COLLOQUIUM: TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING

INFO PACKET

31 pages

Included:

Helpful Links

Colloquium Presentation Notes

Sample emails to Department Chairs

Academic Cover Letter Sample (with points to remember)

Sample CVs

5 Things Freshman Comp Students Need to Learn

SAMPLE TEACHING HANDOUTS:

Common Errors: Punctuation

Common Errors: Spelling & Grammar

Paragraphs

Structure & Organization

MLA Heading Format

Assignment Sheet: Description & Exemplification

Assignment Sheet: Narrative Paragraph

Assignment Sheet: Narrative Essay with Compare/Contrast

Brainstorming Handout: Narrative with Compare/Contrast

Prewriting Worksheet: Compare/Contrast

Peer Response Sheet: Description & Exemplification

Peer Edit Sheet: Thesis Statements

Eliminating Clutter in Your Writing (group exercise)

Sample grammar/editing test

Sample test on essay structure / in-class essay assignment

The Basics of In-Text Citations (for research papers)

Guidelines for Works Cited Page (for research papers)

Helpful Links

New adjunct Info:

<https://sites.google.com/site/adjunctsunite/Home>

<http://chronicle.com/section/First-Time-on-the-Market-/146/>

Writing Academic Cover Letters:

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/842.asp>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/549/1/>

CV info:

<http://www.adjunctprofessoronline.com/content/cv-formatting-guidelines>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/641/01/>

<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/career-tools-and-advice/cv-templates/346/10-things-not-to-do-on-your-cv>

Free Word CV Templates:

[http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/CT010144925.aspx#pg:2|ai:TC030005858](http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/CT010144925.aspx#pg:2|ai:TC030005858 )

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/CT010144925.aspx#pg:2|ai:TC006369486>

TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING COLLOQUIUM—NOTES

After completed 18 credit hours (2 clusters), can apply to teach developmental writing at community colleges (grammar lab, 2 pre-comp writing classes—sentence-level work and writing paragraphs / writing full essay)

Email the English Department Chair directly (see sample)—brief, polite, to the point.

Sample CVs & cover letters available online. (see samples in folder)

CV different from a resume—lists education first, then any teaching-related experience (training, etc.); publications; direct & clear

After finish degree, can apply to teach comp. Openings will be listed on websites. Do application, have transcripts sent (info on each site). Can send follow-up email to Chair—brief and to the point. (see sample)

INTERVIEW:

Be enthusiastic about teaching writing; be flexible and willing to take classes at times/campuses offered; have an idea of what your teaching philosophy would be—focus on the writing process, teaching important writing and communications skills for all majors; have an idea of a class exercise that you might do (for adjunct, usuall no demo, but might ask for an example of how you teach)

ONCE YOU HAVE THE JOB:

Do NOT teach comp like a creative writing class—do not workshop student work the way you would in an MFA class. But you can use your creativity in other ways.

Use the textbooks—they’re paying good money for them, so assign and cover in class daily readings from the texts—but it’s OK to supplement occasionally (just don’t copy/assign tons of stories/poems just because you love them—teach the text).

HO: 5 things comp students need to know

Tell them at the beginning of class (can write on board) what they’ll be doing today (learning objectives)

Give assignment sheet for each essay, go over it in class, make sure they know what’s expected of them, what grading based on

Discuss readings in class—encourage them to annotate their texts as they read (they can still sell them back); have them apply readings/concepts to their own lives (critical thinking skills)

Have them write every day, but make the writing geared toward their essay/writing assignment (not just random topic of the day—they’ll think it’s busy work)

Sample creative in-class exercises:

Writing exercises that are focused toward the writing assignment/upcoming essay

For compare/contrast essay: play song & cover song, take notes during for specific details and examples, write a c/c paragraph in class after (paragraph // essay structure)

For literary analysis: watch short movie clips, then ask students questions about symbolism, characters, setting, scene, dialogue, etc.—and how those things tie in with the theme of the film

For argument/persuasive essay: bring in two ads—one effectively persuasive, one not. Short presentations showing ads and why one is persuasive and other isn’t effective (audience/overgeneralization/etc.)

For arg essay: in-class debate on a topic (divide room in half—make it something that won’t offend based on religious/ political beliefs) [i.e., why they should get an extra class period before essay is due]

You can use media in various ways (as long as you make it directly apply to their essays/writing assignments)—class blog, Blackboard discussion board/videos/links

Use groups, use pairs for focused writing exercises/activities—give specific directions

Try combining rhetorical strategies:

narrative with compare/contrast (being hs student vs. college student; brother vs. you)

descriptive with exemplification (descriptive details + concrete examples / show a point)

argument with research (argument essay can serve as draft for research paper—add sources to back up your own good points)

GRADING: Do NOT over-comment. Do NOT correct every comma. Note patterns of errors, comment at end that student should look for all occurrences in essay (comma splices, fragments, run-on sentences).

Do NOT make their paper bleed red ink—they won’t read your notes. They need to know concretely what they’re doing well & what they need to work on in next essay.

DO break up your grading throughout the day(s)/week—several at a time, not all at once, or it will be too overwhelming.

Plagiarism—Put a plagiarism policy in your syllabus (check school’s catalog), make it clear in class and on each assignment sheet that no outside sources are to be used for any essay except the research essay. They should be writing in class—you’ll see the development of their essay.

If you feel something may be plagiarized, Google a suspicious line. If the school uses Turnitin, use it.

Make sure you have the students write on the first day of class—an introductory freewrite, to practice freewriting and to introduce themselves to the class—and collect and keep those freewrites so you have a sample of their natural writing style.

