

English 1301

Exercise 1: The Writing Process

Purpose of the Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to facilitate an experience of your writing process, to give you an opportunity to watch yourself work through the development of an expository (explanatory) essay from the beginning to the end, from the inception of an idea worth writing about to the editing of a final copy.

Instructions

With the assistance of your instructor, complete each of the following steps in order. These steps will be interrupted from time to time for commentary and review of your work. Working through its steps for a short time each class period and privately out of class, the entire unit is designed to take about two weeks for completion.

Steps for Completing the Exercise

Inventing Ideas

1. Read the four context topics (see the handout of topics). Select a word, phrase, or sentence in only *one* of those topics that sparks some interest for you.
2. Copy the word, phrase, or sentence from the topic onto a page of clean, lined writing paper (you will hand in all written work completed for this exercises).
3. Starting with this statement from the topic, begin writing for ten minutes *without stopping!*. *Keep the pen moving for ten minutes without interruption.* It is not important to stay with a single idea--even with the idea you copied at first. Rather, you may ramble from idea to idea as whimsy or inspiration takes you. What *is* important is to keep the pen moving! Correct grammar, spelling, organization, and other writing elements are not important in this exploration task. Your purpose is simply to get the mind and pen working together--any ideas are suitable to write down.

At the end of ten minutes, STOP. Draw a horizontal line across your page just below the text of your writing.

4. Reread the composition you have just written. Underline the most important or most interesting idea you have developed. Copy that idea below the horizontal line as a claim (a complete sentence that alleges the truth of something). Use this claim as the topic sentence with which you will begin a short paragraph of five or six sentences. Write for 15 minutes. Then, STOP, and draw a horizontal line across your page below your composition.

Narrowing the Focus

In this phase, you have been narrowing the range of your interests for composition. Hopefully, you have developed an idea that you are excited and enthusiastic about. This idea, however, is still in the domain of private insight; in other words, you have been writing primarily with yourself as the source and perhaps the audience as well.

The task now is to begin to objectify your composition, to begin the process of *transformation of private insight into public insight*.

Objectifying Your Composition

5. The first task in objectifying your writing is to identify the subject you are writing about. Below the horizontal line, write the sentence, "This writing is about _____" and fill in the blank.

6. Next, below this sentence, write the word, "Audience: _____" Identify an audience of two or more people (not including yourself) who, you believe, would be naturally interested in your subject.

7. After you have identified the audience, then write, "What the audience knows about this subject: _____" and list several ideas with which your audience is already familiar.

8. Below these ideas, write the phrase, "What the audience feels about this subject: _____" and name the emotions(s) that your audience probably experiences when thinking of your subject. Examples might include *interest, enthusiasm, fear, excitement*, etc.

9. After you have identified what the audience knows and feels about the subject, write, "What I want the audience to know about this subject: _____." List in brief words or phrases those new concepts and details you want to share with them.

Now, to generate new and perhaps some better ideas, number a sheet of paper from "1" to "18" and beside each number, write the following interrogatory pronouns in the following order. (Note: Write only one interrogatory pronoun per line.)

- 1) Who _____
- 2) Who _____
- 3) Who _____

- 4) What _____
- 5) What _____
- 6) What _____

7) Where _____

8) Where _____

9) Where _____

10) When _____

11) When _____

12) When _____

13) Why _____

14) Why _____

15) Why _____

16) How _____

17) How _____

18) How _____

Next, compose 18 questions about the subject matter you identified in Step 5--one for each of the interrogative pronouns. Circle the numbers of any questions that trigger new insight, new ideas to write about. Then, add these new ideas to your list of ideas above.

10. Then, write the sentence, "I want the audience to feel _____." Write the name of the emotion you want the audience to feel about the subject after reading your essay. (Note: This feeling may be quite different from that which you anticipated above that they already feel about the subject.)

11. Draw a line and write a **general thesis statement** that announces to the audience that you have selected what you plan to write about. If necessary, you may begin with the following phrase: "The following paper discusses _____."

Here's an example:

"The following paper discusses what high school students need to know about the differences between high school and college and how to finance their college education."

12. After you compose the **general thesis statement**, then rewrite the sentence, giving more specific detail, perhaps the major topics you plan to address that you listed above in Step 9. Drop the phrase, "The following paper discusses" and the interrogative pronoun(s) (in the example above, "what" and "how"). Essentially, your new **specific thesis statement** will be a claim you make about the subject you identified in Step 5. It is specific to the extent that now it will include actual details you will develop, explore, or support.

Here's an example:

"While high schools and colleges differ in important ways--the amount of work, the personal responsibility required, and the independence students experience, perhaps a more immediate issue is developing a financial plan to pay for several years of study."

Drafting the Paper

13. You are ready to begin writing a paper on a limited subject for a specific audience.

Start by writing the specific thesis below the line on your page. Then, continue writing paragraph units that explore that thesis sentence.

