibility of

shutting down the thoughts or taking a break from thoughts first hand during the initial phase of journaling.

My main goal of this project—experimenting journaling/writing as a way to take breaks from thoughts—was not then quite going the direction I had initially hoped for. The process of journaling, or to put it more specifically, my attempts to take breaks from thoughts seemed rushed—an experience that I could not name first but gradually figured out in the later phase of the process.

Upon discussing the first four (the first-dataset) journals with my project supervisor, Dr. Jamie Heiman, I added two other components to the journaling process: free-writing and meditating. Also, while delving deep into studies regarding the journaling process, I found out that free-writing is indeed an acknowledged part in the journaling process. For example, Moon directly associates “freewriting” as a section of journaling as she states, “Often, however, students who are guided in some of their entries are encouraged also to write freely in another section” (4). Freewriting then is an acknowledged section in a journal among other sections there.

After some reflection and revision, I revamped the methodology of this project. The revised journaling procedure included 10 minutes of a. Freewriting, b. 10 minutes of close-eyed mediation, and c. responding to 3 journal-specific questions [3-5 minutes]. Below I describe the procedure in full details:

I begin mindfulness practice sitting at my reading table. My feet touch the ground and my hands rest on the laptop’s keyboard. Then I start freewriting for a minimum of 10 minutes. Freewriting allows me to free up my mind. This has the effect of “emptying my mind” as I have experienced over the course of mindfulness practice. One common theme in my freewriting is

“presence,” discovering a notion of how I am at the present moment. However, sometimes while composing a journal entry, I drift away from this theme and land upon random things that come to my mind as I write.

Regardless of the subject inspiring what I write, I pay attention to the location and form of my body in the writing position. When ten minutes of freewriting have concluded, I keep my feet on the ground and my head level, retracting my hands from the keyboard, placing them in my lap with the back of my left hand on top of my right before I close my eyes. I align my back and lean slightly against the chair.

During this time, I remain quiet to notice what thoughts occur in my mind. I breathe slowly and gently, usually counting my breaths. Most of the time, no thoughts appear, at least initially. It is not uncommon for me to feel a bit sleepy. This meditation helps to test the effect of free-writing on me. Noticing my thoughts quietly for 10 minutes as part of this mindfulness practice allows me to keep tabs on what and how I feel after the freewriting exercise. Eventually, I feel the urge to open my eyes and move my body out of this relaxed state. In response, I ask myself, “Why do I want to stop?” or “What is going on in my mind?” Occasionally, I tell myself that I want to stop out of boredom, but I typically resist. Before I know it, my boredom has passed, replaced by some other thought, feeling, or sensation.

After ten minutes of meditation, I slowly open my eyes and return to the journal, answering the three pre-set questions, ending this meditative practice. Slowly I rise from my seat, usually to do household chores. I practice the mindfulness-journal process on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays mornings at a set time period (usually 10.00 am. -10.30 am.). Spacing out the mindfulness practices among different days in the week allows me the required break to

monitor the effects of such practices. I have preferred the mornings as for practice sessions because of my assumption that mind is usually fresh and quieter after the nightly sleep.

The mindfulness journals are the dataset that are designed to help me track the effects of such practice on my writing. As qualitative datasets, these journals are intended to inform me (and my audience/readers) about the significance of awareness in terms of writing transfers and what differences they (mindfulness practices) may or may not make in the writing process. In other words, analysis of these data was likely to generate rhetorical response to the “so what” question pertaining to my culminating project.

In later part of the study, I have included the patterns and trends that I found in the completed journals. However, the primarily anticipated number of journals did not match the final count. At the end, I managed to do 24 journals in total. I maintained 2 journals over the course of 12 weeks during the defense/final stages/phases of the study which brings the number down to the current count (24).

## Chapter 4

### *Making Meaning from the Data*

When I started the final analysis process for the study, I had a total of 24 journal records of my mindful writing. To analyze the data (accumulated over the course of this study) based on my research, I came up with some criteria for analysis. The criteria are also reflective of what happened before, during and after the meditative process. My original intention in the project was to experience the efficacy of writing—as a means of meditative practice—that writers/students would use to take a break from thoughts.

Once the data gathering, i. e. journaling was done, the process of analyzing them and drawing conclusion began. In order to do that, the 24 journals that I produce to practice mindfulness and track my progress afterwards had to be organized in a way that would be meaningful.

First, I grouped the first four journals in one category (as first dataset) as those were before the actual study began in full-length and the remaining 20 journals in another category. At this point, I looked at the research questions to pick out the relevant details in the journal responses. The three main criteria that are based on the research questions were: i. journaling as a meditative practice, ii. effects of this meditative practice on writing, iii. implications for writing transfer.

