

Essay 1: Personal Essay

"The best essay topics are an itch you need to scratch"
--Bruce Ballenger

This essay requires that you explore something in which you consider yourself an authority (though that doesn't necessarily mean something you're perfect at, but it could also be something you know because of where/how you were raised, or something you are interested in enough that you are working to be an "expert" at it). Remember, as Ballenger describes on p. 94 of *The Curious Writer*, "the subject of an essay is often commonplace," so your topic doesn't need to be something major or dramatic but something you can both describe and make meaning about. (See all of his guidelines on p. 94, which will be discussed in class as you prepare your piece.)

In your essay, then, you'll focus on a narrow slice of your personal experience (think small: it's hard to cover a span of years in five pages) and then share the significance of the experience. Your evidence will come from your experience and making that evidence compelling and interesting to readers. (Examples: writing about your continuing expertise at cooking and the familial/cultural influences that shaped that expertise, such as gender, a heritage that values cooking, etc., or writing about the place where you come from and how it shapes who you are, etc.) Remember that the authority in autobiographical writing comes from the care with which you select your material and the richness of the details you choose to present. The more specific you are, the more your piece becomes universal, as paradoxical as that may seem. Feel free to try an unexpected or humorous topic. Think about your in-class writings, Elbow pages, common readings writing, or your writing history as possible starting points. We'll read samples of essays together, too. As a writer, then, you have two objectives: 1) to enable readers to enter your experience, to feel what you felt and 2) to convince readers that your experience is strong evidence of the point you wish to make about what you're an authority on.

Some words of caution: This is not the kind of writing assignment that can be dashed off in one sitting. In some ways it's the most difficult assignment of the semester because it's seemingly easy: write about yourself. It requires that you start with a question or issue you want to explore (or allow a small question to lead to bigger questions), that you come up with a lot of material to work with, and then choose carefully the material you want to present to readers. You must also consider how to incorporate both narrative and reflection. It may take several drafts and a lot of feedback from readers to help you discover and narrow the point you want to make. You may also find that after you begin writing, the point you want to make changes. Rather than how you may have written previous essays where you decide your main point and then find ways to show it, you'll be inquiring and figuring out what your point is as you draft the piece: you'll start from something that you find interesting and move toward your main idea, not the other way around.

Final draft 5-7 pages, typed

Due Dates: (include author's notes and copies for workshop):

First Draft Due: Wednesday, September 5

Second Draft Due: Wednesday, September 12

Your second draft will receive a pencil grade, but you'll have the option of revising again.

Essay Two: Discovery Essay

The motive for writing a research essay...is not to prove but to discover.

---Bruce Ballenger

For this essay, you'll be incorporating research into a piece but not writing what you might think of as a "research paper." In thinking of writing as inquiry, your goal with the research essay is to find something out rather than prove something. You'll choose a research question about an issue that interests you. *It must be a topic you wonder about*, and that often will stem from your experiences and interests. As you'll discover in doing research, there isn't one answer to your question or issue—there may be multiple answers, conflicting answers, or not an answer at all.

Find at least five sources about your research question (they should not all be Internet sources; we'll talk more about this in class) that represent various points or approaches to your topic (you don't want all of your sources to say the same thing) and print them out or save them as a .pdf file. You'll need to identify more than five sources so that you can choose among them the sources most useful to you. **Read—and reread—your sources carefully, taking notes** that record both what the authors are saying and what you think about what they are saying (a dual-entry journal, which we'll talk about).

After doing some brainstorming in class and **forming a research question**, you'll then write an essay in which you explore the topic based on the sources you've read—*not an argument paper where research feeds your opinion about the issue*; rather, you'll be *exploring* a topic and explaining how the research changed *you* instead of developing an argument in which you try to change the minds of others. And you're building on your personal essay, so remember that just because you are incorporating sources doesn't mean you can't have your own voice in the piece—you are the person putting these ideas together in conversation. You'll want to explain your knowledge on the issue before you begin research and how the research has complicated your thinking. Think of it in terms of "i-search" rather than "research." Potential research questions might range from, "Should a Mars landing be the next mission for NASA?" to "How private is my Facebook page?"