At this stage, have fun. Concentrate on paragraph development. Don't worry too much about the broad organizational plan of the paper, even though you probably have at least a general idea in mind. Concentrate on the paragraphs.

When you have worked one paragraph to your satisfaction, then start another one. If you get a good idea related to the thesis, don't hesitate to start writing about it immediately before you forget it. You can always come back to the other paragraphs which you have already partially developed.

After you have completed the draft of the body of the paper, compose an effective title. Write a brief introductory paragraph and conclusion. Your thesis sentence should be placed at the end of your introduction preceded by the development of some kind of interest device (quotation, anecdote, startling statement, etc.) The conclusion should do more than simply summarize your main points, but rather, bring the essay to a sense of closure, perhaps at the same time providing a guide for further study, an application of your conclusion, an evaluation, or a set of recommendations.

Revising Your Draft

14. When you have finished developing your paragraph units, then begin the revising process. You will consider the following three elements during this phase:

- organization: arranging the paragraphs into a logical, purposeful sequence
- coherency: making sure the paragraphs "stick together," that each begins (includes) a topic sentence that repeats key concepts from the thesis sentence.
- development: making sure that you have both sufficient primary and secondary sentences to clarify the subject of each paragraph for your audience.
- voice: developing a sense of personality who "narrates" the essay to the reader. In shaping a voice, begin from a sense of "personal voice." "Personal voice" is characterized by a sense of honest, forthright communication that is void of pretension and arrogance. It employs words that are natural for its audience and is sensitive to providing sufficient support for its observations.

15. After you have finished the first revised copy of your essay, then rewrite the paper, dropping the use of first and second person throughout the essay. (First person: "I," "me," "we," "us." Second person: "you," "your.")

Editing the Essay

16. Now, you have reached the final phase of the writing process--the "fixing" or editing phase.

To begin the editing phase, ask yourself, "What types of errors am I likely to make?" Start reading for the most common problem you have as a writer; perhaps it's spelling, comma errors, or sentence fragments, maybe pronoun or subject/verb agreement.

In order to edit effectively, concentrate on paragraph units. Reread each paragraph for each type of error you commonly make. For example, read it first for spelling errors, then for comma or other punctuation errors, then for major sentence construction problems. But remember: ***don't try to read a paragraph once, hoping to spot all possible errors in one review!***

Completing the Final Draft of Your Essay

17. Set the paper aside for a while, maybe even for several days. If you decide that limited use of first person and/or second person is important, you may revise the final draft accordingly. Make a photocopy of your essay or a backup copy on your hard drive or separate floppy disk. Ask a friend who is a good reader to read the paper aloud to you as you follow silently reading your own copy of the manuscript. This exercise may suggest last minute changes you may wish to make.

Finally, when you are satisfied with the edited draft, compose the final copy for submission. If possible, use a computer for all stages of the composition, including the preparation for the final copy for submission. Follow the standard conventions for word processed compositions.

Select an idea from one of the following topics to initiate the writing process:

Topic 1

Perhaps one of the most fundamental social needs is developing personal control for one's own affairs. In an increasingly specialized and institutionalized society, fewer and fewer people seem to have real control over even such basic human needs as food and shelter. On the other hand, newspapers and other news media recount daily the stories of those few individuals who seem to take control not only of their own destinies but of the well-being of others--even in a global arena. A case in point is the South Carolina Baptist congregation that raised almost 3 million dollars for the African hunger relief effort. In such a complex and perplexing world, to what extent can we manifest control over our lives? Realistically, where and how can we assume responsibility for the well-being of a global community and expect to affect positive change?

Topic 2

Some popular art exhibitions are so controversial in the subject matter they include that it is difficult to appreciate artistic taste, style, and technique because of the overwhelming impact of the content. A recent local university collection of art included works with obvious sexual organs and references. For many observers, these subjects were only powerful distractions. Other exhibitions have included subjects and materials quite foreign to most students--technical/mechanical designs, abstractions with only a hint of the subject. Subject matter in art can be a problem for an audience.

Topic 3

In the balmy days of John Kennedy's liberal "New Frontier" in the early 1960's, it seemed that the answer to racism in American society was only a few selective funerals away in an older, rapidly fading generation. Racial prejudice--whites for blacks, blacks for whites, the non-native American for the Native American, etc.--all of it would pass away in the wake of rational, reasoned social legislation. But the re-emergence of radical groups among many American communities suggests that legislation is not the final solution to racism and that a new generation of American citizens must formulate its own answers to this social blight.

Topic 4

Everyone can point to someone--that special person who changed his or her point of view, perhaps even a major direction in life. These special people are called mentors. They are guides who usher us into a fuller or larger understanding of our world. Explain the impact of such a mentor in your life. What unique contribution did that person make? How has your mentor changed your life? your life's direction? In what ways was your mentor the right person at the right time?