

Alas, Earwax

Ryan Specht

I have to surprise you with creativity in content, as per conditions of the prompt I was given. Prepare to be underwhelmed.

But I suppose, on one hand, I could totally quote Albus Dumbledore right now. Well, I mean, I already did for those astute readers. He's kind of legit. I'm also kind of rambling.

Where was I? Well actually I hadn't arrived at a point quite yet. What is my practice in the booth? My practice is simple: I pull up a chair, grab a cup of coffee (fresh cup for every learner, makes sure I'm on my toes), and listen. I've found in my experiences in the TLC that listening is arguably one of the more underrated things in conversation.

Though, naturally, my title is actually relevant to my creative story. Us elite Harry Potter fans will immediately recognize the title as Albus Dumbledore's famous quote after he attempts a hand at Bertie Bots Every Flavor Beans, remarking to his dismay, that he had received an earwax flavor.

Unfortunate news, truly.

One of the points I'm making, or trying to make (the phrase beached whale is applicable here), is that life is like a box of Bertie Bots Every Flavor Beans, you never know what you'll get next. I honestly can't even believe I typed that combo cliché Forest Gump/Harry Potter reference. But in all seriousness, don't take things too serious.

The prompt says I should stop rambling and making obscure references and make a point about how I do my work. I'll try to tone down my creative anecdotes for a moment.

The work we do in the booth is of utmost importance. We aren't just editors; we're peers. We aren't just random students from class; we're familiar faces around campus. We aren't just tutors; we're friends. Some of my learners have never openly talked about their writing with someone, or have never had an opportunity to ask a peer in a safe place a question about writing they thought was "too dumb" to ask in class.

And so, my practice is simple. I grab my cup of coffee, sit forward in the chair with my ears turned on full alert, and I ask the learner what they've brought in today. They may read something out loud; I listen. They may discuss a prompt; I'll be listening away. The majority of being able to respond to someone's concern is being able to hear their actual question, and that is so important in the booth. After listening, I'll ask questions. Then I'll ask a few more questions. Then I'll suggest a word or a synonym, maybe explain what passive voice is, or how to use a possessive apostrophe.

Oh and P.S., the cup of coffee is the most important part for two reasons. The first, humans bond incredibly quickly over food and drink. I'll offer a cup to the learner, always. The second, I talk with my hands and need an object to keep them under control. The booth is a close quarters arena and my animation is quite uncontrolled.

That is my practice in a nutshell. I listen, question, listen, respond. Simple formula. I still have a page to fill so I'll go back to creative and witty anecdotes.

So, every learner you get is a different flavor right . . . and though not all are going to be what you've hoped for, *all* are valuable kernels of being. Sometimes you'll get a nice pink lemonade. Or a watermelon kiwi. But occasionally, you'll be sitting in the booth, and you'll think to yourself calmly "alas, earwax."