

## Ten Audience Analysis Exercises

1. Your job in your paper is convince a group of people to change their minds and adopt your point of view on a current issue. Think of your audience as a group of players on an opposing soccer team (or other athletic team). Whenever two teams meet, they analyze each other's skills and devise strategies to help them do their best. For instance, you might notice that the goalie is a little slower moving to block balls on the left side of the net. After noting that weakness, you'd create a new playing strategy to help score a point--you'd try to kick to the goalie's left side. What are the strengths of the opposing position that your audience holds? What are the weaknesses? What strategies can you devise based on these strengths and weaknesses?
2. Have a Devil's Advocate discussion. Each person in your group will present a position on an issue and the facts and details that support that position. Once someone has posted a position, the rest of your group members play devil's advocate--responding to the position by suggesting counter-positions and counter-arguments. Give as many responses to the writer's position as you can. As your group members give counter-positions, respond to the issues. Debate each person's topic for at least 15 minutes. When you finish with one writer in your group, move to the next one until everyone in the group has had a chance to share a topic. Once everyone has finished, look over the notes for your topic. Which positions are your readers likely to believe? Which of the arguments would they be likely to make? What counter-arguments are convincing? Use the list to focus on the things that matter to your readers.

NOTE: If students are working online (in an InterChange session or MOO session), you can save a transcript; if they're working in an oral discussion setting, have someone from each group take notes for the writer. Students could also complete this exercise in email.

3. Create your own graphic organizer to brainstorm on your audience's position and think about your writing task. On a sheet of paper, draw a continuum with four columns:

Complete Agreement | Some Agreement | Some Disagreement | Complete Disagreement

Under the columns, sketch out the points and related issues that you and a reader who adopts the opposing position share, based on the headings in the organizer. For instance, say you were writing that more money should be budgeted for classroom equipment and an opposing reader argues that money should be budgeted instead for teachers' salaries. You and your reader both agree that more money should be spend on education, so you are in complete agreement. You

probably also agree that money spent on schools should be used for educational reasons (not for something like replacing the shrubbery on the school's property). But you disagree completely on the educational goals the the money should help fulfill.

For your topic, simply think through similar positions--what things do you and an opponent agree on? What would you have similar ideas about? What would you disagree about?

4. Put yourself in your reader's place. What doubts does your reader have about your position? What ideas is your reader skeptical of? After you list the things that your reader is likely to doubt, go back through the list and try to come up with two or three reasons that your reader has these doubts.

Once you're created a list of all the doubts, go back to your chart and add a third column, counter-points. For each of the doubts that is listed, add a response in the counter-point column that will help clear up the reader's doubt.

5. Consider the political situation surrounding the issue that you're writing about. How is your audience affected by the issue? Will they gain something? lose something? both? What territorial rights are involved? Will your readers need to change the way that they do something? How will they feel about any changes that are necessary?

For even an informative announcement, there are political and power issues to consider. For instance, if you were writing a message to tell people that there is going to be construction on Main Street for the next three months, you might consider the loss of control that some of your readers will have once the city tells them that they cannot drive down the street the way that they want. Others will be frustrated by traffic congestion. Merchants on the road may feel unhappy about the noise and the effect on their businesses. Still other readers will be angry that money is being spent resurfacing Main Street when there are giant potholes in side streets.

For all the power and territory issues involved, think about how you can best respond to your readers. What can you say to indicate that you understand the readers' position and still convince them that the change or your position is best?

6. What does your audience know about your subject area? Begin by brainstorming or freewriting for a few minutes on your topic itself. What is it that you're writing about?

Next, skip down a bit, and brainstorm or freewrite on what your readers know about your topic and where they have learned what they know.

Now, think about the relationship between the subject and your readers' knowledge. Think about the special terms and jargon that you know about your topic. What will you need to define? Are there acronyms that you'll need to explain? Look back over your original brainstorming on your topic--are there ideas or words that will need details for your readers? Make a list of all the things that you'll need to deal with to help your readers understand.