In the end, then, your paper will address 1) your interest in the issue; 2) what others have to say about the issue; 3) the significance for you in what you've discovered. Like with the first paper, it may likely be that it takes a whole first draft to discover what your controlling idea is, and through revision your controlling idea will come out more clearly to your audience. You might also want to be overt about the research process—you can describe, as part of your essay, how your research built upon itself. As Bruce Ballenger says, "the *process* of coming to know something, for the essayist, is as important as *what* he or she comes to know" (*The Curious Reader* 39). Do not limit your essay to explaining a single point of view, even if that point of view is the one you most identify with. You want sources that explain many different opinions on the topic you care about.

Final Draft: 1,800-2,300 words (5-7 pages), plus a works cited page. The paper will follow MLA citation format.

Due Dates: (include author's notes and copies for workshop):

First Draft Due: 9/30

Second Draft Due: 10/7

Pencil Grade Draft Due: 10/9

Essay Three: Profile Essay with Visuals

There may be no better way of dramatizing the impact of a problem, the importance of a question, or the significance of an idea than showing how it presents itself in the life of one person.

---Bruce Ballenger

For this assignment, you'll employ the strategies in *The Curious Writer* to write a profile. While most profiles we read are written about famous people, some of the most interesting people are those who have received little or no attention from the media. You'll profile someone who's representative of larger cultural trends. For example, do you know anyone who just got back from Iraq? Or who has a job that connects to an interesting subculture (tattoo parlor, beauty pageants, etc.)? Or a job in the field you hope to go into one day? One caveat: you'll be profiling someone **you do not know well**; you will need to have some critical distance from your source in order to write effectively (the exception is someone you know who has a past you don't know about, like a relative who fought in Vietnam or was a rodeo queen). This assignment should get you talking to people you normally might not meet.

Whomever you pick as your subject, you should be able to connect this individual to something larger within our culture. As Ballenger says, the profile gives "a general idea or feeling a face" (134). Of course, you also need to take care not to generalize. For example, just because one international student does not encounter any difficulties in an unfamiliar culture, that does not mean that another international student who speaks of difficulties fitting into U.S. culture is not telling the truth. It is up to you, as an ethical writer, to find some kind of balance. Being an ethical writer also means presenting your source fairly. You should not let your preconceived notions (and we *all* have them) shape your essay; rather, the evidence you gather should shape your essay. We will talk more about these issues in class.

You'll build upon Essay 1 in that you'll be incorporating narrative and details that convey meaning, and you'll incorporate research as with Essay 2, but it will be a different kind of research. Rather than using library sources, you'll be doing your own research by interviewing (likely more than once—the longer you spend with her/him, the better) and observing the person you're profiling. You'll want to observe your source in her/his element for at least a couple of hours.

After research, brainstorming, and early drafting, your paper should 1) ultimately be organized around ways your profile seems representative or typical of the larger group to which your subject belongs; 2) convey narrative stories that help reveal this theme, bringing in your subject through stories *and visuals* (you're required to incorporate visuals to enhance your essay [provided there aren't confidentiality issues with your participants], and that will be discussed in class). Just like your earlier essays, this essay will have a controlling idea that will emerge through your research and drafting.

Final Draft: 1,800-2,300 words (5-7 pages), plus two visuals and a works cited page. The paper will follow MLA citation format, if applicable.

Due Dates: (include author's notes and copies for workshop):

First Draft Due: 10/23

Second Draft Due: 10/30

Pencil Grade Draft Due: 11/2

*We'll go over the process of conducting interviews, but you want everyone you speak to know who you are and why you are talking to them. You'll need to get permission to use their words in your paper, and you'll need to have a works cited where you include their contact information.

Essay 4: Argument Essay

To argue well is an act of imagination, not a picking of sides

---Bruce Ballenger

For this assignment, you'll inquire deeper into an issue you are invested in, investigate the topic through doing research, and then write an essay that works to persuade. So you'll write an essay in which you **assert and support a position on a complex issue**, using elements of academic argument (which we will be discussing in class but which will build upon the work we've done in other essays, too). As Ballenger says in *The Curious Writer*, "the best argument essays make a clear claim, but they do it by bowing respectfully to the complexity of the subject, examining it from a variety of perspectives, not just two opposing poles. And you will come to appreciate that wonderful complexity by keeping an open mind" (273).