Sample email to apply to teach developmental writing (before degree completed):

Dr. Smith,

I am very interested in teaching developmental writing classes while I am finishing up my MFA in Writing degree at Lindenwood University. My schedule is flexible, and I would be happy to teach any of the developmental classes you offer. My CV is attached and I have filled out the application for employment. Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

name

phone number

email

Sample email to apply to teach composition, etc. (after degree completed):

Dr. Smith,

I recently completed my MFA in Writing at Lindenwood University, and I am very interested in teaching any writing or literature classes that you offer. My schedule is flexible, and I have filled out the application and have submitted my transcripts. My CV is attached for your review. Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

name

phone number

email

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/639/02/>

**Academic Cover Letter Sample**

**Summary:** When you're applying for a faculty position with a college or university, the cover letter is your first chance to make a strong impression as a promising researcher and teacher. Below you'll find some strategies for presenting your qualifications effectively in an academic context.

**Contributors:**Purdue OWL  
**Last Edited:** 2010-04-25 09:00:00

November 2, 1998

Dr. Naomi Sellers  
Chair, English Search Committee  
Box 58  
Baxter College  
Arcadia, WV 24803

Dear Dr. Sellers:

I am writing to apply for the position as assistant professor of English with an emphasis in rhetoric and composition that you advertised in the October MLA Job Information List. I am a graduate student at Prestigious University working on a dissertation under the direction of Professor Prominent Figure. Currently revising the third of five chapters, I expect to complete all work for the Ph.D. by May of 1999. I believe that my teaching and tutoring experience combined with my course work and research background in rhetoric and composition theory make me a strong candidate for the position outlined in your notice.

As my curriculum vitae shows, I have had excellent opportunities to teach a variety of writing courses during my graduate studies, including developmental writing, first-year writing for both native speakers and second language students, advanced writing, and business writing. I have also worked as a teaching mentor for new graduate students, a position that involved instruction in methods of composition teaching, development of course materials, and evaluation of new graduate instructors. Among the most satisfying experiences for me as a teacher has been instructing students on an individual basis as a tutor in our university Writing Lab. Even as a classroom instructor, I find that I always look forward to the individual conferences that I hold with my students several times during the semester because I believe this kind of one-on-one interaction to be essential to their development as writers.

My work in the composition classroom has provided me with the inspiration as well as a kind of laboratory for my dissertation research. My project, The I Has It: Applications of Recent Models of Subjectivity in Composition Theory, examines the shift since the 1960s from expressive models of writing toward now-dominant postmodern conceptions of decentered subjectivity and self-construction through writing. I argue that these more recent theoretical models, while promising, cannot have the liberating effects that are claimed for them without a concomitant reconception of writing pedagogy and the dynamics of the writing classroom. I relate critical readings of theoretical texts to my own pedagogical experiments as a writing teacher, using narratives of classroom successes and failures as the bases for critical reflection on postmodern composition theory. After developing my dissertation into a book manuscript, I plan to continue my work in current composition theory through a critical examination of the rhetoric of technological advancement in the computer-mediated writing classroom.

My interest in the computer classroom has grown out of recent experience teaching composition in that environment. In these courses my students have used computers for writing and turning in notes and essays, communicating with one another and with me, conducting library catalogue research and web research, and creating websites. I have encouraged my students to think and write critically about their experiences with technology, both in my class and elsewhere, even as we have used technology to facilitate our work in the course. Syllabi and other materials for my writing courses can be viewed at my website: http://machine.prestigious.edu/~name. In all of my writing courses I encourage students to become critical readers, thinkers, and writers; my goal is always not only to promote their intellectual engagement with cultural texts of all kinds but also to help them become more discerning readers of and forceful writers about the world around them.

I have included my curriculum vitae and would be happy to send you additional materials such as a dossier of letters of reference, writing samples, teaching evaluations, and past and proposed course syllabi. I will be available to meet with you for an interview at either the MLA or the CCCC convention, or elsewhere at your convenience. I can be reached at my home phone number before December 19; between then and the start of the MLA convention, you can reach me at (123) 456-7890. I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

First Lastname

#### Points to Remember

* Use the form of address and title of the contact person as they appear in the job notice.
* Refer to the job title as it appears in the notice, and state where you learned of the position.
* Mention your major professor by name, especially if he or she is well known in your field. Also, mention your expected completion date.
* Make a claim for your candidacy that you will support in the body of the letter.
* For a position at a small undergraduate college, emphasize teaching experience and philosophy early in the letter.
* Describe your dissertation and plans for future research. Emphasize links between your teaching and research interests.
* Mention specific teaching experience that is relevant to the job notice or is otherwise noteworthy.
* Refer to relevant materials available on the web.
* State your willingness to forward additional materials and to meet for an interview.
* Mention any temporary changes in contact information.

**SAMPLE CV**

**MARY SMITH**

123 Main Street, St. Louis, MO 63105

(314) 555.5555

msmith@email.com

**Education:**

MFA in Writing (Poetry), 2008

Washington University in St. Louis, MO

Thesis: *Stay Your Eager Hand*, directed by Carl Phillips

BA in English (Creative Writing), 2005

Minor in Women & Gender Studies

Augustana College, Rock Island, IL

*Cum laude*

**Teaching Experience:**

Lecturer, Department of English, Washington University in St. Louis

Writing 1: *Writing Culture*, designed & graded, Spring 2009

Lecturer, Department of English, Washington University in St. Louis

Independent Study: Advanced Poetry Writing, designed & graded, Spring 2009

Visiting Writer, Department of English, Washington University in St. Louis

Writing 1: *Writing Culture*, designed, Spring 2009

Writing 1: *Writing Culture*, designed, Fall 2008

Instructor, Department of English, Washington University in St. Louis

Poetry Writing 1, designed & graded, Spring 2008

Poetry Writing 1, designed & graded, Fall 2007

**Poetry Publications:**

***Chapbook*:**

*Silence and Snow*, Lettre Sauvage, forthcoming 2012, Lettre Sauvage Poetry Prize

