

Sequence of Assignments for Introduction to College Composition

Unit I: Descriptive Narrative

Objectives

Write with specificity, referring to detailed objects, places, names;
Write visually, using vivid and precise descriptors to situate your readers;
Write with nuance, engaging your readers in fresh & subtle observations

Writing Task

Identity, that unification of characteristics that define us as singular individuals, largely emerges from our (responses to) life experiences. An experience can range from major life events such as the death of a loved one to minor occurrences such as the sting of a bee. How might a simple bee sting, you ask, contribute to identity formation? If we conceive of identity as simply the narrative we write of our lives, then any meditation on any life experience may be said to contribute to identity. What I ask, in this writing task, is that you compose a narrative of one aspect of your identity based on a single, seemingly minor, life experience. As a result, the emphasis will not be on the experience itself but on your constructed narrative of that experience.

Grading Criteria

Adhere to the General Writing Submission Guidelines. For content and quality refer primarily to the grading rubric (available on WebCT). Generally, you will be graded on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In particular, you will be evaluated on your ability to transform a seemingly insignificant event into a defining narrative of your identity.

Sequence of Assignments for Introduction to College Composition

Unit II: Explanatory Essay

Objectives

Write with explanatory skill, detailing selected processes and their varieties;

Write with critical observation, using detailed notes on a live event;

Write with sociopolitical awareness, analyzing social mechanisms

Writing Task

The civilizing process is so effective that our developed habits, manners, and behaviors become nearly invisible to us. Yet, the subtle ways in which diverse individuals comport themselves, as in brushing one's teeth, hand-writing a letter, waving to a friend (or stranger), walking into a restaurant, or dancing at a party, can say much personality, psychology, culture, socioeconomic status, moral values, or political beliefs. In an attempt to render the invisible visible, write an essay that isolates a process in which the human body engages on a regular basis and evaluate its potential sociopolitical implications.

Consider this habit on a physiological scale: what, indeed, is the body doing? Or perhaps on an anthropological level: what human drives and instincts contribute to such behavior? Sociologically, how does one's environment or upbringing influence this behavior? Politically, what mechanisms of power are coded in the behavior? You might consider the ideal form of this behavior and what would happen if others were to conform to this ideal. What is the most destructive form of this behavior?

Grading Criteria

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[example on following page]

Sequence of Assignments for Introduction to College Composition

Unit II: Explanatory Essay (continued)

from Moshe Feldenkrais The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity.

In "The Origin of Faulty Posture," Feldenkrais considers the sociological and psychological roots of patterns in human posture. Note the details he observes as minute as one who walks holding his breath and note the analytical conclusions he draws from this behavior, being that one who walks as if holding his breath walks as if he had "no right to live"; he walks in a submissive state.

People slouch or tense their bodies unnecessarily not because there is some nervous deficiency in their systems, but because their means were insufficient at the moment of facing the novel situation. Our dependence on others is so great that we have to comply with what is wanted or expected from us, or else we lose parental affection, social approval, and our means of subsistence. At different stages of our existence, each of these losses means isolation from the habitual environment--which is tantamount to self-destruction. As children, we cannot afford to displease our parents to the point of our complete rejection, any more than we can afford to brave the world beyond certain bounds. Our security demands the performance of what is expected of us, and we have to do it whether we are able to or not.

Faulty posture always expresses the emotional stress that has been responsible for its formation. The most frequent and observable one is the stress of insecurity in its different aspects, such as hesitation, fear, doubt, apprehension, servility, unquestioning compliance--and their exact opposites.

If we observe the carriage of people in the street, we find that one person walks as if he had no right to breathe the air without securing someone's permission; and in fact he does hold his breath most of the time. He has to justify his existence by being good; he has to earn his right to breathe. He is unobtrusive, but all tension; his voice, his movements, and his whole demeanor show the conflict between his desire to live and his inner conviction of his inability to live up to and perform what he himself has accepted as the norm of what he should be able to do.

Now, here is a woman passing. At every step you see her cheeks vibrating slightly, and if you observe closely you notice hardly perceptible jerks of her head and the alternate contractions of the muscles at the back of the neck. She walks very "straight"; if she had swallowed a yardstick, she would not walk any straighter. She is as stiff as a poker, and all her demeanor cries, "I am straight." If she were not straight, she would have no right to live. She is just as insecure as the first man; her straightness is just as compulsive as the former's servility. They have both learned to direct themselves so as to comply with what was expected of them; they both have inhibited their spontaneity. There is little need to multiply examples; it is sufficient to stand for a few moments at the window or in the street to see the greatest possible variety of such deformed human frames.

Sequence of Assignments for Introduction to College Composition

Unit III: Perspectives Essay

Objectives

Interact with the qualities of a community that differs widely from your own;
Respond to those differences with sensitivity to diversity

Writing Task

Oftentimes, our lives as we experience them appear so normal, so common sense to us, that we find it difficult to conceive of alternatives to our social existence. Yet, in order to communicate effectively with rhetorical strategies, we must be able to suspend our own beliefs and inhabit those that differ from ours.

One one of breaking down these barriers is to immerse yourself in communities unfamiliar to you. For this project, I'd like you to attend and participate in a community activity that is not only new to you, but even makes you feel out of place, uncomfortable. Depending on your own background, that may mean attending a religious service, fitness class, night club, or bridge club. Check the UF Calendar or Gainesville Sun Community Events for group activities in Gainesville. Write an essay that studies the beliefs, values, and lifestyles of the community you observe. Consider this project both an anthropological experiment and a study in audience.

Grading Criteria

Adhere to the General Writing Submission Guidelines. For content and quality refer primarily to the grading rubric (available on WebCT). Generally, you will be graded on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In particular, you will be evaluated on your ability to draw a detailed and intimate portrait of the community that you observe.

Sequence of Assignments for Introduction to College Composition

Unit IV: Argumentative Essay (In Defense of New Media)

Objectives

Implement rhetorical tools to create a convincing argument
Perform simple research on introductory library databases
Introduce secondary research into your argument
Respond to a critic's argument

Writing Task

New media is often criticized for causing detrimental effects on modern society. For example, in "Never Just Pictures" Susan Bordo claims that advertisements contribute to a cultural obsession with modeling and attaining the "perfect" body (a perfection that varies generation to generation). In "Television: The Plug-In Drug," Winn argues that television viewing has splintered the family unit, instead of bringing it closer together. Consider, however, if we look backward to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we see that novels were once considered a form of popular entertainment that weakened the morals of its readers, and, if we look forward to the twenty-first century, we see that social networking sites on the Internet are being considered volatile and dangerous spaces for young teens. It is very easy to make arguments both for and against forms of media throughout history.

What I'd like for you to do in this project is to take up one specific issue addressed by either Bordo or Winn and make it the starting point for your defense of media. Your audience will not be Bordo or Winn, but rather, you are speaking to the audience you created in the last essay, the Perspectives Essay. Consider what you think their greatest objections to your argument will be based on the ideas and values you have constructed about them. Address those concerns. Your objective is to enlighten your audience, not necessarily change their minds. You will need to address specific claims made in the essay and support your own claims with current secondary research (at least one article from LexisNexis, OmniFile, or Academic Search Premier).

Grading Criteria

Adhere to the General Writing Submission Guidelines. For content and quality refer primarily to the grading rubric (available on WebCT). Generally, you will be graded on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In particular, you will be evaluated on your ability to use effective rhetorical tools to construct a logical and persuasive argument.