

Zach Smith's Flash Nonfiction Pieces

“Dear Final-Semester Self” - June 18, 2020

Dear final-semester self,

You are in for one unforgettable semester as you finish off your undergraduate studies at Worcester State. There are two things I want to get across before you begin your work.

The first order of business is that there will be a respiratory virus pandemic that will shut down operations in mid-March. I don't want to think that you'll get sick and it will ruin the semester, but you will be home doing your work from spring break all the way to the end. You've done online classes before, so I don't think you'll have any issues submitting work and completing assignments and projects. Always remember to prioritize assignments and deadlines and you'll be good to go.

Second, I want to remind you not to get overwhelmed at the sight of the workload. Everything might seem like a lot, but don't feel pressured to get every possible detail on the page. Professors look for students who put quality effort, and if they feel your effort is solid, you can expect a decent grade. Staying up until 1 or 2 a.m. burning the candle at both ends might give you a slight boost, but ultimately, doing so wears you out, makes you more tired, and only adds to the stress. Please don't go to bed super late to write an additional paragraph or page when you have all day tomorrow to do so. Trust me, when the remote learning begins, you'll have all the time in the world to complete your work.

You can do this. Remember to take a deep breath, relax, and know that effort plays a pivotal role in how others view your work. Keep that information in mind, and everything will culminate in success.

I wish you the best for a successful final semester!

Warm regards,
Future Zach Smith

“Inside the Autistic Mind” - June 25, 2020

My mind is an encyclopedia organized A through Z. It has facts and trivia and news and everything but the kitchen sink. Ask me a question. You'll get a quick answer. I don't need Google. I'll use my mind instead of the search bar.

I also can recall specific dates from my life. A March 15 dentist appointment. A May 5 final paper deadline. An October 29 Regal shift. Ask me the who, what, when, where, why, and how, and I'll tell you everything. I'll make you feel like you were there.

One component of my mind is that I tend to overthink. Whether I'm examining the ins and outs of a sports story, writing a paper for school, or seeing the circumstances of conflict, I dive in too far. I want to understand and explain every possible detail, and I want to get my reasoning across with an apologetic or sheepish attitude. I need to realize that not every detail matters, so I don't have to bombard myself for perfection. I want a positive and uplifting mind and personality through all I do, and keeping my intentions clear and concise will do the trick.

My mind is an innovative and insightful medium. I receive a stream of information that can produce an analytical waterfall. Every news story, sport, family member, and friend will update and change throughout my life. When those events happen, I will carefully go through them, knowing that I have my limits.

“Here Comes the Virus” - July 15, 2020

Life changes quickly before your eyes. One day you're going about your business. Studying, writing, working. The next you're ordered to stay home. Events postponed, canceled, not going to happen this year. The weather is fine and mild for mid-March. We don't think anything is amiss with Mother Nature cooperating. Instead, we are face to face with a pandemic.

Introducing the coronavirus. The disease comes from China and spreads like wildfire. It comes with a cough, fever, and shortness of breath. Do you have the virus? If so, quarantine for two weeks. Did you test positive but have no symptoms? Same procedure. Travel somewhere with a high number of cases? Come home and stay isolated for two weeks. We don't want a repeat of the Spanish Flu, so please take every precaution to stop the spread and flatten the curve. Whether it is regular handwashing and sanitizing or wearing a mask to the grocery store, every contribution makes a difference.

No one should view the virus as a downfall in his or her life. That is why we have texting, instant messaging, and video chatting. Share your experiences of quarantining, the one item Stop & Shop didn't have how you were looking forward to celebrating your college graduation. Folks need others to talk to about the exciting and disappointing times in their lives for support. Family and friends are go-to people when anything is on your mind. They are your eyes and ears, and you are theirs, too.

The coronavirus will not make the world come to an end. Our normal way of life will return to the way it was. We will work in an office setting. We will attend school in classrooms. We watch sporting events at the stadium and at bars. The social distancing won't last forever. Keep positive

thoughts and this pandemic will be over sooner rather than later. Don't think the virus won't end because it will.

“Don't Frustrate the Frustration” - July 22, 2020

Throughout my life, I have struggled with internal frustration and anxiety. Last-minute plan changes, unexpected loud hand dryers, a surprise from a barking dog, I have a lot I could name. What is the first thing I do when plans don't go in my favor? I only look at the negatives without the consideration of others. Who's to blame for the late dash start? Why did we choose the ice cream shop with the friggin' hand dryers? Why is the barker here? I shouldn't be downplaying and criticizing the hands that feed me and the gracious family members and friends whom I endear so much. That attitude doesn't go along with my character and craft. Instead, I have other components that I should consider. It's no one fault we started late, that's just how we went along. The restaurant wants to eliminate waste and become more environmentally friendly, so it installed the dryers in the bathroom. No one was around to watch the dog, which is why the family felt it was to bring him so he wouldn't have been lonely at home.

Understanding others' needs and attitudes are important for me as I look to build and strengthen any of my vital interpersonal relationships. I must not sit back and analyze how the inconveniences and setbacks will impact me. Otherwise, the pressure will build up and when the eruption happens, I might be too direct and condescending when I meant to say something professional and polite. spill out something that should've stayed in the bag. I need to know their feelings, opinions, emotions, and other characteristics about anything in the world for me to put myself in their shoes. There might be loafers that don't fit or heels that detract from my masculinity, but I know how others react to specific situations and I'm there to support and lend a hand.

Another frustration area I want to improve on is making watching sports not my main priority. The Yankees, Giants, and Rangers play so often that I would miss many social and work opportunities if I stayed home when games are on. No DoorDashing, no Regal outings, no new job opportunities. Those circumstances shouldn't be my life's setup, and the frustration would only get worse from the missed chances for me to have fun with my life. I'm a fish freely swimming in the lake, and I shouldn't be confined to my tank letting opportunities and fun pass me by. Making my life meaningful and productive will make me more appreciative and successful in what I do, and I will have so many memories to look back on for years and years. And more importantly, the frustration and anxiety will dissipate and skip town.