Process Paper: Surfing Essay, Research Paper

Surfing has been a sport enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. It originated in Polynesian culture as a religious ceremony mainly practiced by the royalty. Having been introduced from the Hawaiian Islands roughly 60 years ago, it has become a common practice in virtually every coastal beach break throughout the USA and numerous places around the globe. When one goes surfing there are three basic stages that are repeated in a surf session: getting out to the line up, waiting for the wave, and catching a wave and riding it in.

First off, one has to get to a beach break where there are rideable waves. Once there, one gets his/her leash and firmly straps it to the ankle. Depending if one’s surfing stance on the board is Regular footed (left foot in front) or Goofy footed (right foot in front), the leash is normally strapped on the trailing leg. Taking the board in hand, one jumps into the water resting his/her chest on the center of the board, and begins paddling in a smooth and controlled fashion. As the whitewater from the crashing waves get closer and closer one has to submerse oneself along with the board under the wave, this is called “duck diving.” In order to not get caught by the wave’s force and washed off the board, this procedure has to be performed with proper timing and technique. In most cases it takes a lot of practice to properly master, even then, one is at the wave’s mercy. To make matters even more challenging, other surfers have to be accounted for. Depending on how crowded the surf break is, the possibilities of getting hit or run-over by other surfers is predominant. Meanwhile, several “duck dives” later one has reached the “line-up” and has an opportunity to rest up after the hard paddle.

Once at the “line up”(or general area that one waits for the incoming waves) its all a matter of patience and proper timing, two very important aspects involved in surfing. These aspects become the key to the second stage. Patience is needed in order to not get frustrated with numerous possibilities, ranging from not being able to catch a wave to not having enough waves to catch. If one begins to get frustrated then that messes up their timing and affects their ability to get properly positioned with the wave in order to drop in safely. A lot of time is spent just waiting for the right wave to come. This is one of the nice things about surfing for many people. It gives them a chance to forget about their problems and responsibilities. At the same time it can be a place to just think and clear one’s mind. Although this thought process is going on, one is to remain very attentive and constantly screening the horizon for any possible wave swells.

As soon as a good wave is spotted and no other surfer is positioned for it, a hard paddle is commenced in order to catch the wave. This effort initiates the third stage, riding the damn thing! As soon as enough paddling speed has been attained and the wave begins to take over one’s forward momentum, a split second decision has to be made on which way to “drop in,” left or right? This decision is based on countless circumstances. There could be a surfer on one side going right, forcing one to go left. This brings in the aspect of communication with other surfers. If the decision is made to go right and the other surfer goes the same way, it could lead to a collision and possible injury. It has to be made clear to the other surfer in which direction one is going by either eye contact, body movement, or a simple vocal warning. As soon as that is established (all this takes place in less than 1.5 seconds) one pushes off the board in a quick movement, pops up on two feet, and drops in. At this point one begins to feel an exhilarating rush of speed and fluidity as the board glides across the face of the wave. Once surfing the wave, skill and ability permitting, many tricks and maneuvers can be done. But in many cases just simply “surfing” the wave for what it is, can suffice to make one smile in awe of such an incredible experience.

Immediately after the wave has finished (assuming there wasn’t a “wipe out”) the three stages begin to repeat themselves over and over again. For the most part a session usually lasts anywhere from 1 to 5 hours, depending on the quality of the wave and how much time one has. It eventually becomes an addictive process, each stage with it’s own set of challenges and rewards. But when one’s last wave of the session has been ridden into the beach and the leash has been wrapped around the board and arms stretched, a sense of gratitude for the ocean sets in and the rest of the day is put into a positive perspective.