***Journals:***

*Admit Two*, “Dream Sleep,” Fall 2010

*Agni*, “Hummingbird,” Winter 2008

*Barn Owl Review*, “As Much As This Allows,” Winter 2008

**Work in Progress:**

*Mourning Song*, a book-length collection of poems

**Awards, Fellowships, & Honors:**

Winner, Lettre Sauvage Poetry Prize, 2009

Jr. Writer-in-Residence, Washington University in St. Louis, 2009

Semi-Finalist, Brittingham & Pollak Prizes, 2008

**Readings & Lectures:**

Featured Poet, The Writing Program Reading, Washington University in St. Louis, April 2008

**Editorial Experience:**

Editor, Snowbank Press, 2006 to present

Poetry Editor, *Hilltops*, 2008

Poetry Reader, *North Review*, 2006

**Related Experience:**

Reading/Writing Center Tutor, Augustana College, 2002-2005

Special Collections Library Assistant, Augustana College, Summer 2005

Editing/Marketing Intern, Design Toscano, Elk Grove, IL, Summer 2003

**Professional Associations:**

Academy of American Poets, 2008 to present

Association of Writers & Writing Programs, 2006 to present

PEN American Center, 2006 to present

Modern Language Association, 2008

**References:**

Available upon request

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| **Sample Curriculum Vitae - Academic** | |
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| **John Smith  Street, City, State, Zip Phone: 555-555-5555 Cell: 555-666-6666 email@email.com**  **Objective:** Assistant Professor, Psychology  **Education:** Ph.D., Psychology, University of Minnesota, 2006 Concentrations: Psychology, Community Psychology Dissertation: A Study of Learning Disabled Children in a Low Income Community  M.A., Psychology, University at Albany, 2003 Concentrations: Psychology, Special Education Thesis: Communication Skills of Learning Disabled Children   B.A, Psychology, California State University, Long Beach, CA, 2000  **Experience:** Instructor, 2004 - 2006 University of Minnesota Course: Psychology in the Classroom  Teaching Assistant, 2002 - 2003 University at Albany Courses: Special Education, Learning Disabilities  **Research Skills:** Extensive knowledge of SPSSX and SAS statistical programs.  **Presentations:** Smith John (2006). The behavior of learning disabled adolescents in the classrooms. Paper presented at the Psychology Conference at the University of Minnesota.  **Publications:** Smith, John (2005). The behavior of learning disabled adolescents in the classroom. Journal of Educational Psychology, 120 - 125.  **Grants and Fellowships:**   * RDB Grant (University of Minnesota Research Grant, 2005), $2000 * Workshop Grant (for ASPA meeting in New York, 2004), $1500   **Awards and Honors:**   * Treldar Scholar, 2005 * Academic Excellent Award, 2003   **Skills and Qualifications:**   * Microsoft Office, Internet * Programming ability in C++ and PHP   **References:** Available upon request. | |

**Five Things Freshman Composition Students Need to Learn**

Beth Mead

**1. Writing is a process**

On the first day of class, ask your students about their past experiences with writing assignments. Have they had teachers who simply gave them a due date for a paper, with little direction about how to write it? Did they have teachers who marked up their essays so much that the paper seemed to be bleeding red ink? Did they have to write on topics they cared nothing about? (These things won’t happen in your class—they will learn how to write an essay; you will note patterns of errors on their essays as opposed to marking every single error; you will allow them to find a topic for each writing assignment that interests them in some way.) Finally, ask them what the hardest part of writing is. They may have many things to say (or nothing at all to say)—but the hardest thing for many students (and many writers) is just getting started.

Let them know that approaching writing as a process, rather than as a final product, makes getting started much easier. Tell them—or better yet, ask them, since some may know—what the steps of the writing process are: Brainstorming / Freewriting / Prewriting / Drafting / Peer Response / Revision

The writing process is not necessarily one straight line; when you get stuck and run out of things to say in your draft, go back to freewriting. After you’ve revised, you can ask a peer to read your paper again.

Emphasize these things to your students:

* The steps of the writing process may seem like more work than “just” writing a paper all at once, but they actually make it easier—when you freewrite on your essay topic in class, you’ll go home armed with notes you can type up, move around, and expand upon, which is much easier than staring at a blank computer screen, wondering how to begin.
* Procrastinating does not make you a bad writer. It makes you a writer. Share a story of your own—vacuuming at 2am when a paper was due the next morning—to let them know you understand that weight, that dread you carry around knowing you have to write an essay. Then remind them that the best cure for procrastination is freewriting. Just sit down and start to write (or type). No expectations, no corrections—just let the writing be a form of thinking.
* Find what works best for you—maybe rather than freewriting, you prefer listing or clustering. Maybe you need complete silence while you write; maybe you need to have music in the background. Find your favorite place to sit, your best time of day to write, your favorite pen; curl up with your laptop, or sit up straight in the school computer lab—whatever feels right to you and helps you get started.
* Editing for grammar, spelling, and punctuation comes later in the process. At the prewriting phase, focus on content, getting your thoughts on the page. Once you have a draft to work with, then it’s time to spell-check and line-edit. If you focus on mechanics in the early stages of your essay—rewriting sentences as you go, worrying if you spelled something correctly—then you’re interrupting the flow of thought that will allow you to get your content on the page. Just write down everything you can think of about the topic first. The cleaning-up, revising, and editing will come later to polish all the good thoughts you’re sharing in your essay.