The very first journal revealed some information. Now that I look back at the traits it revealed, they were indicative of the problems I faced later during the continuation of journaling process which finally called for the overhaul of the journaling procedure. I experienced some new things during that phase of journaling/ meditating through writing. Based on the journal specific questions, the findings were the followings:

- In all three questions/checks, being in the moment is very challenging.
- The challenge of training is to quiet the mind.
- The more closely a mind is looked at, the more I become aware of its strange behavior (hard to control).
- The more I try to be in presence, I more I drift back to past or future worries.

I more learned from my first journal that the first check was kind of a call to become aware of my physical presence. The second check (the second question) informs me that various thoughts were going on in my mind and it is very difficult, almost to the point of being impossible, to stop them (thoughts). This apparent impossibility, as I initially thought could also be attributed to the fact I never attempted this. During the third check I realized that I was worrying about something and thus not “being” in the moment!

The following three journals (after the first one) exhibited similar traits. Like the first journal, they were done without any procedure. For all three of them, I simply sat down on the chair next to my reading table and without any further delay went straight to the journal specific questions. My responses to the questions, however, were followed by some reflections on the response experiences. Those response-reflections provided some information that I think relate to research question 1, to be specific. In those journals, while writing I experienced some awkward feelings in me just like I did in the first journal. The three journals questions that I answered for those two journals gave me those unfamiliar feelings that I had noted in the reflection questions. I noted that I was kind of “uneasy” about answering those questions. At times, it even felt absurd to answer those questions. When I focused on those feelings, I also gave me some unease. My feelings of unease probably stemmed from the fact that specifically focused “where” exactly I am/was. Also, for the second and third journal questions, too I experienced similar tension in me.

I do not recall asking myself in a very long time about what exactly was going on my mind or was I “present” at that certain moment both physically and mentally. Even the concept of current moment was something that I never thought about.

Experiencing those questions for the first time in life where I really had to be “aware” gave rise to those feelings. Also, what I noticed during the first four seemingly unimportant, rather disorganized mindfulness practice sessions, that I was constantly getting “lost” while thinking about the questions and the subsequent responses. Also, there were many thoughts going on in my mind while I was responding to the journal questions and, also when I was reflecting on the responses. Therefore, to answer to research question 1 based on the analysis of the first dataset, journaling as a meditative/mindfulness act though seemed good in theory but in practice was not quite so—at least that was the feeling initially.

My mind experienced troubled thoughts from the past, and future. Trying to take a break from thinking was tensed and I personally felt uncomfortable. However, digging a bit deeper underneath these emotions and feelings I unearthed a revelation—I think—about the grinding process of *being* aware of oneself. As I felt or attempted to experience that “being-centric” awareness for the first time consciously and with a specific purpose in my mind (the project goals—ties/connection to writing), I was met with such negative feelings. As for the research questions 2 and 3, I did not find anything as it would be way too premature/ early to look for how meditation relates to writing.

My journaling experience was much different when I revised my approach to mindfulness journaling. From journal 5 to journal 24, I followed the same procedure that I described in the earlier chapter. I also tried different methods for journaling a couple of times. Like for journal 13 and 14, I handwrote the freewriting portion and the responses, too.

The free writing was a challenge at the beginning as I did not do much of that before. Even though I initially struggled with freewriting a little bit, I soon overcame it. The strategy was a simple one—I simply continued writing—that being the way to do freewriting according to Peter Elbow.

The freewriting was an informative experience during journaling process. In that section of journaling, I continued writing up for 10 minutes without pausing—which produced an interesting effect on the next phase of the journaling—the meditation part. The meditation was an interesting part during the journaling process. As it turned out it was necessary to take a break from writing in order to see how writing to stop “thinking” or writing as a meditative practice is working out.

The meditation part of journaling brought me some insight to the entire (journaling) process. As I kept doing the free-writing for a period of 10 minutes without any break, I almost emptied the bucket of thoughts, almost. It was not that there were no thoughts occurring at all during the meditation but it was much different from when freewriting and meditation was not parts of journaling, like that of first phase of journaling practice.

During the meditation, I paid particular attention to thoughts surfacing in my mind randomly. However, to some surprise during the 5<sup>th</sup> journal (during the process), I noticed the reduced amount of thoughts that were surfacing. This pattern/trend continued in almost every journal after that (5<sup>th</sup>).

As I earlier indicated in chapter 2, after I am done with the freewriting phase, I closed my eyes in order to notice thoughts that is/are/will be currently there. However, there was very few thoughts compared to the earlier times. Moreover, I was in control of regulating my attention.

