

# **ON TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING**

FACULTY WRITING FELLOWS  
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY  
SPRING 2008

## FACULTY WRITING FELLOWS SEMINAR

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The Center for the Study of Writing held its inaugural Faculty Writing Fellows program in Spring 2008.<sup>1</sup> A select group of College of Arts and Sciences faculty members gathered weekly to discuss approaches to writing within and across academic disciplines. Sessions ranged from practical explorations (e.g., of what “counts” as good writing across fields and disciplines, and of how best to help student writers throughout the University improve their writing) to theoretical discussions (e.g., of theories of writing in digital media). The focus of this seminar was primarily pedagogical, and responded to the need of SAGES instructors for ideas about and strategies for working with student writers at all levels. Nevertheless, the discussions ranged across student *and* faculty writing experiences and concerns.

The first group of Case Western Reserve Faculty Writing Fellows included:

Carlos Crespo (Chemistry)  
William Deal (Religion)  
Linda Ehrlich (Modern Languages)  
Kimberly Emmons (English)  
Daniel Goldmark (Music)  
Paul Iversen (Classics)  
Michael Kenney (Chemistry)  
Kurt Koenigsberger (English)  
T.J. McCallum (Psychology)  
James Overholser (Psychology)  
Sara Waller (Philosophy)  
Peter Yang (Modern Languages)  
Tatiana Zilotina (Modern Languages)

At the end of the semester, each Fellow was asked to contribute suggestions for the successful teaching of college writing. The responses are collected in the following pages, followed by an appendix of sample assignments. Additional writing suggestions may be found on the Writing@Case website: <http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/writing>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for the Study of Writing (CSW) is a flexible, cross-disciplinary initiative that fosters connections between innovative writing research and sound pedagogical practices, between specialized faculty expertise and the needs and interests of aspiring undergraduate and graduate students, and between the histories and technologies of writing and the futures of communication media. For more information, please see: <http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/writing/csw>.

Suggestions for teaching college writing:

1. Discuss examples of others' writing

Bring to the class examples of "well-written" papers, essays, manuscripts and discuss with students the following questions: What is good or bad (not as good as) about the writing style of that particular document? Why?

2. Students' peer review of their writing

Ask students to write a short paragraph about any topic they like and then ask other students in the group to peer review their work.

3. Useful links:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/faculty/toc.shtml>

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/faculty/forum/links.shtml>

<http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/suggestions.php>

[http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/college\\_writing.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/college_writing.html)

4. Suggested Reading:

Fulwiler, Toby. "Teaching Writing as a Liberal Art: Ideas That made the Difference." A lecture presented for the Tenth Anniversary Annual Colloquium of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing. Lillian Birdwell-Bowles, Series Editor; Erika R.L. Rivers, Editor. The University of Vermont. No. 13 (1999). Available: [http://writing.umn.edu/docs/speakerseries\\_pubs/Fulwiler.pdf](http://writing.umn.edu/docs/speakerseries_pubs/Fulwiler.pdf)

National Writing Project. "30 Ideas for Teaching Writing." Available: <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/922>

### *Five Suggestions for Teaching College Writing*

#### **Suggestion #1: Asking Critical Questions** (see Appendix)

If students don't know how or are otherwise unable to ask open-ended, ambiguity-embracing questions, then student writing will be limited to simple answers to simple questions. Though there is much more to be said on this topic, I've found it a good starting point to get students to consider three types of questions:

- **factual questions:** those with one right answer
  - Example: What is the boiling point of lead?
- **opinion questions:** those with as many answers as there are different human preferences
  - Example: Which would you prefer, a vacation in the mountains or one at the seashore?
- **critical questions:** those with better or worse answers (well or poorly reasoned answers)
  - Example: How can we best address our most significant economic problems?

Also useful is: Francis P. Hunkins, *Teaching Thinking Through Effective Questioning*, 2nd. ed. (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 1995).

#### **Suggestion #2: Classic Style Writing** (see Appendix)

I hate to read—and grade—five paragraph-style essays written in the third person on topics about which the writers have no firsthand experience or knowledge. To push students past this deeply engrained style of writing, I have utilized Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner's *Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing Classic Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). I have used this text in my SAGES courses. Some students find the book dense and difficult—especially those that don't believe that style matters—but in general I've found student writing better when using this book. Among other things, classic style promotes the following ideas:

#### **Some Key Elements of Classic Style** (see Appendix)

- the writer is competent and assured
  - the writer neither hesitates nor equivocates in detailing her/his views
- the motive is truth
  - the writer seeks to present the truth as she/he perceives it
- the purpose is presentation
  - presentation of the writer's ideas to her/his readers
- the occasion is informal
  - classic style often reads like someone speaking
- the model scene is conversation between equals
  - the writer is in conversation with the reader and treats the reader as an equal

### **Suggestion #3: Revision, Revision, Revision**

Revision is not a choice. It is a requirement for crafting effective, engaging, logical, critical, convincing, and persuasively argued prose. Find ways to convince students to take revision seriously, in part by stressing process over product in their writing. I've found it useful to use a wiki for writing drafts because I can see every change that a student makes in the process of writing an essay.

### **Suggestion #4: Close Reading Skills**

I am often struck by the lack of close reading skills exhibited by many of my students. Sometimes the problem is the result of hasty reading, but more often it is a consequence of having little experience with refining skills such as paraphrasing, identifying the structure of arguments, identifying and correctly defining key concepts, and taking usable notes. A good starting point in thinking about these issues is Chapter 8: "Helping Students Read Difficult Texts" in John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas*. I am particularly interested in this issue because I think students often say they don't like a text when what is really happening is that they don't understand the text.

### **Suggestion #5: Thinking Through Writing**

When we write we think. Too often, my students assume that writing is the last thing they do after they have thought about what it is they want to write about or what argument they want to make. I always ask my students if they have ever had the experience of thinking that they knew what they wanted to say in a particular essay but that when they sat down to write, new ideas or possible logical inconsistencies came to light that they had not previously considered. They also answer affirmatively. Writing is crucial for refining thinking—an idea I stress to my students. For ideas about how to consider this issue and some pedagogical suggestions, see Susan R. Horton, *Thinking Through Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

## LINDA EHRLICH (MODERN LANGUAGES)

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**A paradox:** The process of writing is complex; inspiration cannot be scheduled. Alas, deadlines exist.

Show your own writing process to students in drafts, editor's comments, rewrites.

Share your love of the necessary (at times beautiful) metaphor, phrase, argument.

Writing is treacherous. (“It is as dangerous for society to attract and indulge authors as it is for grain-dealers to raise rats in their granaries...” [de Maupassant]).

What is authentic writing? (the goal I give the students)

Good writing takes time, patience, desire

Are my marks on my students' papers as much a way for me to become involved as they are “words of wisdom” to the students? Can I read their papers without a pencil in my hand?