Have your students freewrite for five minutes at the very first class meeting. Give them a specific topic (for the first class, it may be to describe themselves; other freewrites should be directed toward their essay topics—and even that first freewrite can be useful for more than introductions if you assign a narrative essay). Tell them to relax their shoulders and hands, to write at a normal pace, and to write without stopping, without trying to think things out first or make corrections along the way. They may dread doing this at first—but eventually they will get used to freewriting every class, and they will see how their freewrites can be very useful as they draft their essays.

**2. Every student has something worthwhile to say**

Ask your students how many of them hate writing. Almost certainly you will see some hands go up. Others may want to raise their hands but are afraid to admit their dread of writing to a teacher. Remember that Freshman Composition is required for all majors—you may have students who are brilliant at math but struggle with writing. You may have students for whom English is a second language; perhaps they can express themselves eloquently in their first language, and they may be extremely frustrated that they are not yet able to do so in English. Students need to understand why this class is worthwhile for them, beyond fulfilling a general education requirement. Along with assurance that they will learn communication skills that will help them in a future career (and in life), possibly the most important thing you can teach your students is that they have a unique perspective on the world around them—you are the only person who sees things exactly the way you do—and by simply being who they are, they have something worthwhile to say through their writing.

Sharing writing in class—each student reading a few lines from an in-class freewrite, for example—can be a wonderful way to prove this to students. While they may be reluctant to read their work aloud, often they will get a good response from the class (laughter at a funny line, agreement on a point of view, or at least acknowledgment from the teacher that a good point was made or that something was phrased in an interesting way). This lets students know they are being heard, that they are saying something that matters.

Freewrites allow students to write in their own natural voice. While some of this must be adjusted as essays are polished—revising overly-conversational phrasing, for example—it’s important that students realize that this unique voice should remain a part of their final essay. Their essay should sound like them—just the best version of them, the most polished and clear version of their voice.

**3. Essay structure**

You may have students who never learned the basics of essay structure. Maybe their high school English classes focused mainly on literature rather than writing; maybe they never paid attention in class; maybe they learned it at some point but need a review. Teaching essay structure is an essential part of teaching a freshman composition class. Engage the students as you discuss the parts of an essay—ask them what the first paragraph is called, what a thesis statement is. Write on the board or display on a screen or give a handout with these basic reminders:

INTRODUCTION: The first paragraph should draw in the reader (perhaps by describing an interesting example related to the essay topic) and should include a THESIS STATEMENT that makes the focus of the essay clear.

BODY PARAGRAPHS: Each body paragraph should have a main point—a topic sentence—and all the sentences in that paragraph should give details and specific examples that fully develop that point (and tie back to the essay’s thesis statement). Transitions between sentences and between paragraphs should help the essay flow smoothly—give them a list of transitional phrases for reference. An essay should have at least three body paragraphs to fully support and develop the essay’s thesis statement.

CONCLUSION: The final paragraph should wrap up the essay in an interesting way—perhaps circling back to an image or phrase from the introduction paragraph—and should restate the thesis. It can briefly tie together the essay’s main points. The last sentence should clearly feel like the end of the essay.

Remind your students that while a freewrite can be in first person, an academic essay should be in third person. The final essay is still the student’s perspective and uses the student’s voice, but the points are stated objectively (for example, instead of writing *I think smoking should be illegal in all restaurants,* write *Smoking should be illegal in all restaurants*).

**4. Common errors in punctuation and grammar**

Writing mechanics—punctuation, spelling, grammar—can be daunting for someone who never really learned these rules, who has habits that can be hard to break. A good way to initially approach mechanics in the freshman comp classroom is to focus on common errors. Give them a handout with interesting or funny examples of errors—comma splices, fragments, apostrophe errors, common misspellings, etc.—and discuss them in class. Why are these usages wrong? How do we fix them? Have your students look for these errors out in the world (billboards, magazine articles, store signs, online) and bring examples to class. Give your students a sheet with several sentences containing these kinds of errors and have them make corrections in pairs or in groups. Once they are used to catching these errors, they’ll be more likely to find and correct them in their own essays as they revise.

**5. The more you write, the better you get**

This is why you have your students write at every class meeting. This is why there is hope for every student, even if he or she enters freshman comp without having learned the basics of writing an essay in high school. When students write consistently, with focus, with helpful guidelines, on the lookout for their own habitual errors, and convinced that they have something worthwhile to say, they will get better and better. They will be stronger writers at the end of your class than when they began it. They will communicate their point of view more clearly. They will become more confident, they will find the act of sitting down to write less daunting, and they will be armed with the knowledge of exactly what an academic essay should be. Assure them of this: if they keep writing, they will get better.

**COMMON ERRORS: Punctuation**

Rules to remember:

- Commas and periods ALWAYS go INSIDE quotation marks.

EX: Pam said, “Please don’t throw garbage at me**.”**

**“**Please don’t throw garbage at me**,”** Pam said.

- Semicolons are used to separate two COMPLETE sentences.

EX: I don’t want to do that**;** I want to be more than that.

- A comma is not strong enough to separate two full sentences by itself; you need to add a conjunction (or use a semicolon).

**ERROR:** Michael was mumbling, Darryl had to strain to hear him.

CORRECT: Michael was mumbling**, so** Darryl had to strain to hear him.

CORRECT: Michael was mumbling**;** Darryl had to strain to hear him.

- Use a comma with a conjunction (and, but, or, etc.) IF there is a second subject in the sentence (if the sentence contains two full sentences).

EX: That was amazing**,** but **I** am still looking for someone with a sales background.

- Do NOT use a comma if there is no second subject after the conjunction.

EX: Kevin just wants to lie on the beach and eat hot dogs.

EX: Stanley loves pretzel day and always tries to be first in line.

[A comma would be used if a second subject was added:

Stanley loves pretzel day, and he always tries to be first in line.]

