

YL UC ENTRY – Subscribing to Circles Rationale

Subscribing to Circles is a personal essay which explores expectation, failure, and success. It highlights the distorted perceptions humans can have surrounding success, suggesting that striving to meet these impossible expectations is equivalent to running in circles. It comments on validation and personifies failure to highlight the distorted view humans have regarding it. Expectations are metaphorized as invisible strings which seem insignificant but accumulate and ultimately restrict true success—which is identified as self-recognition and accepting occasional failure.

Initially, *Subscribing to Circles* was merely my submission for an English assignment, and it was nothing like what it is today; I had a rough, working title called *Shades of Expectations*, and I attempted to compare expectations to the different colours of the sky during a day. Although I was invested, I was not confident with my idea and abilities—I questioned if I had even met the criteria of a personal essay, and I was quite uninspired. Less than a week before it was due, I got draft feedback, which was not entirely positive, and it confirmed my hesitations. I was disappointed, so I took time to truly evaluate the roles expectation, failure, and success played in my life.

They were all prevalent aspects of my life when I was writing this assignment; it was Term 1, and I had recently received all the grades and feedback for my first round of assessments. Prior to this, I had hoped for relatively good marks, since I studied hard for these exams and did quite well in previous years of schooling. I was incredibly disappointed when I did not receive the results I wanted—especially when I discovered that I had failed an exam for the first time. This disappointment was exacerbated when others started asking what my results were and if I had topped any classes, because in my mind, I had done the exact opposite. I truly believed I had failed my senior studies within six weeks of starting Year 11.

I realised this disappointment, failure to live up to my expectations and “succeed”, had shattered my confidence, negatively impacting my motivation and performance in classes. I thought of a line from *this is me trying* by Taylor Swift, which stuck with me; “I was so ahead of the curve; the curve became a sphere”. I realised that my previous achievements, the expectations placed on me, and my desire for a false sense of success, had ultimately restricted my performance. Although I was reluctant to admit it, I was effectively “running around in circles”.

This was the moment when this insignificant English assignment became something truly meaningful for me. I decided to change the path of my assignment abruptly and drastically; I created a new, detailed plan and discarded all my work on *Shades of Expectations*. I stayed in bed and rewrote my entire personal essay in one sitting. It was exhausting and took the entire day, but writing it felt natural and almost easy—none of the essay was forced, and the whole experience was incredibly cathartic. This left me with two days to edit my work before submitting it, but I only made a few changes. I had finally found confidence in my work and moved beyond my fears of failure—ironically by writing about it.

Now, after revisiting and editing some parts of this personal essay, *Subscribing to Circles* acts as a reminder of an unforgettable period in my life; true reflections and realisations about myself, which would change my perspectives on success and failure forever.