Different approaches to writing:

- A problem to be solved
- An opportunity to be explored
- An obsession (“The best years of my youth were made one continual agony for me by my writing” [Chekhov])

WRITING ASSIGNMENT TIPS I LEARNED/STOLE FROM OTHERS IN THE SEMINAR:

- Show 2-3 approaches to one subject. Write from different points-of-view.
- Stage writing assignments—each subsequent paper does a little more.
- Assign 3 papers per term: Part A/Part B/Part A and B combined
- Ask students to submit post-writing evaluations of their own writing

***Favorite Writing Websites***

- Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> – for handouts, explanations of common writing challenges, etc.
- U. of Washington “Ask Betty”: <http://depts.washington.edu/engl/askbetty/> – provides translations of marginal comments by faculty on student writing and other writing advice.
- Washington State U, “Critical Thinking Project”: <http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu/index.htm> – provides rubrics, exercises, commentary, and news about efforts to teach critical thinking.
- Jack Lynch (Rutgers University) “Getting an A on an English Paper”: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/> – provides a variety of useful advice, particularly about what “close reading” really means for English professors.
- National Resource Center for the First Year Experience: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/index.html> – provides resources, publications, events, and other materials about first-year experience programs (such as SAGES).

***Favorite Print Resources***

- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001. (ISBN: 978-0787902032)
- Booth, Wayne C., Joseph M. Williams, & Gregory G. Colomb. *The Craft of Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago Press, 2003. (ISBN: 978-0226065687)
- Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. (ISBN: 978-0393924091)
- Kolln, Martha. *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman, 2006. (ISBN: 978-0321397232)

***My 3 Writing Goals for College Students***

- Identify a question of importance to *you*.
- Find (& evaluate) appropriate evidence to support your own contribution to the conversation surrounding the question.
- Present your ideas on the question to an educated but non-expert audience.

***Favorite Writing Exercises*** (See Appendix)

- Reading/Summarizing with a Purpose – to help students see reading as a rhetorical act.
- Reading & Writing Workshops (Concession/Contrast; Using Evidence & Making a Claim; Levels of Argumentation/Explanation) – to isolate specific writing strategies and provide targeted practice with students’ own text.
- Quotation “Sandwich” (also known as the “3-Step Quotation Analysis” or “Framing Quotations”) – to help students “join the conversation” more effectively.
- Peer Review Letters – to raise the stakes (and usefulness) of peer review.

***What I Tell Myself Every Semester...***

- Address student’s prior knowledge – What do *they* think good writing is? Is “good writing” the same in high school and in college? What are the Commandments of Good Writing (DO this...; DON’T do that...; NEVER do...) and are they really gospel?
- Use readings to discuss writing (and vice versa)
- Try to make genre (and disciplinary) conventions as explicit as possible
- Use student writing as much as possible (positively and constructively)
- Comment early and often on drafts of papers; be expansive in formative commentary, but brief in summative commentary (verbal commentary is often more efficient for formative comments)

*In the spirit of interdisciplinarity and multi-modality, a few music-related items.*

***Useful readings in music:***

Susan McClary and Robert Walser. "Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles With Rock." In *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word, 277-292*. Edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

This article, while almost twenty years old, is an excellent survey of the history of scholarly writing about popular music and, more importantly, numerous excellent points to consider when you yourself might want to explore how/why a particular guitar solo or Beatles tune is so compelling.

Christopher Small. *Musicking*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

A brilliant book that begins with an anthropological examination of the modern concert hall—from the architecture and the idiosyncratic hierarchy of seating areas to the attire of the players and the audience—and ends with a critique of how classical music has arrived at its rarified position in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> century. A wonderful way to introduce students who may have been to a few concerts in their lives to the cultural history of the concert hall.

Philip Bohlman. *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

While this series from OUP has its ups and downs, this volume is written by an ethnomusicologist who does an excellent job of presenting the many arguments and issues concerning the Western study of music outside the Western canon. Problems including music and politics, musical imperialism, and the anthropology of music are all raised with compelling examples. An really excellent introduction to the topic.

***Writing about music:***

It seems that most people are somewhere between indifferent to deathly afraid of writing about music, whether it's from a misguided belief that you must know notation to write about music, or that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" (a quotation attributed to several). I have found, even in classes I teach that aren't strictly concerned with music, that giving people the chance to express themselves about the music they like is often an incredibly rewarding experience, as students often do not take the time to consider why they listen to the music they have on their iPods.

...which leads to the...

***Mix tape assignment:***

Students are instructed to produce a mix tape (mix CD, actually). Each song must be chosen for a particular reason, and the ordering of the songs must be considered as well. An accompanying essay gives the students a chance to explain/express why the songs were chosen, what meaning each song has to the student (either on a personal/biographical level, or what it is musically about the song itself that appeals to them), and what the overall narrative of the mix tape is, if any.

*Guidelines and Tips for a Thesis Statement Paper that analyzes a Text*

A paper with a **thesis statement** is a paper with an *argument*. The thesis statement should be found at the beginning of the paper (first or second paragraph is usually best). This is the most important sentence of the entire paper and should be well-thought and well-crafted. It should be a specific and **unified** argument, not a broad topic of many ideas or contrasts. It should not be an obvious statement of fact or merely a personal opinion of the way you feel, but a statement that requires proof based on the primary text(s) you will be analyzing.

A thesis-statement paper should be rhetorically organized on some principle(s) and proceed in a logical manner. Although not the only way to organize a thesis-statement paper, the classical divisions of *exordium* (preparing the reader for your argument), *narratio* (stating what the issue is), *partitio* (giving your thesis), *confirmatio* (making case by argument, paragraph by paragraph), *reprehensio* (responding to opposing arguments, perhaps in footnotes so as not to disrupt the flow) and *peroratio* (summing up/conclusion) are always effective. Whatever system of rhetorical organization you use, here are some tips for success:

– Make sure every paragraph and every sentence in every paragraph is relevant to your thesis statement. Cut out any extraneous material.

– Make sure every paragraph and sentence *supports* your thesis statement. If there is conflicting evidence, then you must adjust your thesis statement to accommodate the conflicting evidence.

– Do not give long plot summaries. Only use brief incidents from your sources to support your thesis statement.

– Do not give excessively long quotes. If you have a quote of over 40 words (and most of you should not), it must be single spaced and indented on each side.

– Do not quote something and just assume it somehow proves your point. Say exactly how it re-reinforces your point.

– Use secondary source material responsibly. Internet sources can be a useful place to begin, but they often include a lot of bad information; better to use peer-reviewed journal articles and books published by respectable publishers (i.e., university presses). When you use secondary sources, do not place them in front of you while you write and then just stitch paraphrases of each source into your paper at various points. Read the secondary literature, internalize it, set it aside, and then write. Any secondary sources should be cited in a consistent style (i.e. APA, Chicago...).