7. How will you tell that your writing is successful? When you write something, you want your readers to do or think something as a result. Perhaps you want them to change the way that they do something (for instance, participate in a recycling program on your campus rather than throwing away aluminum cans). Maybe you want them to change their minds about an issue or to modify their position a little (for instance, you might want to convince readers that a school uniform program would be good for the local public school system).

One way to measure your success is to consider whether your readers do what you want after reading your paper. For your topic, make a list of the things that you want your readers to do or to think after reading your paper. Branch off each thing that you want readers to do or to think, and note the reasons you want them to do so. For instance, you might want readers to participate in a recycling program because it's better for the environment and because the school earns money for recycling. Remember as you move through the list to think about the reasons from the readers' point of view too. Your readers may not care that the school earns money by recycling aluminum. You have to include all the details that **WILL** make your readers care--what will the money be spent on? How will the money affect your readers?

8. Think about the background of your readers: how old are they? what kind of education do they have? what kind of families do they come from? where do they live? what beliefs and values do they hold? Choose three representative types from your audience and write a one-paragraph character sketch on each of the three that gives details on your readers. You might choose different extremes in your readership such as the most conservative readers and the most liberal reader. You could also consider gender, age, education, and so forth. The point is to choose three different kinds of people who will read your paper and think through what you know about those readers' ideas, beliefs, and backgrounds.
9. First impressions are important. How will your readers first react to your topic? Are they likely to be interested? to be annoyed? to be appalled? That first reaction can affect everything else that your readers see in the paper. If they start out annoyed, you'll have a harder time convincing them to adopt your point of view or make the change or decisions that you ask. Once you've identified your readers' first reaction, brainstorm on the things that you can do to keep their attention. What can you say or do that will keep them reading once they know what the

topic is? What techniques might you use to get their attention before they learn what your topic is? Think about that first paragraph that will introduce your ideas to your readers. How can you hook their interest and keep them reading to the end?

10. What if the medium were different? Think about the paper that you're working on and the ways that your knowledge of advertisements and stories on television and in newspapers and magazines can help you learn more about your readers.

If you were writing an advertisement or public service announcement rather than a paper, where would the advertisement or announcement appear? What channel? During what shows? Or what magazine? Which section? And what would the advertisement or announcement look like? More importantly, **WHY** would it appear on those channels during those shows or in those sections of those particular magazines? How does the audience relate to the shows and magazines where the information would appear?

Once you think about what you know about your readers based on where a similar advertisement or public service announcement would appear, think about similar things that you've seen. How do they get and keep the readers' attention? What techniques can you use?

## Ten Critical Literacy & Technology Activities (Part 1)

1. Naming and Web/Email Addresses. A lot of money goes into the names that businesses splash across advertisements, commercials, billboards, and product packages. Companies and organizations want an unmistakable Internet presence (take a look at the work Hormel has done to squash various "Spam" pages for one example). They want the public to look at the addresses and think of the company and its products.

Take a newspaper or magazine and collect every email address and web page address that is included--check the advertisements and the text of the articles, and keep track of where you find the addresses. Once you've gathered all the addresses, write a paper that analyzes the naming conventions that the addresses (or more properly, the companies that chose those names) have used. What is the domain (see below)? Does the company use specific names in the address beyond the domain? In your paper, create a system of classification that outlines the ways that companies name their Internet resources, or write a paper that describes the features that seem important in naming Internet resources (a sort-of how-to guide for someone setting up a site).

\*\*\* A domain is the part of a web page address that comes first--after the http:// and before any additional slashes or words. In the address [http://www.yahoo.com/Education/K\\_12/Teaching/](http://www.yahoo.com/Education/K_12/Teaching/), the domain is "www.yahoo.com." In an email address, the domain is the part that comes after the @ sign. In the email address president@whitehouse.gov, the domain is whitehouse.gov.

You might discuss the Internet naming conventions that govern certain parts of domain addresses. Be sure students understand the differences between .com, .edu, .mil, .gov as well as country and state designations.