- Use a comma to set off introductory phrases.

EX: If this were my career**,** I’d have to throw myself in front of a train.

EX: According to Jim**,** their bread is very good.

- In a list of things, DO use a comma before the conjunction.

EX: Dwight’s ideal choice for the job was Jack Bauer, but he is unavailable, fictional, and

overqualified.

- Use a comma between interchangeable adjectives.

EX: Toby’s calm, patient demeanor irritates Michael.

- Do NOT use a comma if the order of the adjectives cannot be changed (for clarity).

EX: Dwight shot the paintball gun at the **tall oak** tree. [You could not say: …the oak tall tree.]

- Apostrophes are used for contractions (it’s = it is) and for possession (Toby’s).

- If something is both plural and possessive, the apostrophe goes on the outside of the s.

EX: All of the employees’ desks were piled with paper.

**COMMON ERRORS: Spelling and Grammar**

Hints to remember:

-Do NOT start a sentence with a connecting word like *and* or *but*. Correct this by deleting the connecting word, combining sentences, or rewriting the sentence.

**ERROR:** Angela invited me. **But** I don’t want to go to the party.

CORRECT: Angela invited me, but I don’t want to go to the party.

CORRECT: Angela invited me. I don’t want to go to the party, though.

-Only start a sentence with *because* if it is part of an introductory phrase (with a full sentence following the phrase).

EX: Because of the rain, the game was cancelled.

\*Refer to the COORDINATION & SUBORDINATION handout for lists of connecting words and the punctuation required for them.

-NUMBER AGREEMENT: Be sure that a plural subject has a plural verb (and a singular subject has a singular verb).

**ERROR:** A college student should do their homework every night.

CORRECT: College students should do their homework every night.

CORRECT: A college student should do his or her homework every night.

-Avoid SENTENCE FRAGMENTS: Be sure that each sentence you write contains a subject and a verb. (If a sentence contains a subject and a phrase that describes the subject, be careful when looking for the verb. If the descriptive phrase contains a verb, that is part of the phrase, not a verb directly related to the subject. Unless the sentence contains a verb that directly relates to the subject, it is a fragment.) Look over the paragraph below and underline any fragments:

In January, my brother and sister-in-law bought a sixty-year-old farm house in Connecticut. The house is beautiful. A “do-it-yourself” special which needs extensive repairs. Rewiring will be necessary. Only six outlets in the entire house and only one outlet in the kitchen. The plumbing also needs work. Leaking pipes in the basement. And my brother will probably have to spend years making this house comfortable.

-Avoid unnecessary use of PASSIVE VOICE. This weakens your sentence.

PASSIVE EX: The mailman was bitten by the dog.

ACTIVE CORRECTION: The dog bit the mailman.

-Be aware of commonly misspelled or misused words that spell-check will not catch: affect/effect, to/too, lose/loose, its/it’s, used to (not use to), their/they’re/there, a lot (always two words), could have (not could of), etc.

# PARAGRAPHS

Paragraphs are good learning models for writing essays, since they contain many of the same elements. By building strong paragraphs, you are also teaching yourself to build good essays.

Parts of a Paragraph:

TOPIC SENTENCE: This sentence acts like the thesis statement of an essay. It introduces the topic and clearly states the main point of the paragraph.

BODY SENTENCES: These sentences are similar to the body paragraphs of an essay. Each sentence in the paragraph should relate to, and expand upon, the topic sentence. The sentences should give examples or details that fully develop the idea presented in the topic sentence.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE: The last sentence of a paragraph resembles the conclusion of an essay. It should wrap up the paragraph and end on a strong note.

CHECKLIST FOR SELF-EDITING PARAGRAPHS:

* Opening catches reader’s interest.
* Clear, strong topic sentence.
* All sentences in the paragraph relate to, and expand upon, the topic sentence.
* Unity and coherence of the paragraph; good flow from sentence to sentence.
* Paragraph is long enough to fully clarify the topic sentence.
* A strong closing line.
* Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**Student Sample Paragraph**

**Film Analysis**

Not only is The Matrix an entertaining film, but it also keeps its audience thinking, especially through its use of religious symbolism. The characters’ names, for example, provide many references to Christianity. The letters in Neo’s name can be rearranged to spell One. Neo is believed to be “The One” who can destroy the Matrix and free mankind; this makes him a sort of Christ figure, chosen to save his people. Trinity’s name refers to the holy trinity of the father, son, and holy spirit. In the same way, her name can represent the three separate identities contained in the character Neo: he is Mr. Anderson (his real name), Neo (his computer hacker alias), and “The One.” A third character whose name holds religious connotations is Cifer. Much like Judas, Cifer betrays his comrades for his own benefit. Although Cifer’s name is not similar to the name Judas, it is very close to the name of the most historical evil presence: add Lu to his name, and you spell Lucifer, the devil. By including this layer of religious symbolism, The Matrix gives its audience more than just eye candy; it offers food for thought.

THE REVISING PROCESS—

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF YOUR DRAFT

# Part 1: Introduction

The introduction of your essay should catch the reader’s attention in some way. Consider an example that illustrates your point, or for a cited research essay, an interesting quote or a powerful statistic.

Your thesis statement should clearly and concisely state the main point of your essay. The most common placement for your thesis statement is the final sentence of your introduction paragraph. Be sure to transition smoothly from your opening to your thesis statement—often, this can be accomplished by narrowing down your focus from a more general statement of the topic down to your specific claim in the thesis.

# Part 2: Body Paragraphs

Each of your body paragraphs should contain a transition from the paragraph before it (or a transition at the end of the paragraph that leads to the next paragraph); a topic sentence that gives your main point for that paragraph; and details, examples, and quotes that help illustrate your main point.