– Use a clear and concise writing style. Consult any style book for tips.

## MICHAEL KENNEY (CHEMISTRY)

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Upon reflection I have this advice to give to my colleagues (especially those, like me, that do not teach writing as an avocation):

First, write regularly and often. This pertains to both yourself as a researcher and scholar but also to your students. Writing is one of the only forms of communication that enables the individual to see and hear what they are saying. It is only through the process of hearing our own words and seeing them in print (formal and informal) that we are able to hone our own skills as communicators. Spoken words come and go in an instant. Only the written word can last for a lifetime and more. I strongly encourage faculty to both write and require writing on a regular basis. To help get us started, I strongly recommend the essay by Mano Singham, *Seven Suggestions for Becoming a More Productive Writer*, *Change*, 40(2), March/April, 2008.

Second, when assigning writing to your students as part of class work, give careful consideration to whether the writing is to be formally assessed and, consequently, assigned a score or grade that contributes to the overall assessment for the course. Much can be gained from writing informally. Writing to simply help to clarify an individual's thoughts and ideas has as much, and oftentimes more, value than writing for a grade. All too often, the "threat" of a formal assessment makes even the most eloquent writers fall back into habits learned earlier in their development when the goal was simply to appease the evaluator and not to inform the reader. In time, even those writing tasks that are completed as an afterthought may end up as well developed and reasoned written arguments. Like good wine and cheese, give them time to ferment.

Next, for those assignments to be formally assessed, use a rubric. Borrow one, find one, make one up...but flying without a net should be left to the Wallendas. And even they practiced with one.

Last, if you do opt to include a formal written paper as part (or all) of the summative assessment in a course, do NOT underestimate the time commitment required to accurately and fairly assess the work completed by the students. In my experience, reading, evaluating and assessing the work of my students requires nearly as much time as the time they expended in writing the assignment. Whether that time is spent deciphering those essays that lack a clear focus, cleaning up the faulty grammar used, or (hopefully) marveling in the eloquence and clarity of the prose, the time expended will almost certainly exceed by a great amount the amount of time budgeted for the endeavor.

In the end, I will continue to assign both informal and formal writing in my classes. However, having just read the last of the >70 essays submitted this semester, I will plan differently next year.

Final big-picture tips for writing instructors:

- 1) **If your course is a *writing* course and not a course in *grammar and usage*, signal to students that your priorities in the class have to do with higher-order writing concerns before it worries over lower-order concerns.** John Bean distinguishes “higher-order issues (ideas, organization, development, and overall clarity)” from “lower-order issues (sentence correctness, style, mechanics, spelling, and so forth)” (243). While we often think of the lower-order issues as the prerequisites or building blocks for higher-order writing practices, if we really value ideas most in our classrooms, then we should emphasize the higher-order concerns in our teaching and evaluation of student writing.
- 2) **When cultivating higher-order writing practices (development and presentation of sound ideas), avoid all-or-nothing, high-stakes assignments.** Scaffold large projects with a series of preparatory writing assignments, and intersperse formal with informal writing assignments across the semester in order to allow students to work deliberately toward higher-stakes projects.
- 3) **When handling lower-order concerns in students’ papers, consider indicating – rather than correcting – representative errors and infelicities.** Students tend to feel overwhelmed when faced with a sea of red ink, or when sentences have been taken apart and rewritten. Better is to signal to students prevalent difficulties in one paragraph or on one page, offer them resources to learn how to correct errors or revise their writing, and provide opportunities to improve. Students are unlikely to learn from instructors’ editing of their prose.
- 4) **When designing writing assignments, think about larger course goals, the place of the course in a broader curriculum, and what knowledge and practices you want students to recall after 6 months, or 10 years.** How can formal writing assignments help to achieve those goals, to make connections with other learning going on within a curriculum, and to foster the kinds of practices that will serve students well in the near and/or distant future? A particular kind of course might customarily ask for a kind of writing that doesn’t serve students outside of the bounds of the course – or even in relation to the course objectives.
- 5) **When providing feedback, balance formative and summative responses to writing in relation to the place of writing in your course.** If students do not have a chance to revise their writing, it will prove difficult for them to put into practice the advice they receive in formative comments. Conversely, students who are being asked to revise work, or to build upon earlier work in subsequent writing projects, will look to instructors’ feedback for guidance – purely summative responses likely won’t serve them well and will leave them frustrated.

See John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: John Wiley, 2001).

1. **Engagement is vital.** Writing assignments should be interesting to the students in either form (using multiple and/or unique formats) or content (using content chosen by the students or with the students in mind). If the students take ownership of the form or content, they will have a better overall experience.
2. **Support is important.** Most students need support and encouragement for any type of writing that deviates from some of the standard formats that tends to be taught in lower grade levels. Highlighting strengths in student writing can be supportive, but so can critical feedback.
3. **Writing (and teaching) is reciprocal.** Be open to what unique communicative talents each student brings, as well as to what you can learn from your students.

**1. Great Expectations**

I strive to inspire my students to move toward greatness. I believe that when someone finds their niche, they can be productive in a fairly easy way. I hope to push my students to find their natural talents and build upon them. In one of my graduate courses, I aim high. I tell the students that I hope at least one student's paper will be worth revising and submitting for potential publication. I have had four students get their term papers published. I keep these papers on my list of required readings. Eventually, I hope to have a syllabus entirely composed of published student papers.

At the undergraduate level, my expectations are different. I hope to encourage students to display some personal involvement in the material. Because of the material I teach (e.g., Abnormal Psychology, Psychotherapy, Coping with Stress), this may require a bit of personal self-disclosure. I try to give students a fair amount of choice, so their topic could reflect personal struggles, interest, or issues relevant to friends or family members. If students write about material that could be useful in their lives, they are more likely to apply the information and remember the material after the semester has ended.

**2. Be Realistic**

I try to keep in mind that not all college students are destined to become scholars, and not all psychology majors will become licensed psychologists. I realize that for many students, writing class papers is work, and can be difficult for them. I try to remember my days as an undergraduate student. I must admit that in many ways I was something of an idiot. Even now, I see that most of our graduate students enter our training program ill-prepared to write at a scholarly level. They often ask basic questions (e.g., how to identify a credible versus weak source), and they are just learning to follow the numerous rules for APA style.

I am opposed to group writing projects. Someone in the group will slack off, thereby pushing more of the work load onto others. I feel it is difficult to grade a group project in an objective manner. Even though most faculty members produce scholarly works through collaborative efforts, we can choose our collaborators, and we can distribute credit via the order of authors. I would not want my grade in a college course contingent upon the work of my peers.