The topic for this paper is open, and again, we will talk about and generate topics in class. **Your purpose in this essay is to persuade an educated audience that your position is reasonable and worth consideration.** To do so, you must show that you know the opposing arguments and acknowledge their validity as well as provide authoritative evidence (*ethos, pathos, logos*) to support your position. In general, address your argument to readers who have not yet made up their minds on the issue. For the greatest possible audience interest, you should avoid huge topics that are too broad and overused (e.g. gun control, abortion, capital punishment, etc.) *unless* you can bring a fresh—and *narrow*—perspective to the subject. Broad topics like that are very difficult to do successfully in so few pages. Topics of current or local interest are often good choices, as we'll discuss.

This paper will employ some of the methods used in Essay 2, where you draw upon outside sources and synthesize information on your topic, and you should also cite five sources here. It will likely also employ some methods from Essay 1 in that you can incorporate your personal experiences to help solidify your position, and you may employ primary research as you did in Essay 3. This essay also launches you into the work you'll do in 20803 (Intermediate Composition: Writing as Argument).

Note: For this essay, we'll be doing whole-class workshops instead of small group workshops. Failure to submit a complete draft (including a draft of your Works Cited) in time for peers to read and comment and/or show up for class on the day your paper is workshoped can hamper your final portfolio grade for your Essay 4 Portfolio.

Note: You're welcome to include visuals to enhance your essay, and that will be discussed in class.

Final Draft: 1,800-2,300 words (5-7 pages), plus a works cited page. The paper will follow MLA citation format.

Due Dates: (include author's notes and copies for workshop):

First Draft Due: 11/11 – 11/20

Final Assignment: Multimedia Composition, Presentation, and Response

For the Final Evaluative Experience, you will 1) convert one of your essays into another medium; 2) present your new media essay; and 3) write a 2 page response paper that analyzes the rhetorical choices you made and conveys your understanding of the rhetorical situation.

You'll convert one of your essays into a multimedia composition using PowerPoint, Photoshop (i.e., a poster), or Movie Maker (or iMovie); using no more than five slides or 30 seconds of movie time, you'll need to convey the controlling idea from your essay into the new medium. The purpose is to turn your textual essay into a different medium that conveys the point of your original essay through visual and audio messages.

For the presentation you will give the context of the essay you chose to revise into a multimedia composition through PowerPoint, Movie Maker (or iMovie), or poster and explain the rhetorical choices you made to change your textual essay into a different medium. Explain what analysis you made in terms of audience and purpose as you developed your new messages in the new medium. Your presentation must include your multimedia composition and should be five minutes in length, with a minute or two for questions *after* those five minutes.

To accompany your multimedia composition and presentation, you'll submit a rhetorical response in which you explain how you revised one of your essays into a visual essay and what you learned in the process. Specifically, you'll want to accomplish three things in your response: 1) remind readers of the context and give an overview of the essay you converted; 2) explain *in detail* the choices you made in turning this into a visual essay for your classmates; and 3) what you learned about the rhetorical process (issues of audience—including location, form, visual appeals, etc., as we'll discuss in class) and new media from making these changes.

You won't *read* from the rhetorical response for your presentation, but you'll talk from the ideas you express in response. In your presentation, then, you'll share your visual essay and then describe in detail the rhetorical choices you made for your visual essay. Your presentation will be evaluated with a letter grade based on: 1) the effectiveness with which you convey your ideas to your audience (i.e: management of information given the time allowed) and the interest you sustain with your audience (can be done in a variety of ways—think in part of rhetorical strategies we've discussed in class, how you might convey *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, for example); 2) your new medium and explanation of the new medium; 3) and your ability to display your understanding of rhetorical contexts through describing the rhetorical choices you made in converting a textual essay to a PowerPoint, movie, etc. There will be a minute or two for questions after your presentation, and you'll be assessed on how you answer these as well. Finally, your grade will include your work as a participant—asking questions of others' presentations, being engaged in their presentations, etc. **Your presentation grade and Rhetorical Response is 5% of your course grade. This assignment is not complete until presented on Final Exam day. I will not accept any assignments early from students who plan to leave campus before Final Exam day.**

All parts of the final assignment are due during your Final Exam Time, Friday, December 18th, 8 – 10:30 a.m.

Note: Finals are on Friday the 18th, and frequently students will schedule flights home too early. Please DO NOT ask me if you present your final presentation early. As an adult college student, you must weigh the need to fly home early versus the need to attend class and complete the final project/presentation.