**To help structure the body of your essay:**  Write down each of your main points that support your thesis statement; write a topic sentence for each main point. Then list under each main point any examples, details, or quotes from sources that help back up your point. Add in transitional phrases between sentences to build a strong paragraph. Then add any necessary transitions between paragraphs. (For example, this might be a single word, such as *Additionally,* or it may be a phrase that is repeated or rephrased from the sentence before.)

Be sure to develop each of your points fully. **Make connections for us**; don’t assume the reader follows your line of reasoning--even if you think the connection is implied.

# Part 3: Conclusion

End your essay with a paragraph that wraps up your main points and restates your thesis. If you opened your essay with an example in the introduction, you might want to end by referring back to that example, which gives a feeling of closure to the essay. Your final sentence should feel like an ending; leave the reader with the strength of your viewpoint. (BUT REMEMBER—do not use first person, unless you are giving a personal experience as one specific example in support of your thesis. Especially avoid phrases such as *I think* or *In my opinion*—this limits your argument to one person’s point of view; your goal is to make your assertion feel universal.)

**MLA Heading Format**

All essays and paragraph assignments should use the following MLA heading format:

Smith 1

John Smith

Mead

ENG 15011

15 September 2005

(creative title here)

First paragraph starts here …………………………………………………………………………………………..………….

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..……………

[NOTE: Start on the first line of the page when typing your name. Page number with last name should be inserted as noted below. Double-spacing is used throughout, with no extra spaces before or after heading or title.]

**To insert page number with last name in Word:**

First, go to Insert, then Page Numbers. Choose Top of Page, Right Alignment, and leave a check in the box to Show Number on First Page.

After page numbers have been inserted, go to Insert (or View in older versions of Word), then Header and Footer. A dashed box will appear on your page. Click the Right Align icon in your toolbar, then type your last name in front of the page number.

If you have any questions, ask the instructor.

ESSAY 2 ASSIGNMENT: Using Description and Exemplification

**Assignment:**

In this essay, you will advise your readers of something they should do to improve their lives.

The length should be 2 to 3 pages (two full pages minimum/three full pages maximum). Draw from your own talents, beliefs, or interests. Your description of specific examples should convince your readers that they would benefit from taking your advice. You can show us what happens if we don’t take your advice, along with positive outcomes of the behavior you are recommending. Refer to the essay “Be Specific” as an example of this type of essay.

Example topics:

Stop Smoking

Play Football

Become a Lifeguard

Think Before You Send Angry Emails

Learn a Second Language

Try a New Food Every Day

Fall in Love

Vote

Find a Job You Love

**Goals:**

- **Avoid using first person.** You might want to give a specific example from your life, which might require you to use “I” for that paragraph, but avoid phrases like, “I think” or “To me, it seems” or “In my opinion.” Try to state your opinion to the reader without using “I.” (For example, *Quit smoking* instead of *I think it’s a good idea to quit smoking.*)

**-** Use interesting language—concrete details, specific examples, sensory images, and vivid descriptions. Let us see through your eyes. **Show** us why we should do what you’re suggesting, rather than just telling us that we should do it.

- Don’t telegraph. Avoid phrases like, “In this essay, I’m going to . . .”

- Engage the reader with an interesting introduction; use specific examples and sensory details to support your main point; end with a strong closing line.

- Don’t distract the reader with grammatical errors. Ask the instructor if you need extra help with mechanics.

**Due Dates:**

Your draft is due at our next class meeting (4/9). Your final essay (including prewriting, draft, and self edit sheet, stapled with final essay on top) is due 4/14.

**\*\*\***Remember to use MLA format for your heading, page number/last name, and page format.

**Formal Paragraph: Narrative**

**Assignment:**

- You will write ONE fully developed, well-structured paragraph. This will be a narrative paragraph, which means the topic is drawn from your own life. You will show us a moment from your life to make a specific point (a point about your life, or a broader point about life in general).

- Indent the first line of the paragraph, include a creative title (centered), and use MLA format for the heading, page number, title (no bold, caps, or underline), and spacing on the page (see LB and handout).

- Your paragraph should be shorter than one page in length (approximately 7-10 sentences). DO NOT give enough information for a full essay; you are writing a single paragraph. Choose your words carefully (in the revision stage); use only the most important and interesting details in your paragraph.

- Your first line should draw in the reader; your paragraph should have a clearly stated topic sentence; body sentences in the paragraph should give specific details and examples supporting your topic sentence; body sentences should have unity and coherence; use transitions between sentences for a smooth flow (see LB 85-88); the final line should end the paragraph in a strong, interesting way.

- You will use “I” in this assignment because it is a narrative; it is all about you (unlike in other types of academic writing, when first person is not used).

**Topic Selection:** Choose something that has happened in your life that has had a significant impact on who you are today. This may be a choice you made (good or bad), a life event (a new job, starting college), an important moment from childhood, etc. Briefly describe the most important details of the event as a narrative (a story); the point (topic sentence) of the paragraph should clarify the impact that the event had on you, or what it taught you about life in general.

**Writing Process:** In class, you will brainstorm ideas for a topic—list important moments from your life. From that list, try freewriting about one, two, or three of the topics; if the words flow freely, that is probably a good topic for the assignment (it has had a significant impact on you, and you probably remember specific details from the event). Underline the most important details from your freewrite. Write a clear topic sentence that states your main point (what you learned from this experience). Choose the most important examples and details, and decide on the best order for them. Revise the sentences, adding necessary transitions, as you draft a full paragraph. Cut any lines that wander too far from the main point or that repeat information already given.