I often try to ask myself "Six months after my class is over, what do I hope the students will still remember?". My answer never focuses on names, dates, or terminology. My answer usually centers around material that might be useful in their lives outside the classroom. If I only strive to make them better students, I am lost in the ivory tower, and I should retire.

### 3. **Keep it Simple**

I think too many classes make their material unnecessarily complex. I think it can become easy to require many papers, exams, and readings. I try to remember that my course is only one of several courses the student is taking this semester. I also realize that most readings in my field could be condensed down from 35 pages to 5 pages without really losing much substance. Therefore, I try to keep my course expectations fairly simple. I guess I am speaking up for my own children, and hope they can take courses that provide some simple structure to help them learn material that might be useful in their lives.

### 4. **Short and Sweet**

I believe that my required readings for an undergraduate course should be brief and limited to a few simple papers. If we assign too many readings, students will skim the papers or skip them entirely. I also believe that my requirements for student writing should be brief papers instead of long monographs. When students are expected to write longer papers (e.g., more than 15 pages), they cringe at the thought of the assignment, and often try to pad the paper with unnecessary material that they do not want to write and I do not want to read. A short writing assignment (e.g., 1-6 pages) may help them focus on the main topic and express their views in a more focused manner. The material by Sosnoski on “hyper-readers” seems quite relevant for today’s college students.

### 5. **Be Practical**

I have implemented a few simple writing tasks in my classes. Students receive one point if their answers were completed on time, and zero points if not completed by the deadline. This has helped to put the ownership on the student instead of making me the villain. I have used short questionnaires in class, to encourage attendance and thoughtful participation in classroom discussions. I have also used longer essays, broken into ten components, with each component receiving one point if completed by the deadline. My goal is to encourage thinking more than writing, and I hope to get students involved with the material. It has simplified my grading, reduced student complaints, and helped to motivate students to think about the material in and out of the classroom.

- 1) **Have students respond formally to each other's presentations on a discussion board.**  
Students react to, and ask questions about, presentations in a public discussion board format. The commentary is not anonymous, so people are responsible and accountable for what they say, and they have incentive to say meaningful, productive things as they ask questions about the work of their peers.
- 2) **Have students write a thesis paragraph in class – and then re-write it.** Give them 10 minutes to develop a thesis paragraph, and then 10 minutes to rewrite, reword, edit, and re-think their thesis. If they start a paper in class, they cannot come to you later and say they could not come up with an idea for a paper. Also, the different theses can be read aloud to begin a class discussion and debate.
- 3) **Read-Around Groups** – have students bring in an anonymous (pseudonymed) paragraph, collect the paragraphs, break them into groups of 4, and hand out 4 randomized paragraphs to each group. The groups are to select the best paragraph out of the 4 in the stack (they have to decide together what “best” is), and be able to explain why it is the best. Every 8 minutes, have them switch paper piles. If you use a stopwatch, you can get a freshman seminar to read all the papers in 40 minutes, vote on which 4 paragraphs were the best, and explain why. It is glorious for the winners and gives helpful examples for the non-winners.
- 4) **Teach students fallacies** – they love to correct each other using fancy Latin terms, and it keeps debates from becoming heated, and papers from becoming confessional and emotional. (See Appendix)
- 5) **Quick Discussion paragraphs** – after a 30-40 minute lecture (or movie clip), have students take out a piece of paper, put their names on it, and note the most important pieces of evidence for the view presented in the lecture. Why were these pieces of evidence persuasive? Is there something that could have been more persuasively presented? A place where more or different evidence is needed? A great way to get students to think about how their own papers are more, or less, persuasive.
- 6) **Define your terms** – have students identify define the core term in the class, and then start a discussion about any number of things. Why is THAT term the core term? (there will be disagreement!) Which definition is the most clear and complete, and why? Are there problems with even the most crisp definitions? Then ask students to define terms in the paper assignment.

**1: Give Students Clear Writing Assignments as Early as Possible during the Semester**

The clear writing assignments are the assignments in which clear requirements, expectations or guidelines related to writing, peer reviewing, submitting, and grading the essays and other writing pieces are spelled out. Giving students clear writing assignments is vitally important because clear writing assignments related requirements, expectations or guidelines can not only give students clear guidance, thus avoid possible confusion for their writing assignments before they start writing and when they write and peer review their papers and other writing pieces, but also avoid possible disputes over the writing assignments and grading. Giving the clear writing assignments as early as possible during the semester allows students abundant time to understand requirements, expectations or guidelines of the writing assignments. When different requirements or guidelines are expected for different writing assignments, such as Blackboard posts verses essays, specific requirements, expectations or guidelines need to be attached to the respective writing assignments.

**2: Blackboard Discussion Board Posting**

Blackboard discussion board posting is a reading related writing assignment. In this writing assignment, students are required to make comments on part of the weekly readings, which they consider most important, most impressive, or most thought provoking, to explain their thoughts, and to raise and answer questions [at least one in each case]. Effective Blackboard discussion board posts may produce multiple benefits, such as an incentive to ensure that students carefully read the assigned reading material, a way of encouraging out-of-class discussion of course material as preparation for class activities, and more importantly as an writing assignment per se, a tool helping students focus on something they really consider important, which they can take on as starting point in their longer writing assignments of the semester.

**3: Peer Review of Rough Drafts**

Peer review of rough drafts can be assigned as part of a writing assignment. Pairs of students work together in the peer review of rough drafts. This assignment encourages students work collaboratively. Clear guidelines and grading such an assignment are extremely helpful for the students to successfully complete this assignment.

**4: Writing Instruction**

Classroom writing instruction is needed to introduce basics of good writing skills and discuss common problems in students' completed writing assignments. Specific problems of individual students may be addressed in one-to-one conference with individual students. Both in class and outside of class writing instructions can be given in collaboration with the writing liaison.

## **5: Using Blackboard Discussion Board for Writing Assignment Submission**

Using Blackboard discussion board for writing assignment submission has several benefits. It can help students meet the submission deadlines; facilitate the student peer review of rough drafts of a writing assignment, allow students to read other students papers, thus help them learn from each other.

## TATIANA ZILOTINA (MODERN LANGUAGES)

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I am interested mostly in writing in a foreign language, so I found a small but quite useful piece here: <http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/frenchwriting.html>

It's about French, but can be applied to any foreign language. To sum it up:

1. Writing, no matter how simple, in the target language should be done on a regular basis.
2. No translating! try to think in the target language.
3. Good writing in a foreign language results from attentive reading. The more you read, the more natural your writing becomes.
4. Peer-editing is helpful.
5. Use foreign websites with caution and always cite your sources.

French compositions (2 samples in PDF) are available for viewing at the bottom of the page.