2. Naming and Software. Consider the naming conventions that apply to software. Consider the thought that went into names like Windows, Microsoft Word, Excel, PC Anywhere, PartitionMagic, and PhotoShop. What difference would it make if Windows had been named Doors? What suffixes and prefixes are used frequently? Are there words that are never used in titles (words that would make sense for the products)? What do the companies that named this software hope that the potential customer will think about these products? Does the kind of name that is used relate to the things that the product does? For instance, do you notice that word processing software uses one kind of typical naming convention while graphics software uses another? In your paper, create a system of classification for software product names or choose a specific category of software and explore the kinds of names that are used (and those that aren't used) for the products.

3. Naming and Hardware. Consider the names that companies choose for computers, monitors, and printers--names such as iMac, OptiPlex, CyberTron, Zip Drive, and so forth. Or consider the names of the parts that compose a piece of hardware--for example, motherboards, daughterboards, SCSI drives, IDE, USB and Pentium chips. Why these names? Why the abbreviations? Are there prefixes and suffixes that are used repeatedly? What are the companies going for? Are they trying to sound cutting edge? Are they being purposefully unclear--or do they perhaps imagine that the general public won't need to worry about what jargon like SCSI means? In your paper, create a system of classification for hardware or choose a specific category of hardware (hard drives, for instance) and explore the kinds of names that are used (and those that aren't used) for the products.
4. Take a close look at an advertisement for a software product or the cover of a software box. What is pictured? What is the relationship between the pictures in the advertisement or on the box and what the product actually does? Are there seemingly irrelevant things pictured? Are there relevant capabilities that aren't included in the advertisement or on the box cover? Why have certain things been included and others excluded? What does the manufacturer want potential customers to think about the product? How close is the information that is included in the advertisement or on the box to the realities of the product and what it can do?

Write an analytical paper that explains how the advertisement or product cover works. What group of potential customers is the software company attempting to attract? What are these customers interested in based on the advertisement of box cover? What issues are important to them? What conclusions can you draw about the things that are NOT pictured? What groups of customers does the company seem to be missing?

5. Consider references to computer technology in non-computer products--how are businesses using the language of computer technology to attract customers? Think about television commercials featuring a new car's on-board computer. The commercials suggest that the computer can track even the most minor malfunction in a car, and in expensive cars, these computers are tied to satellites that can help a harried couple get to the hospital before their baby is born. Why are these companies focusing on the computer technology? Why draw potential customers' attention to the computer rather than to the cabin space, the anti-lock brakes, or the warranty?

Find at least three advertisements that highlight computer technology as part of their appeal to potential customers. Remember you're looking for advertisements or commercials for non-computer products. Gather details on the things that the three advertisements have in common. How do they discuss computer technology? What details do they include? What features do they ignore as they focus on computer technology? Who do they show using the products? What kind of customers are they targeting? How do they imagine the discussion of computer technology will interest these potential customers? Write an analytical paper that

explains your conclusions about the ways that the advertisers use information about computer technology in your three advertisements.

6. Take a look at a television or print advertisement for an Internet Service Provider (or ISP). Frequently advertised ISPs include AOL, CompuServe, and AT&T WorldNet. What is shown in the advertisements? Who is shown using these Internet access tools? What are these computer users doing? What kinds of computer users are left out? What can you tell about the way that the company describes itself and portrays its customers? Write a paper that compares the Internet as the ISP defines it to what Internet users are really like.

NOTE: You'll need to begin by doing some analysis of Internet users to compare to the ISP commercials.

7. What one word best applies to computers and information technology at your school? What kind of machines and software are available? Where are computers found? Who can use them? Who actually uses them? When are they available? How are the computers used? Once you've captured a sense of the state of computer technology on your campus, write a paper that explains the one word that you've chosen and the reasons that you've chosen it. As you explain your word, be sure to include details on computers and information technology at your school that support your choice.

NOTE: if your school has no computers, you can think about computers where you work or computers available for local access at the library or elsewhere.