**Due Dates:** As stated on your syllabus, a full typed draft is due Tuesday, September 11. We will peer edit for structure issues in class on that day. On Thursday, we will discuss common errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling; you will revise your draft over the weekend, correcting any mechanical errors. Also take into consideration feedback from your peer editor as you revise. The final revised paragraph is due on Tuesday, September 18; you will staple your in-class prewriting, your draft and peer editor comments, and any other revisions beneath your final copy (the final paragraph should be on top, with other work stapled underneath).

**Points:** The Narrative Paragraph is worth 50 points. Factored into your grade will be your use of the writing process, your contributions as a peer editor, and your revision process. Your final paragraph will be graded based on the criteria for a strong paragraph detailed above (and in the separate paragraph handout with a checklist). Please follow the assignment guidelines as stated in this assignment sheet.

Personal Narrative/Compare & Contrast Essay

ASSIGNMENT:

* You will write a personal essay, which means the topic is drawn from your own life.
* Because this is a personal essay, you will use “I” in this essay, unlike formal essays.
* Your essay must include a thesis statement (see LB; in one sentence, clearly state your essay’s main point).
* You will use comparison and contrast techniques to help structure your essay and support your thesis.
* Follow MLA guidelines for the format of your essay. See LB and handout for details of MLA format.
* Essay length should be 2-3 pages.

TOPIC SELECTION:

Choose something that has changed you or your life in a significant way. This may be a choice you made (good or bad), a life event (starting a new job, losing the big game), etc. In your essay, you will describe this change by noting how you/your life is different now as a result (contrast), as well as by noting what remains the same, has stayed constant, despite the change (compare). You can also approach the essay with a before/after structure: describe your life before the change and compare it to your life after the change.

ESSAY STRUCTURE:

Introduction: Your opening should be interesting and grab the reader’s attention. An example introduction for this essay would be to describe, in detail, the moment of change.

Thesis Statement: Usual placement of the thesis statement is the final sentence of the introduction. An example of a thesis statement for this essay would be: My life has changed completely since the birth of my son.

Body Paragraphs: Each paragraph should contain a topic sentence, and the rest of the paragraph should fully develop that topic. For example, your topic sentence might be: I no longer get a full night’s sleep. The paragraph would then expand on why not, what the night schedule is like now, and how that is different from before the baby was born.

Organization of Body Paragraphs: There are several ways to structure a comparison/contrast essay. You can contain similarities and differences of one topic within a single paragraph, or you can have one paragraph explain the similarities and another paragraph explain the differences for that topic. Refer to your LB reading assignment for suggestions on structure.

Conclusion: Your closing paragraph should wrap up the essay by restating your main points and thesis. **For this particular essay, you will expand your thesis statement in the final paragraph by coming to a conclusion about the change in your life.** For example: Even though my life has become more difficult in some ways since the birth of my son, it has also become happier.

WRITING PROCESS:

Use the prewriting freewrite done in class when writing your essay draft. Do further freewriting, without worrying about structure or mechanics, as you start to draft your essay. After you have some good ideas on paper, organize them into an essay structure: pulling from your notes, decide on a strong opening and write a clear thesis statement to form your introduction; break down your main points into a narrative outline for your body paragraphs; and look through your freewriting notes to help create a strong ending for your essay.

TURNING IN YOUR ESSAY: **Your essay must be stapled.** Include your prewriting sheet, your draft, your self-edit sheet, and your final essay. DUE DATES: THU. 2/26:Assignment /Prewriting; TUE. 3/3: Draft DUE, Self-edit & response;THU. 3/5: Essay DUE

Narrative with Compare/Contrast Essay

Brainstorming for Topics

List moments that were important in your life, positive or negative, that changed your perspective or the direction of your life in some way. List as many as you can, and then if there is still time left in the brainstorm session, expand upon one or two of your topics—describe the moment or your feelings about it. See which moment would be the most interesting for you to write about.

**Compare/Contrast Prewriting Worksheet**

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

What topic have you chosen for your Compare/Contrast essay?

Draft a thesis statement for your essay (the main point you are making about your topic, clearly stated in one sentence):

List the most important similarities and differences you will address in your essay to support your thesis:

What specific examples and descriptive details will you use to support your thesis?

Freewrite an introduction to your essay on the back of this page.

PEER RESPONSE SHEET – DESCRIPTION/EXEMPLIFICATION ESSAY

Name of Peer Editor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Responding to Essay by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Underline what you believe is the thesis statement in the essay. Is the thesis clearly stated? If not, what suggestions do you have for improvement?

2. Comment on the structure of the essay. Is it easy to follow? Does it lack smooth transitions? Does each paragraph have a topic sentence and expand on it adequately? Are the intro and conclusion paragraphs effective? What suggestions do you have for improvement in any of these areas?

3. Are well-developed, specific examples given in the essay? Which are strongest? Which need work, and what do you suggest? Did any other examples come to mind that the author may want to include?

4. Comment on the author’s use of description. Does he or she use concrete, sensory details? Does he or she SHOW rather than TELL? If possible, give an exemple of an effective description, as well as one or two that could be strengthened.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Write your thesis statement below (or give your peer editor a typed statement):

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**Peer Editor’s Name:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions about the above thesis statement:

1. Is the thesis statement a debatable stance on an issue? Or is it just a statement of fact? If it is a statement of fact, suggest how the author might reword the thesis to make it an assertion.

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2. Is the thesis statement a strongly worded claim? Is it clear to the reader? If not, what suggestions do you have for rewording it to improve clarity and strength?

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3. Look over the outline. Does the author give strong main points to support his or her thesis?

Is the opposition acknowledged? Are there other points you think should be included?