I also found this compilation of articles (abstracts) on writing about literature in a foreign language: [http://www.uwm.edu/lets/edison/wac/foreign\\_languages.html](http://www.uwm.edu/lets/edison/wac/foreign_languages.html)

## APPENDIX: SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS

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<i>From William Deal</i>	
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### Three Categories of Questions: Crucial Distinctions

→ based on: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/crucial-distinctions.cfm>

Many critical thinking approaches present all judgments as falling into two exclusive and exhaustive categories: fact and opinion. However, the kind of judgment most important to this course and the kind we most want to foster falls into a third, very important category, that of reasoned judgment (critical thinking). A judge in a court of law is expected to engage in reasoned judgment; that is, the judge is expected not only to render a judgment, but also to base that judgment on sound, relevant evidence and valid legal reasoning. A judge is not expected to base her judgments on her subjective preferences, on her personal opinions, as such. Judgment based on sound reasoning goes beyond, and is never to be equated with, fact alone or mere opinion alone. Facts are typically used in reasoning, but good reasoning does more than state facts. Furthermore, a position that is well reasoned is not to be described as simply "opinion." Of course, we sometimes call the judge's verdict an "opinion," but we not only expect, we demand that it be based on relevant and sound reasoning.

Here's a somewhat different way to put this same point. It is essential when thinking critically to clearly distinguish three different kinds of questions:

→ **factual questions:** those with one right answer  
Example: What is the boiling point of lead?

→ **opinion questions:** those with as many answers as there are different human preferences  
Example: Which would you prefer, a vacation in the mountains or one at the seashore?

→ **critical questions:** those with better or worse answers (well or poorly reasoned answers)  
Example: How can we best address our most significant economic problems?

Only the second kind of question is a matter of sheer opinion. The third kind is a matter of reasoned judgment—we can rationally evaluate answers to the question (using intellectual standards such as clarity, depth, consistency and so forth).

When questions that require better or worse answers are treated as matters of opinion, pseudo critical thinking occurs. We come, then, to uncritically assume that everyone's "opinion" is of equal value. Our capacity to appreciate the importance of intellectual standards diminishes, and we can expect to hear questions such as these:

- What if I don't like these standards?
- Why shouldn't I use my own standards?
- Don't I have a right to my own opinion?
- What if I'm just an emotional person?
- What if I like to follow my intuition?
- What if I don't believe in being "rational?"

We then fail to see the difference between offering legitimate reasons and evidence in support of a view and simply asserting the view as true. We need to learn to recognize, value, and respect good reasoning.

## THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

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Mark Turner

Writing is torture for the writer who has not selected a style. A style comes not from surface choices large or small but from a set of answers to basic conceptual questions about truth, presentation, writer, reader, thought, language, and their relationships. Can truth be known? Can language be adequate to presentation? Who is speaking? What is the motive? Is there symmetry between writer and reader? Is the occasion formal or informal? Is writing a presentation of a completed thought, an engine of discovery, a self-replicating organism, a prison, or a fun-house mirror?

Questions like these are the elements of style. A consistent and mature suite of answers to them is a stand on the elements of style, and styles are defined by such stands. There are many styles, some specialized, some general: classic style, practical style, plain style, contemplative style, romantic style. We learn to write by learning a general style. From it, verbal skills and surface mechanical features flow. Writing is an intellectual activity that leads to verbal skills, but the verbal skills themselves do not lead to the activity. The relationship is not symmetric.

The distinction between the stand of the style and the actual conditions of the writer is all-important. The writer may be nervous, unsure of facts and locutions, motivated by an imposed task, obliged to try to persuade an audience of a proposition he does not have the knowledge or experience to understand, driven to avoid punishment, or afflicted by any of the other conditions typical of the first-year student in a composition course, but he may choose a style in which the **writer is competent and assured**, the **motive is truth**, the **purpose is presentation**, prose is a window, the **occasion is informal**, and the model scene is **conversation between equals**. This is a substitution of **classic style** for an actual scene of mock argument, and it has an illustrious history of success.

What is good in one style may be bad in another. If you start off with a view of style as a list of verbal skills and surface mechanical elements at any level, then you can end up with the "correct" list and present it as constituting style rather than a style. There are many mature and effective styles. Each offers the qualities that follow from its stand on the elements of style. The virtues of classic style, for example, include the clarity and simplicity that come from matching language to thought on the motive of truth. Other styles have other virtues.

### Some Key Elements of Classic Style

- **the writer is competent and assured** → the writer neither hesitates nor equivocates in detailing her/his views
- **the motive is truth** → the writer seeks to present the truth as she/he perceives it
- **the purpose is presentation** → presentation of the writer's ideas to her/his readers
- **the occasion is informal** → classic style often reads like someone speaking
- **the model scene is conversation between equals** → the writer is in conversation with the reader and treats the reader as an equal

### Reading & Summarizing with a Purpose

You have 15 minutes. We will reconvene to share summaries at 8:45.

*NOTE: I make separate handouts for each group – the groups don't know that the others have a different assignment.*

Group 1: STUDENT NAMES

Imagine that you are writing an essay on the “generation gap” between college students and their professors. Barrett Seaman’s chapter, “Daily Res Life,” is one of your sources of evidence.<sup>1</sup> In 3-5 sentences, accurately summarize the chapter for use in your essay. Consult *They Say/I Say* (especially pp. 36-7) for templates and verbs that introduce others’ work into your own.

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Group 2: STUDENT NAMES

Imagine that you are writing an essay on the use of technology by college students. Barrett Seaman’s chapter, “Daily Res Life,” is one of your sources of evidence. In 3-5 sentences, accurately summarize the chapter for use in your essay. Consult *They Say/I Say* (especially pp. 36-7) for templates and verbs that introduce others’ work into your own.

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Group 3: STUDENT NAMES

Imagine that you are writing an essay on political/social activism and engagement on campus. Barrett Seaman’s chapter, “Daily Res Life,” is one of your sources of evidence. In 3-5 sentences, accurately summarize the chapter for use in your essay. Consult *They Say/I Say* (especially pp. 36-7) for templates and verbs that introduce others’ work into your own.

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Group 4: STUDENT NAMES

Imagine that you are writing an essay on the physical and mental health of students on campus. Barrett Seaman’s chapter, “Daily Res Life,” is one of your sources of evidence. In 3-5 sentences, accurately summarize the chapter for use in your essay. Consult *They Say/I Say* (especially pp. 36-7) for templates and verbs that introduce others’ work into your own.

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<sup>1</sup> Seaman, Barrett. “Daily Res Life.” Chapter 1 in his *Binge: What Your College Student Won’t Tell You*. Wiley, 2006.