8. Take a look at commercials for computer products like the iMac and Gateway's Your:)Ware or software products like QuickBooks Pro. If you believe the commercials, what are the steps in using a computer? How do you go about getting online? writing out an invoice? paying your bills? sending an email message? Write a paper that compares the fairy-tale world of the commercials to the experiences that you or your friends and family have had with computers. Why are computers and software portrayed the way that they are in these commercials? Are the commercials believable?
9. Assume that you work in the Research and Development division of a business that produces computers, software, or computer training programs. For this paper, pitch a new product or service to your manager that provides better access to a wider variety of people than its competitors. Your paper needs to describe the product or service and explain why it's needed. Describe the customers who will use the product. As you describe your product, pay attention to issues of equal access--What makes your product or service available to as many people as possible? How does it provide better access than competitors in the market? Your paper will be a persuasive proposal. Include a section on the background and need,

description of the product or service, its advantages and disadvantages, and conclusions or recommendations.

10. Your school is trying to increase access to computers on campus. To gather ideas on ways that access can be improved, the school has invited students to submit proposals that explain things that the school can do to help more people get to computers or to help more people learn how to use computers in educational ways. Look around your campus at the computer technology now available. What kind of machines and software are available? Where are computers found? Who can use them? Who actually uses them? When are they available? How are the computers used--what do people use them for? In your paper, include the following information:
  - Outline the need for the kind of access your proposal focuses on.
  - Describe the things which are necessary to provide access (hardware? furniture? software? training classes? etc.).
  - Explain why your proposal is the best alternative.
  - Recommend a timetable or course of action necessary to implement your proposal.

## **Ten Critical Literacy & Technology Activities (Part 2)**

1. The Microsoft Monopoly trial has placed computing in the news and increased the number of stories related to computer technology that are covered on the news. Choose a statement made by one of the major players in the monopoly trial (Bill Gates, the chair of Netscape, and so on). Do a close reading of the way that the speaker talks about computers and computer technology. How does the speaker think about the people who use computers? How does the speaker talk about what computers can do? Does the speaker have different assumptions from the general public? Consider, for instance, all this discussion surrounding the definition of a web browser. How do you and your friends define web browser, and how do your definitions compare to the ones that are used in the statements that have been released? For this paper, your job is to focus on how the trial is defining something about computers or computer technology and compare that definition to what you see in the world around you.
2. Write a parody of an advertisement for a particular kind of computer, for a particular kind of software, or a particular Internet Service Provider (AOL, Compuserve, and AT&T Worldnet are Internet Service Providers). Think about the ways that the technology you're exploring are presented in typical advertisements. What kind of people are shown? Or are there people? What are the computers doing? What aren't they doing? Once you've thought about that way that advertisements are done, write a parody that makes a point about the



- way that way that computers and technology are presented. Remember not just to make fun of the advertisement, but to make a point about something like access to computers or about the reality of using computers.
3. Computers are often portrayed as an invention that has changed life drastically. Think about inventions that are historically portrayed as dramatically shifting life--the automobile, electricity, the locomotive, and so on. Do computers fit in this group? Have they had a drastic effect upon your life or upon the lives of people that you know? How have that effected (or not) society in general? Write a paper that argues your position--Are computers life changing? Will they change society as we know (or knew) it? Be sure to use evidence to support your claim.
  4. Analyze the portrayal of computers in television science fiction shows or in motion pictures. What do computers and computer-based technologies look like? What can computers do? How do they work? Consider how the science fiction portrayal compares to the real knowledge about computers at the time that the work was published or filmed (in other words, if you're analyzing the computers on the original Star Trek television series, you need to compare the Star Trek computer to the technology available in the late 1960s rather than to the technology available today). How do you account for the differences between the technology available when the piece was written and the technology that is shown in the film or episode? What does the portrayal of computers tell you about the way that people thought about computers when the show was written?

NOTE: This assignment can easily be shifted to an analysis of science fiction novels or short stories.