For example, even if there was a thought or two, I tried not to attend it. There was a relative calm and serenity in my mind.

Freewriting seems to have had the quieting of the mind effect on me. Metaphorically speaking, the continually writing for ten minutes had the emptying the bucket effect. Whenever I started the meditation process, I experienced thoughts started to subdue.

My responses to the journal specific questions—the third section of journaling this time had an altogether a different experience. While I was responding to the journal specific questions, I did not experience jamming of my mind by interrupting thoughts—as it happened before. This, perhaps, was an aftermath of the emptying the bucket through freewriting and meditation.

The patterns that emerged both from the designs and subsequent datasets were indicative of some valuable traits that relate to the research questions and the criteria that I came up with earlier for data analysis. First, the initial design of journaling was, to some extent, emblematic of some personal traits regarding my own being. Closer inspection and mindful reflection of that design revealed an attitude in me—an ego. I had the unaware bias in me that this task (project) will not be very difficult since I have done this once. This probably also relates to the third criteria/question about the writing transfer. I was quite unaware that my confidence regarding research-based writing manifested itself (transfer) through the initial design.

Also, from a rhetorical perspective, the flawed design reveals a negation towards critical thinking. I did not *critically* think about taking a break from thoughts or a way to achieve. Because thoughts are so much parts and parcels of me, I did not think what it is not like to think or what it is like to stop thinking—in the process blanking my mind. In other words, I was not even aware of what thoughts themselves are. In many ways, this revelation reminded me of

Wallace's fish metaphor in his 2005 Kenyan College graduation ceremony where he related the parable where two young fish forgot what water is because they are always in it.

The initial and revised project designs and subsequent datasets drawn from them help me gain valuable insights me regarding all my research questions/ analysis criteria. Comparative analyses them (two different study designs and datasets), show that the first design and dataset were emblematic of an ego—manifested in the design and later in the data—unaware of the significance of critical thinking. As a result of the flawed design, I could not take a break from thinking (again at least initially)—the intended purpose of the practice (mindfulness journal practice). Thoughts were recurring when I was journaling. There was hardly any break from them. During this phase of the study, I was rather going with something that can be referred to as “motion” as Burke would put it. I thought my method would work and I was following the procedure I initially devised for the project.

However, the second dataset—mostly because of the alteration in the design/method—shows a change—this struggle (taking break from thoughts) during the freewriting phase. In the freewriting phase, I record everything that occurs in my mind. As I was done letting out everything in my mind during the freewriting phase, I felt much calmer during the meditation phase. Also, the third phase, journal responses were easier in the sense that while responding to the specific questions, I did not note the tension that I noted in the earlier journal responses. As for the response to my research question 1, my experience journal writing can indeed be a meditative tool. It can help quiet the mind. It may have the capacity to make one aware of oneself. Especially for this research question (criteria number 1), freewriting—an obvious a form of writing—was indeed a way to practice mediation and, also, worked as a way to reduce thoughts if not completely relieved of them (thoughts). Therefore, the freewriting phase of my

journaling definitely helped with the former while the latter, meditation helped me keep watch of thoughts that, I thought would occur, but did not for the most part. Even if sometimes while meditating after freewriting, there were some thoughts, I cannot tell what exactly they were about as I did not attend them. Therefore, I regulated my attention during the meditative process. Also, important to note here as I went over the journals, the tension that was there during the first phase/dataset of journals was not found in the later set. These findings tie to research question 2, the immediate impact to writing was noticeable as I no longer experienced the tension that I had earlier. Regarding research question/criteria 3, the writing transfer manifested in the form of my personal attitude towards writing in the initial study method and in the subsequent dataset. However, the second phase of journaling made me aware of the ego. The revised format of methodology and the subsequent practice—emptying the mind from thoughts—calmed my mind. As a result, awareness about myself—a heightened sense of being affects my writing now.

## Chapter 5

### **End is *not* the End: Meditative Writing as a Recurring Process**

This culminating project, more than anything, was a meditative *revision* of my own writing style or the flaws attached to it. Throughout the entire process, I learned different things about my own writing, saw the pattern (in my writing) I never was aware of. The initial project design itself was a manifestation of an ego—kind of know-it-already type. Perhaps because of this ego, I did not think enough about the project initial design. The familiarity of journaling, and the word/term “journal” itself put a terministic screen on my mind that produced an unaware effect. My situation at least in the initial phase of this project was what Burke would call a “terministic situation”. Also, while I was concentrating too much to keep thinking away from my project, I almost forgot that being and thinking after all are not completely discreet of each other—a realization that I have as an aftermath of conducting this study.