## CONCESSION AND CONTRAST

One of the hallmarks of sophisticated writing (and thinking) is the ability to cope with complicated issues and ideas. As the cliché goes, nothing is ever easy, nothing in life falls into a simple “right” or “wrong” category (at least in academia, this is certainly true!). So, in order to prove that you are a thoughtful individual, you will have to learn to deal with (apparent and real) contradictions to your lines of argumentation. Even when you are not directly confronted with opposing viewpoints, there are often times when your argument can be strengthened through juxtaposing ideas. Two rhetorical choices, what I am calling “concession” and “contrast,” can help you develop a more complex writing style.

**Concession** involves admitting that the “other side” has a reasonable point to make, that there are other viewpoints about your topic. **Contrast** allows you to point out useful complications to your ideas, but does not necessarily suggest that one viewpoint is better than the other.

For example:

**CONCESSION:** Members of the discourse community suggest that the Patient Medical History Form is simply a neutral way of transmitting knowledge efficiently from patient to doctor. They deny the possibility that what also gets transmitted is a set of western medical values (body over mind, isolated and isolatable symptoms, and valuation of medical technology). *Acknowledging the need for economical transmission of knowledge*, both in terms of space and time, we can nevertheless draw connections between the genre and the ways of knowing their patients that the doctors in this study displayed.

**CONTRAST:** *While the check-box portion* of the Patient Medical History Form focuses physical symptoms of the patient, *the narrative portions* of the form emphasize medical technology. Narrative questions ask for information about surgeries, medical procedures undergone, and the previous treatment of the patient.

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Revise the following pairs of sentences to use either concession or contrast (these sentences are loosely derived from your Essay 1 papers).

1. The intentions and reasons for filling the surveys out range from guest to guest. As for the administrative staff at the hotel, their reason is to gather feedback on their performance.

## Using Concrete Evidence & Making a Claim

*An Example from Rebekah Nathan<sup>1</sup> to inspire Blog Posting #2...*

*TS = “They Say”; IS = “I Say”*

Probably the most common door display included strings of phrases and words cut from magazines, usually interspersed with cutout images. Although some doors posted discrete messages such as “Saying of the Week” or “Quotable Quotes,” most used a collage-like genre to create a carefully constructed impression of freethinking spontaneity and individuality. On one representative door on my hall were the following phrases:

Friends don’t let friends party naked; Bitch; 24 hours in a day. 24 bottles of beer in a case. Coincidence? I think Not; Z-Man!! We Test Animals; Crazy Wild; Where the Stars Go; How Long Should you Wait?

While this reads on one level like a highly individualized almost stream of consciousness expression, it is actually highly stylized. Its cutout words and phrases, set at different angles and using different sizes and fonts of type, were in the same visual style that appears on most doors. Its content references to booze, nakedness, craziness, youth, celebrity, and sexuality were also common themes, which conveyed even larger themes of freedom and fun. Thus, down the hall on a neighboring door, one could see different phrases, also in pasted cutouts, that were manifestations of the same themes: “Bare your butt,” “Young and Royal,” “Las Vegas,” “A Colorful Character,” “Once Upon a Mattress,” “The Next Best Thing to Naked,” or on the next one “Welcome to CrazyWorld” and “Naked on Roller Skates.”

Nudity, sexuality, drinking, craziness. These are certainly part of the college scene, but concentrating on the literal content alone misses the underlying values—fun, expressiveness, individuality, freedom, spontaneity—which are really the point. (Nathan 23-4)

*General statement sets the scene & transitions from previous paragraph...*

*Narrows the topic from all displays to “collage-like genre”*

*Provides concrete evidence (from observation)*

*TS = this is an example of individualism; IS = this is a “highly stylized” genre with rules & regularities*

*Connection to larger controlling idea/argument (“freedom and fun” as the primary themes expressed by students via dormitory door decorations)*

*Additional examples to justify claim/interpretation.*

*Complicates the argument: Implied TS = focus on the “bad” behavior; IS = taking these phrases too literally misses the point; underlying values are more significant*

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan, Rebekah. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

## *Levels of Argumentation*

We have discussed the disciplinary conventions for argumentation – different disciplines (biology, sociology, classics, etc.) handle argumentation differently, but they all require you to make a claim about your subject and support it with evidence. The important difference between novice (students) and expert (scholars in each discipline) claims is their specificity and relevance. Essentially, all scholarly disciplines (and you *are* members of a scholarly community, at least while you’re at the university) require you to “join a conversation” that is already in progress. That means not only acknowledging previous and current research (intertextuality), but also understanding *what* makes a good argument/claim/thesis for a particular discipline.

Your challenge (at least in English classes, and in many other disciplines as well) is to move beyond the obvious claims (those that elicit a “duh” response) to ones that are more complicated and *add* something to the conversation.

Consider these four claims:

1. *The Bell Curve* concludes that intelligence is genetic.
2. Relying on the validity of highly suspect intelligence testing measures, *The Bell Curve* concludes that intelligence is genetic.
3. An analysis of the language in *The Bell Curve* reveals logical elisions that parallel the authors’ reliance on unproblematized intelligence testing measures.
4. The cohesive ties of *The Bell Curve* help maintain an illusion of scientific veracity for the text’s conclusions about the genetic/racial roots of intelligence.

What are the differences in these four claims? Which claim seems the most specific? Why? What is the *new* information presented in each of the claims?

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YOUR TASK: Look back at Essay 1 (or one of the others you are revising for your final portfolio). Write the claim below (1-2 sentences):

What *new* information does this claim add to the ‘conversation’ that the paper is joining? That is, what does your claim contribute to knowledge about the topic?

## *Levels of Explanation*

One of the hallmarks of good scholarly writing is the clarity and precision of its examples and evidence. Just as we discussed with claim statements, however, *specificity* helps make your position stronger. Consider the following statements about the movie *Stand and Deliver* – how specific and useful are they?

Level 1: Jaime Escalante goes overboard when teasing his students.

*General, broad – doesn't really explain much. What is "overboard"? What kind of "teasing"?*

Level 2: Jaime Escalante makes fun of his female students, using their personal lives to amuse the class.

*More specific (female students, personal lives), but still doesn't say how he "makes fun" of them.*

Level 3: Jaime Escalante makes fun of Claudia for having many boyfriends.

*Specific (Claudia, boyfriends), good piece of evidence – could be more specific still, and could also have other evidence linked to it.*

Level 4: Jaime Escalante ridicules his female students, going so far as to comment that Claudia has "more boyfriends than Elizabeth Taylor." When his female students get problems right, Escalante often makes comments about their personal lives. For example, when Ana rightly identifies her apple as "missing twenty-five percent," Escalante responds with the question "Is it true that intelligent women make better lovers?" Again, when Claudia answers a question correctly, Escalante comments that she "is good now, but [she's] gonna end up barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen" to laughter from the class.