5. What are the dangers of computers that are shown in the news, in advertisements, and in popular culture? You can begin your list with dangerous hackers, viruses, and hard drive crashes. And, of course, there's a great deal of information on the possible troubles of the shift to the Year 2000. What is the point of discussing these dangers? What kind of language is used to talk about them? What are the reporters and advertisers trying to communicate? Analyze the purpose and audience for the discussion. What is the point of view? How is the point of view communicated? How does the point of view affect the way that the ideas are discussed? What details are included? What is explained--and what isn't?
6. Take a look at what you see on-screen in a particular computer program. Consider the menu commands, the dialog box names, and the design of what you see on-screen. What can you tell about the designers by the names and the design that they use in the program? Who does the designer think will use the program? What does the designer assume that the user knows (and doesn't know)? What terms does the designer assume that the user is familiar with? Where is online help

available (and where is it missing)? Is the program ADA-compliant\*? Write a paper that analyzes the computer designer's vision of the users with attention not only to who the designer is thinking of but also to the users that the designer leaves out.

\*\*ADA-compliant means compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. You can find information on ADA compliance with a simple Internet search, but at its most basic it means that a piece of software can be used by someone who visually impaired or hearing impaired. Think about the way that the program is used--if the only indication of something is a change in color, will someone who is color blind understand? if the only indication of an error is that the computer beeps, will a hearing-impaired user know what is going on? Consider such issues as you examine your software.

7. Examine a program that claims to show a realistic vision of its topic (or a vision based on reality). Consider a simulation program such as SimCity or Microsoft Flight Simulator; or take a look at the way that people, places, and events are portrayed in the Carmen SanDiego series. Think about the way that humans are portrayed in medical education software like Adam. Choose a particular program and analyze the way that the designers think about their topic--just how realistic is their vision? what is included and what is left out? What can you tell about the designers biases? How does the designer's vision affect the value of the program? [Based on an assignment described by Anne Wysocki of Michigan Technological University, at the Computers and Writing Conference in Gainesville, Florida.]
8. Examine a program designed to help you complete a task such as write a paper, draw a picture, or calculate data in a spreadsheet. You might choose any program in Microsoft Office, PhotoShop, Word Perfect, Illustrator, Freehand, or Quicken. Take a close look at the program that you've chosen--what does it do? what abilities does it leave out? Once you've thought about the program and the things that it does, analyze the designer's vision of the task that the program is meant to help the user complete. How does Microsoft define 'writing' if you consider Microsoft Word as a writing tool? How does Adobe define 'art' if you base their definition on what you see in PhotoShop? What do the designers think is important, and what do they leave out? Look at the activities that the program supports, the ease of using the tool, and the way that the features are named. Your paper should analyze the task that the tool supports and the ways that it supports it.
9. Take a critical look at something that most people never consider--Look at the fonts that are available on a computer that you have access to. You'll see font such as Arial, Courier, Monaco, Chicago, Schoolbook, Wingding, Verdana, and Colonna. Create a system of classification that makes sense of the naming

conventions that are used. What connections are there between the names and the appearance of the fonts? As you create your system, give attention to the reasons for the categories that you find--why, for instance, are some fonts named after cities? why are some given women's names (Arial, Desdemona, etc.) Your paper should provide both a basic classification system and some interpretation of the reasons for the apparent categories.

10. How is money spent on computers at your school, where you work, or in a local business or government? For your paper, do some investigative work--dig around and find out where the money comes from and what it is spent on. Who proposes ways to spend the money? Who makes the decisions? Who are resources provided for--and who is left out? What kind of training and support are available? Once you've completed your research, write a paper that explains how technology is valued and the ways that technology users are defined at your school, where you work, or in the business or government agency you've investigated. Alternately, you can write a paper that proposes a change in the process that is used to decide how money is spent or a paper that suggests a specific technological need that should be addressed in future spending. [Based on an assignment described by Dickie Selfe of Michigan Technological University, at the Computers and Writing Conference in Gainesville, Florida.]

# Ten Narrative Writing Prompts

This list of ten is targeted mainly at high school teachers and basic college composition, but you may be able to modify the questions to work with more advanced students at the college level.