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**Eliminating “clutter” in your writing** (see LB 392-394)

Ways to achieve conciseness:

- Make the subject and verb of each sentence identify its actor and action (LB 384, 529)

- Cut or shorten empty words or phrases (LB 531)

- Cut unnecessary repetition (LB 532)

- Reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to single words (LB 534)

- Combine sentences (LB 535)

- Cut or rewrite jargon (LB 535)

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**Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate the “clutter” of extra words.**

The boss made a decision to hire a new employee.

In my opinion, smoking should not be in any way allowed in restaurants.

The homework assignment was to write a biography of the life of Jane Austen.

There were delays, which caused the deadline to be missed, that could have been avoided.

Chewing gum was originally introduced to the United States by Antonio López. He was the Mexican general.

Grammar/Editing Test

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

TRUE/FALSE: Circle T if the statement is True or F if the statement is false.

1. T F A comma can separate two complete sentences.

(EX—I went to the park, I saw some ducks.)

2. T F **Its** is the correct possessive form for **it**.

(EX—The dog chased its tail.)

3. T F A semicolon ( ; ) is used to introduce a list of items.

(EX—She liked many classes; history, science, math, and art.)

4. T F One of the first steps in the writing process is to edit the grammar.

5. T F A semicolon separates two complete sentences.

6. T F At the end of a quote, commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.

(EX—Please call him by his nickname, “Bobby.”)

7. T F A comma should be used between interchangeable adjectives.

(EX—She held a soft, fluffy teddy bear.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Circle the letter of the correct choice.

8. The following is a complete sentence:

(a) Stop.

(b) Because I said so.

(c) The tired parents with their three noisy kids.

(d) And then we went to the zoo.

Editing sentences: **Edit** the following sentences, correcting the indicated error; make sure your change can be clearly understood. (Do NOT rewrite the sentences.)

9. When a person talks to much, it makes me want to avoid them.

10. I should of studied more for the final exam. Because it really effected my grade.

11. After he ate breakfast Amys’ father hung the tire swing from the tall oak tree. And Amy played on it all day.

12. Gary’s opinion use to affect Alice alot but now she only listens to Barb; her best friend.

13. Because of to much rain the soccer game was postponed.

14. I heard a loud bang, it sounded alot like a gunshot.

Rewrite the following sentence so that the verb is **active** rather than **passive**.

15. Electricity was discovered by Ben Franklin.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**ENG 150: ESSAY STRUCTURE TEST**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**PART I: SHORT ANSWER.** Briefly answer each question below using the space provided. For this section, it is NOT necessary to write in complete sentences.

1. What is a thesis statement?

2. Where does a thesis statement traditionally appear in an academic essay?

3. Name the stages of the writing process in the order that they usually occur.

4. According to our discussions in class, why is it important to use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in your writing?

5. Name the paragraphs contained in an essay, and briefly explain what each paragraph should contain.

6. When is it acceptable to use first person (“I”) in an academic essay? When is it not acceptable?

**PART II: IN-CLASS ESSAY.** Write a rough draft of a 5-paragraph descriptive personal narrative essay about a particular person who has impacted your life. Each of the 5 paragraphs should contain approximately 4 sentences. **Be sure to demonstrate your knowledge of essay structure and the elements each paragraph should contain.** You may prewrite on the back of this sheet; write your final essay on the attached page.

THE BASICS OF IN-TEXT CITATIONS

- The basic format for an in-text citation is as follows. Note that the quotation marks close at the end of the quoted words; the parenthetical information directly follows the quote; the parentheses contain the author’s last name and the page number, with no comma between them; the period comes after the parenthetical citation. (If you use the author’s name in the text of your sentence, you do not need to repeat the name in the parentheses—only indicate the page number.)

**When PlayStation 2 was released, “Hollywood was so abuzz with excitement, you would’ve**

**thought a liposuction pill had just been invented” (Shaw 20).**

- Block quotes are only used when you are quoting four lines of text or more. This should be used sparingly and only when all of the information in the quote is important.

FOR BLOCK QUOTES ONLY (4 or more lines): Left indent 10 spaces (two tabs); no right indent; no quotation marks; period comes before the parenthetical citation. Example for format (but not a very good example of important content):

**The debut of PS2 was eagerly anticipated. Even celebrities were anxious to get their**

**hands on one, according to Entertainment Weekly:**

**With the $299 machine expected to fly off shelves (Steven Spielberg, Sandra**

**Bullock, and Matthew Perry have already secured theirs), celebs looking for a**

**sneak peek . . . found themselves among the hundreds of fans who (horrors!)**

**waited on lines to test out games like *Tekken Tag* and *Madden 2001*. (Shaw 20)**

- A paraphrase or summary of another person’s writing, speech, ideas, etc., MUST be cited.

Example for format of a paraphrase:

**Trey Parker said he was a big fan of PlayStation until he wasn’t allowed to cut in line at the**

**PS2 debut event. He joked that he now prefers Nintendo (Shaw 20).**

- Always precede or follow up quotes with your own words, connecting others’ ideas to your own. For smooth transitions, it is often better to work portions of a quote into your own sentence, rather than just letting a quote stand on its own (see first example above).

GUIDELINES FOR WORKS CITED PAGE:

* Last name and page number (last page of essay) should be in top right corner
* Regular double spacing throughout the page, including above and below the words Works Cited (no extra space anywhere)
* The words Works Cited should NOT be underlined or bolded or all in caps
* The entries should be in alphabetical order
* The second (and third, etc.) line of each entry should be indented five spaces (one tab)
* A period should be at the end of each entry—check especially after website addresses
* Website addresses should be contained in < >
* Website addresses should not be blue or underlined or smaller print
* Book titles should be underlined; titles of smaller works, such as magazine articles, should be in quotation marks; any periods next to quotation marks should be inside the quotation marks
* If you are unsure about an entry, check with the instructor