*Detail, detail, detail! This explanation provides specific information (quotations) as well as several examples to back up the claim.*

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**YOUR TURN** – Take the following claims and support them with specific and detailed examples from the film.

1. In some parts, Mr. Escalante ignored what the students had to say and even made some students cry.
2. Because of his disciplinary skills, Mr. Clark was able to change a school full of drug dealers and troublemakers into a school full of students who wanted an education.
3. Ms. Johnson was a nurturing teacher, taking an interest in her students' lives.

## *Framing Quotations*

“In a way, quotations are orphans: words that have been taken from their original contexts and that need to be integrated into their new textual surroundings” (Graff and Birkenstein 40).<sup>1</sup>

**First: Introduce the quotation.**  
**(Write down and cite quotation)**

College life provides a diversity of social, academic and athletic opportunities for students. This can be a powerful positive force, but it can also detract from students’ abilities to manage their time. As Malcolm X states, “one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that” (227).

Some Templates (Graff and Birkenstein 43):

- X states, “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- As the prominent philosopher X puts it, “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- According to X, “\_\_\_\_\_”
- In her book, \_\_\_\_\_, X maintains that “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- X complicates matters further when she writes, “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).

**Then: Explain what the author is arguing in the quotation. (The author should agree with how you sum up the quotation – this will help you establish credibility, by demonstrating that you do know what the author is saying even if you don't agree.)**

College life provides a diversity of social, academic and athletic opportunities for students. This can be a powerful positive force, but it can also detract from students’ abilities to manage their time. As Malcolm X states, “one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that” (227). *In this statement, Malcolm X is pointing out that the variety of activities that colleges offer students can keep them from completing their academic work.*

Some Templates (Graff and Birkenstein 44):

- X is insisting that “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- The essence of X’s argument is that “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- In making this comment, X argues that “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).
- In other words, X believes “\_\_\_\_\_” (#).

### **Works Cited**

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Malcolm X. “Learning to Read.” *Rereading America*. Eds. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen and Bonnie Lisle. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford, 1998. 219-226.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that *this* quotation has, indeed, been orphaned. Poor quotation. It needs a frame!

The “frame” is not really complete until you *do something with it*. (This is the “I Say” portion of your response – we’ll discuss strategies for this throughout this semester.)

**And Beyond: State the implications of the quotation for your own argument.  
(What do you make of the author's argument? How does it allow you room to have your say?)**

College life provides a diversity of social, academic and athletic opportunities for students. This can be a powerful positive force, but it can also detract from students’ abilities to manage their time. As Malcolm X states, “one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that” (227). In this statement, Malcolm X is pointing out that the variety of activities that colleges offer students can keep them from completing their academic work. *While Malcolm X is certainly right that distractions are plentiful on college campuses, he fails to consider the necessity of these social interactions among students. Without the “boola-boola and all of that,” students would miss out on an essential part of their education.*

**YOUR TURN:** On a separate sheet of paper, provide a “frame” (steps 1 and 2) for the following quotations. *Note:* you may want to use only part of each quotation – this is OK, as long as your sentences are still complete.

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“Writing also...gives you a way of going back to work on the text of your own reading. It allows you to be self-critical. You can revise not just to make your essay neat or tight or tidy but to see what kind of reader you have been, to examine the pattern and consequences in the choices you have made” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 4).

“Reading...requires a difficult mix of authority and humility. On the one hand, a reader takes charge of a text; on the other, a reader gives generous attention to someone else’s (a writer’s) key terms and methods, commits his time to her examples, tries to think in her language, imagines that this strange work is important, compelling, at least for the moment” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 10).

“Strong readers...remake what they have read to serve their own ends, putting things together, figuring out how ideas and examples relate, explaining as best they can material that is difficult or problematic, translating phrases like Richard Rodriguez’s ‘scholarship boy’ into their own terms. At these moments, it is hard to distinguish the act of reading from the act of writing” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 12).

## Works Cited

Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. “Introduction: Ways of Reading.” *Ways of Reading*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996. 1-18.

## *Peer Review Letters*

### *Why do we peer review?*

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The concept of peer review is likely not new to you – you’ve probably been asked to read through a friend’s paper the night before it was due, etc. Recognizing that you are *not* the ones who will be grading the final product, however, the question remains a legitimate one: why do this? There are several reasons. First, looking at your peers’ work gives you insights into rhetorical and argumentative practices that you may not have thought about yourself. Rhetoricians for centuries have suggested modeling your writing on writing that you admire – so one of the benefits of peer review is that it provides a number of different models. Second, the process of peer review asks you to apply the grading criteria to an actual essay. By doing so, you cement the criteria in your own mind and (one hopes) begin to think about it as you revise your own work. Finally, peer review is a useful and less-threatening way to gather feedback on your writing. Your peers can often give you great advice on where something feels awkward or confusing, and you can do the same for them.

### *How do we peer review?*

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The most tried-and-true method of peer review is the “mark up the margins” technique. While I think this is a good place to start, simply asking you to “read and mark” your peers’ papers doesn’t necessarily ensure your thoughtful engagement with the text (instead, it often leads to a treasure hunt for errors). So, while I encourage you to make notes in the margins of your peers’ papers, I’m asking that you do a little bit more:

1. Read your peer’s paper carefully and note significant moments in the margins – really interesting ideas, confusing wording or argumentation, insufficiently developed arguments, exceptionally clear examples or explanations, etc.
2. Type a letter to your peer consisting of three paragraphs (as follows):
  - a. Paragraph One: Describe to the author at least three things that you really liked about the essay. (Keep in mind the grading criteria and reference them as appropriate.) Be sure to explain *what* you liked as well as *why* you liked it.
  - b. Paragraph Two: Describe three things that the author could do to improve the paper. Here, it is even more important to be specific – what areas of the paper need further development? Again, reference the grading criteria whenever possible.
  - c. Paragraph Three – you have three papers, each of which is numbered (1-3). You will do a little Kolln-style rhetorical analysis<sup>1</sup> on each paper (a different feature for each number) as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Kolln, Martha. *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman, 2006.

- i. Paper 1 – Sentence Patterns & Rhythm. Consider how the paper makes use of the sentence patterns outlined by Kolln. How does the paper flow (rhythm)? Are there places where the rhythm can/should be broken up or smoothed out? You may also want to think about the Known-New contract in this paper – does the author make appropriate use of this “contract”? Explain.
- ii. Paper 2 – Coordination/Subordination. Consider how the author chooses to emphasize particular kinds of information. Does the author use many subordinate clauses? What information is included in these clauses? For this paper, consider also the use of adverbials and/or adjectival phrases. How many are there? How effective are they? Are there places where you might suggest alterations? Explain.
- iii. Paper 3 – Word choice. Consider the particular word choices the author has made (verbs, adjectives, adverbs). Are there any extended metaphors being used in the essay? How effective is the imagery used by the author? Are the verbs mostly active or passive? What is the effect? Explain.