## Using the Prompts

To use one of the prompts with your students, add appropriate instructions for the writing task, following the pattern and language that is used on standardized tests in your state, perhaps something like the following:

Write a paper (or letter) that informs your readers by telling them a story. Your paper should narrate an entire story (beginning, middle, and end). Your answer should

- include adequate details about the events in the story
- use a clear organizational structure, including transitions, an introduction and a conclusion
- use effective and appropriate diction
- express ideas smoothly and fluently

## Customizing the Questions

The prompts below are longer and more detailed than those used on most exams. Generally, the exam questions do not include examples of situations that fit the writing assignment. You can revise the assignments for briefer versions that are more in line with the test questions. Spend some time in class asking students how to deal with the more general questions, including urging them to brainstorm scenarios on their test form before committing to a topic.

1. **Being Unprepared.** Because you have been sick, out of town, busy at work, or working on other homework, you didn't have as much time to study for an important test as you needed. Everyone going to school has been in this situation. Think of a specific test that you took that you felt unprepared for and narrate the events. Tell your readers about the preparation that you were able to do, the reasons that you didn't get to prepare as well as you wanted, taking the test, and any significant events that happened after you took the test. Your paper should help readers understand what it felt like to be unprepared.
2. **Lightbulb Moment.** Think of an experience when you realized that you suddenly understood an idea, a skill, or a concept you had been struggling with--it might be something related to a class that you took or a specific athletic skill you were trying to perfect. For instance, you might think about trying to understand how to identify iambic pentameter in a poem or how to complete a Taylor Series problem

in your Calculus class. Or you might consider trying to perfect your free throws and suddenly understanding how your follow-through was affecting your success. Write a narrative that tells the story of your movement toward understanding. How did you finally come to understand? What changed your perceptions and gave you a new understanding? Your paper should help readers understand how you felt to struggle with the idea or skill and then to understand.

3. **Childhood Event.** Choose a vivid time from your childhood--You might think of the first time that you rode a school bus, of a time when you went to the principal's office, the first A you earned on a test or paper, earning money to buy something that you really wanted, and so on. Narrate the events related to the childhood memory that you've chosen so that your readers will understand why the event was important and memorable.
4. **Achieving a Goal.** Think of a time when you achieved a personal goal--you might have finally completed a marathon or triathlon, or you might have bettered your score on the SATs or another test, or you might have learned how to use a piece of software like Microsoft Word or Excel. Tell your readers about the story of how you met your goal. Be sure that your readers understand why the goal is important to you.
5. **The Good and the Bad.** Think about an event in your life that seemed bad but turned out to be good. Maybe you got injured and while you were waiting for your broken leg to heal, you learned how to use a computer. What makes the event change from bad to good may be something that you learned as a result, something that you did differently as a result, or something that happened that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. Tell the story of the event that you experienced and help your readers understand how an event that seemed negative turned out to have valuable consequences.
6. **Being a Teacher.** Teaching someone else how to do something can be rewarding. Think of a skill that you've taught someone else how to do. Perhaps you taught someone else how to swim, showed someone how to bake a soufflé, or helped someone learn how to study more effectively. Think about the events that made up the process of teaching the skill, and narrate the story for your readers.