Quite unknowingly, I thought—this is just journaling and taking break from thoughts—easy! I thought I have some background in meditation, I had done some reading/research and have some ideas—directions/thoughts of the unaware ego. Interestingly enough, my perception of the word, “thinking” was what Burke would call “scientific” which had a myopic understanding of the word which led my actions having the effect of “dramatistic” screen. I had approached this study with a preconceived notion of what it is I was/would be doing. I had a myopic view that journaling without much of a procedure is the pathway to achieve the intended goal of the project. This is the only way to get to the destination. In other words, I wanted to take a short-cut—an attitude manifested by many first-year writers.

Because I thought taking a break from thoughts would be so easy just by answering some questions was a mark of unawareness in me about the whole process. The very thought of it was

perhaps a demonstration of an ego. I have done some research about this aspect of mindfulness and I just thought I can do it just like that. However, the entire experience of extending the journaling procedure taught me that taking break from thoughts can't just happen without giving some reflection and attention to it (the process) by way of critical thinking. Therefore, careful, open and critical thoughts are needed even to take break from thoughts. In other words, it is not just thinking but also, noticing the thinking and taking required actions based on observation as I did (like revising the methodology if required) is the way forward—that is what Burke suggests, “Basically, the Dramatistic screen involves a methodic tracking down of the implications in the idea of symbolic action, and of man as the kind of being that is particularly distinguished by an aptitude for such action.” I think by reflecting on the first dataset and revising the redesigning the methodology was, for me “tracking down” the implication of my actions. What Burke, in my understanding is getting at is the significance of observation. And observation is meditation. By observing the first dataset and the design, I discovered the flaws in them.

This observation or dramatistic screen was also manifested in the second phase of the study where freewriting process revealed that the existing/surfacing thoughts have all to be extracted from the mind to give it a break. When the free-writing part is looked at through dramatistic screen after it is done, it in itself becomes a meditative piece which upholds the thoughts that were going on in the mind. Freewriting when observed from this angle is a meditative practice.

What my practices revealed is that writing can be a way of taking break from thoughts. However, it should be coupled with some sort of meditative practice, at least to test the intended effects of writing. This project also reshuffled my ideas about meditation—a practice to let go of the ego. Letting go of ego is directly relates to writing. When writing is approached with that

attitude (with an ego), it becomes biased and does not have much authenticity to it. It limits our perspective, shrinking our views of the surround and of other. When aware of ego, however, the writer also becomes aware of others. He may understand that awareness then is not of oneself but also of others—the audience—target or untargeted. By way of journaling practices, then writers—first year students especially, perhaps can practice identifying their ego. They can, in the very least, try locating it (the ego) in their attitude however that may manifest. Once it is located, i. e. once aware of it, it will be weakened as Tolle said.

For future studies in the same subject, a bigger project could be taken upon where the first-year writing students free-write and also keep a journal for a total of 4 months (approx. one semester) to record the reflections about their freewriting activity. When they reflect about their freewriting, chance is that they will see something about their writing as well just as I did. By way of freewriting, they can trace what effects it had on their mind. Some cautious generalization may be drawn from such bigger studies. When they observe their writing and also reflect about it, they may see a pattern which may get them to their aha-moment something Veeder gets at, “In that space a realizing intuition, some one thing, be it image or term, starts us moving toward a unified conception of the mosaic. This is pattern recognition and when it happens we have a Zen moment, an *Aha!* experience. Having the patience and discipline to suspend judgment and believe in such a moment is to practice Hectic Zen.”

I think when students write with a view to working on their awareness, writing may become a purified form of composition practice as it is open and receiving to what is authentic either minus the ego or a much less empowered version of it (ego). When the first-year writing students raise their awareness about their writing by recognizing their biases, and let go of their ego, they can consciously trace writing transfer. They will be able to recognize when they write

with 8<sup>th</sup> grade mentality and when they do not. Only by recognizing their writing habits, they can work on their writing transfer skills. In other words, when they are mindful of their writing, they may as well be able to better control writing transfer. However, just like writing is a recurring process, they should continue with this journal keeping meditative process to resume the effects of such practice however minimal it is at the beginning.

One of the caveats of this method is the study is self-observational. I was writing, making journal entries and collecting data regarding all these from the mindfulness journals. Since I was the researcher and the only potential subject of the study the analysis/thesis may suffer from confirmation bias.

One potential problem with this method of collecting data is that it was incomplete and runs the risks of confirmation bias. Another potential problem is that there is no secondary source of data and there is no way to fully validate the interpretation.

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