## FALLACIES TO REMEMBER

*A fallacy is an argument in which the premises fail to imply the conclusion*

### **Circular/question begging (petitio principii)**

*Assumes what it is trying to prove*

“Everything in the bible was divinely inspired, because the bible says so.”  
“To allow every person freedom of speech is advantageous to the state because it is highly conducive to the interests of the community that everyone be granted the ability to express him or herself freely.”  
“I think that abortion is wrong because it isn’t right to have an abortion.”

### **Ambiguous/sophistic**

*Shifts meaning of a term or phrase in the middle of the argument*

#### **A. Equivocation**

*A term or phrase is used in different ways in different parts of the argument*

“Who did you pass on the road?” “Nobody.” “Where did he go?”  
“Legalizing armed assault would result in less crime because fewer persons (no persons) would be guilty of armed assault.” Crime is reduced because it is redefined, not because the policy has worked wonders.

#### **B. Amphiboly/amphibology**

*The grammatical construction of a sentence leaves the meaning of that sentence open -- on one reading it is false, on another reading, true*

“One child was observed by an officer jumping from the roof and was taken into custody.” (from the landmark sept. 10, 1994.)

“The oracle told Croesus that if he went to war a great kingdom would be destroyed.”  
“Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg address while traveling to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope.”

#### **C. Accent**

*The accent on the term shifts, changing its meaning*

“I had a wonderful meal.” V. “i had a wonderful meal.”  
“I’ve been to Paris, but I’ve never been to Paris.”

### **Beside the point/non sequitur (ignoratio elenchi)**

*Conclusion is irrelevant to the issue at hand*

“Veterans have always had a strong voice in our government, (therefore) it is time to give them the recognition they deserve.” (Ronald Reagan)  
It is raining, so i must buy some apples.”

### **Appeal to the crowd/majority**

*Most/all people believe this, therefore, this is true*

“Everyone is doing it!” “Nobody believes that anymore!”

### **Straw man**

*Misrepresents the view of the opponent, or oversimplifies it*

“Communists think that all people are exactly alike, but all people are not exactly alike, so communism is wrong.”  
(Notice that Marx claims that people are varied in the manifesto.)  
“So, your position is that it is always right to take action, under any circumstance, no matter what.”

**Opposition**

*The opposition believes this, therefore it is false*

“The socialists believe that the earth is round, therefore the earth must be flat.”  
“Because I disagree with your positions on the space program and the plight of the chipmunk, i shall also disagree with your position on chocolate.”

**Genetic fallacy**

*We can explain why you believe a, therefore a is false*

“You hate logic only because your uncle hated logic and you strive to be like him.” (Notice that the explanation may be true without dampening your intense hatred for logic, or falsifying the possibility that hating logic is right.)

**Appeal to ignorance (ad ignorantiam)**

*No one has proven a, therefore a is false*

“No one has proven that there is a God, therefore there is no God.”

(or)

*No one has disproven a, therefore a is true*

“No one has proven that there isn’t a God, therefore, there is a God.”

**Post hoc ergo propter hoc**

*A happened after b, therefore a was caused by b*

“Why are you whistling?” “To keep the elephants away.” “But there are no elephants here.” “See, it works!”  
“If I chant and then dribble twice, I will make the basket.”

**Complex question**

*An incriminating answer is loaded into the meaning of the inquiry*

“Are you still beating your wife?”  
“Why is the private development of resources so much more efficient than any government-owned enterprise?”

**Division/composition**

*This is f, therefore every part of this is f*

“This is an important corporation, Mr. Doe is an official of that corporation, and therefore Mr. Doe is important.”  
“The south side of town is dangerous, you are from the south side of town, therefore you are dangerous”

(Or)

*Every part of this is f, thus, this is f*

“Every part of this machine is lightweight, therefore this machine is lightweight.”  
“One cigarette won’t kill me.”

**Appeal to inappropriate authority (ad verecundiam)**

*The authority says a is true, therefore a is true*

“Michael Jordan wears Nike, therefore Nike makes the best shoes.”  
“Two out of three specialists agree, product x is the strongest.”

**Hasty generalization**

*Drawing a conclusion based on a single case or very few cases*

“All the women I have met dislike cheesecake, therefore women just don’t like cheesecake.”

“The last U.S. administration was dishonest, therefore this administration is dishonest.”

**Accident**

*A rule is applied to a specific case, to which the rule should not be applied*

“Property should be returned to its rightful owner. Return this AK-47 to the violent man in the asylum right now!”

“Patience is a virtue, and so is tolerance. So I will continue to be patient and tolerate my neighbor, not reporting this child molester to the authorities.”

**Faulty analogy**

*An analogy is made that is severely lacking or misleading*

“Eminem is exactly like Hitler, because they both have/had an interest in art.”

“Cats are like women, spoiled and finicky.”

**False dichotomy**

*Offering two extreme choices without regard to other possibilities*

“Death is either like a deep sleep or it is hanging out with your friends in the afterlife. As both of these activities are fun, death is fun.” (from Socrates in the Phaedo. The form here is a valid one, yet the option of burning eternally in hell is not considered in the premises.)

**Against the man (ad hominem)**

*Argues against the person who holds the position instead of against the position itself*

“Don’t believe her, she is an adulteress”

“You can dismiss what he says because he is lazy”

**A. Tu quoque**

*Pointing out someone else’s guilt in order to prove your own innocence*

“Look who’s talking!”

**B. Poisoning the well**

*Pointing out a non-rational motive for holding a position in order to prove the position false*

“You’re just defending the draft because you know you will get a medical exemption.”

“You’re just attacking the draft because you know you will be chosen.”

**Appeal to emotion (ad populum)**

*Attempting to persuade someone not through evidence but by instilling a feeling in that person*

“If you are a patriot, then you must love everything the president does.”

“If you want to be like Cindy Crawford, you have to try Revlon.”

**Appeal to pity (ad misericordiam)**

*A case is made based on the altruism and mercy of the audience*

“Although he was an axe murderer, Henry argued ad misericordiam (claiming he was an abused child who only sought his mother’s love) to a jury not schooled in logic, and was acquitted because they felt sorry for him.”

**Slippery slope**

*Arguing that once you begin, there will be no stopping until you hit bottom*

“First, they will take our handguns. Then they will take our hunting knives. Give them an inch and they will take a mile. Soon they will take our freedom!”

“First, a beer. Then a joint, then cocaine, then LSD, then full blown heroin addiction!”

**Appeal to force (ad baculum)**

*Attempting to persuade by threat rather than reason*

“Agree with me or I will thrash you!”

“I am here to make you an offer you can’t refuse.”