7. **Changing Places.** Every place has things that change--sometimes as the result of economics, sometimes because different people are involved, and sometimes for no clear reason that you know about. Think of a change to a place that you know well. Perhaps the local grocery store you grew up with as Smith and Bros. Grocery was bought out by a regional chain like Food Lion or Winn Dixie. Maybe the First National Bank of Smithburg suddenly becomes NationsBank. Perhaps the change was more personal--an older sibling moves out of the house and your family changes the room to a guest room or an office. Think of a specific change and narrate the events that occurred. Readers should know the details of the change, and they should know how you feel about the changes that occurred.
8. **Personal Rituals.** Describe a personal ritual that you, your friends, or your family have. Think about the personal steps that you always go through when you prepare for an exam. Do you sit at a desk, spread books and notes across your bed, or use the kitchen table? Do you have to have something to drink...soda, water, jolt? There are numerous things that we do for which we create our own personal rituals. Choose one event--studying for a test, writing a paper, dressing and warming up before a game, or preparing and having a special family meal. Narrate the events that take place when you complete your ritual so that your readers understand the steps that the ritual includes and why you complete them.
9. **Standing Up.** Choose a time when you did something that took a lot of nerve, a time when you didn't follow the crowd or a time when you stood up for your beliefs. Perhaps your friends were urging you to do something that you were uncomfortable with and you chose not to cave into peer pressure. Maybe you took a stance on a political issue that was important in your community, or you might have Whatever you choose, think about the details of the event and write a story that tells about what happened. Your narrative should show your readers why you decided to make a stand or try something that took nerve, give specifics on the events, and share how you felt after the event.
10. **Disagreeing.** Think of a time when you disagreed with a decision that had been made and did something about it. The decision might have been made by someone you know personally--your Biology teacher announced a new policy to grade for spelling and grammar on your quizzes and homework, or an older family member decides to cancel a subscription to a magazine that you liked to read. You might have responded by discussing your concerns with your principal or dean, or you might have decided to get a part-time job to earn enough money to buy the magazine yourself. Or the decision could have been made by someone

you never met--perhaps your school board decided to change the lines in your school district so that you would have to go to a different school, or your state legislature has passed a bill that you disagreed with. Your response might have been to write a letter to the editor, to your state representative, or to the school board. Whatever happened, your job is to write a paper that narrates the events that occurred--from the decision that was made to your response. Be sure that your paper gives enough details that your readers understand why you disagreed with the decision and why you felt that your response was appropriate

## Ten Oscar Competition Activities (Plus Five)

This List of Ten is a bit different. In my thinking of the hoopla over the Oscars, I began wondering what would happen if instead of movies, we were talking about works of literature. So I've come up with an Oscar-type competition for the readings that a class has completed over the course of a school term. Some of the items in the competition can be separated by gender, as the Oscars are separated. I've listed them as different categories below, but you could collapse the categories. You could consider, for example, all characters rather than best male and best female. Likewise, while there are questions below for different genre, all the questions could be collapsed into a single question on the most outstanding piece of literature (rather than the best poem, the best play, and so on). There are two different ways to use these suggestions. Either way, it probably works best as an end-of-the-term activity.

**Option One:** You might have an actual contest. Students could assemble in small groups to go through their readings for the semester or the year, searching for nominations. You might ask students to write objective support for their nominations and to include the equivalent of "film clips"--passages that show the strength of their nominations. The questions in the assignments below could guide groups of students gathering the nominations for a particular category. Once all the nominations are in place, you might have some time for campaigning, and eventually your students could vote. This assignment could work across classes if different sections have done the same readings.

**Option Two:** Choose one of the questions below and use it as an exam prompt or a final paper. To help students, you might name five candidates for them to choose among. By listing choices, you can help students avoid freezing and wasting time trying to think of appropriate candidates, letting them focusing on making a choice and providing supporting details. Note: since the items are a bit redundant, I've rounded this list up to 15 items. The extra five give me the chance to explain related options (such as best play, poem, novel and short story) while still including everything that I wanted to have on the list.

1. **Outstanding Male Character.** Who was the most outstanding male character in the literature that we've read this term? Your choice should be a main character in any work that we've read. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a male character "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the male character you've chosen really does stand out.
2. **Outstanding Female Character.** Who was the most outstanding female character in the literature that we've read this term? Your choice should be a main character in any work that we've read. Think carefully about how the character



you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a female character "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the male character you've chosen really does stand out.

3. **Supporting Male Character.** Who was the most outstanding male supporting character in the literature that we've read this term? Your choice should be a supporting character in any work that we've read. A supporting character is one who is important to the events of the work, but who is not the main character. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a male character "outstanding," and be sure that you have a clear understanding of the difference between a main character and a supporting character. Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the male character you've chosen really does stand out.
4. **Supporting Female Character.** Who was the most outstanding female supporting character in the literature that we've read this term? Your choice should be a supporting character in any work that we've read. A supporting character is one who is important to the events of the work, but who is not the main character. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a female character "outstanding," and be sure that you have a clear understanding of the difference between a main character and a supporting character. Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the female character you've chosen really does stand out.
5. **Setting.** What was the most outstanding setting in the literature that we've read this term? A work can include more than one setting--for instance, in there may be several inside rooms that are treated as different settings, or an entire house may work as a setting juxtaposed to an outside setting, an out-building like a barn, or a location such as a specific street in a city. Think carefully about how the setting you choose is explained, described, and developed--and in particular, think about what makes this setting important to the work as a whole. An outstanding setting is more than a well-described place--Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a setting "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you

considered. Your paper should show readers why the setting you've chosen really does stand out.

6. **Animal Character.** What was the most outstanding animal character in the literature that we've read this term? The animal may have had a major role in the work or have been something of a supporting or symbolic character. Think carefully about how the animal character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Give attention to the ways that this animal character is important to the work--is it symbolically important? does it drive the plot? what would be lost if it were not there? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes this character "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the animal character you've chosen really does stand out.
7. **Short Story.** What was the most outstanding short story that we've read this term? Think carefully about the short story that you choose--all the aspects of the story should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, tone, point of view, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a short story "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the short story you've chosen really does stand out.
8. **Poem.** What was the most outstanding poem that we've read this term? Think carefully about the poem that you choose--all the aspects of the poem should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as symbolism, structure, tone, point of view, rhyme, rhythm and style. Additionally, account for conventions that apply to the kind of poem you've selected (for example, a dramatic monologue or a haiku). Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a poem "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the poem you've chosen really does stand out.
9. **Play.** What was the most outstanding play that we've read this term? Think carefully about the play that you choose--all the aspects of the play should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, stage direction, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a play "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that

you considered. Your paper should show readers why the play you've chosen really does stand out.

10. **Novel.** What was the most outstanding novel that we've read this term? Think carefully about the novel that you choose--all the aspects of the novel should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, tone, point of view, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a novel "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the novel you've chosen really does stand out.
11. **Adaptation of Myth or Folk Tale.** What was the most outstanding adaptation of a myth or folk tale that you found in a piece of literature that we've read this term? Think about the relationship between the original myth or folk tale and its representation in a more recent work. How has the original been adapted in the new version, and why has it been included? How does the adapted myth or folk tale add to the work in which the appears? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes an adaptation "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the adaptation you've chosen really does stand out.
12. **Descriptive Passage** (50 words or less). What was the most outstanding descriptive passage in the literature that we've read this term? The passage can describe anything: a character, a setting, an event, and so forth. Think carefully about how the descriptive setting that you choose works. What kind of detail does it use? What literary techniques does it rely on? And, in particular, think about what makes this description important to the work as a whole. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a descriptive passage "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the passage that you've chosen really does stand out.
13. **Sentence.** What was the most outstanding sentence in the literature that we've read this term? The sentence can serve any purpose in the text--exposition, description, and so forth. Think carefully about how the sentence that you choose works. What kind of detail does it use? What literary techniques does it rely on?

And, in particular, think about what makes this sentence important to the work as a whole. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a sentence "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the sentence that you've chosen really does stand out.

14. **Plot.** What was the most outstanding plot in the literature that we've read this term? Think carefully about the plot you choose--how is it structured, what are the key turning points or events, and how do the components combine in an overall structure that is unique or exemplary. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a plot "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the plot you've chosen really does stand out.
  
15. **Use of Symbolism.** What was the most outstanding use of symbolism in the literature that we've read this term? Think carefully about the symbol that you choose--how is it symbolic? what does it symbolize? how is the symbol important to the work as a whole? why does it stand out? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a symbol "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the use of symbolism that you've chosen really does stand out.

# Ten Persuasive Writing Prompts

## Using the Prompts

To use one of the prompts with your students, add appropriate instructions for the writing task, following the pattern and language that is used on standardized tests in your state, perhaps something like the following:

Write a paper (or letter) that explains your position on the given topic. Provide reasons that elaborate your ideas and support your position convincingly. Your answer should

- include adequate support for your position
- use a clear organizational structure, including transitions, an introduction and a conclusion
- use effective and appropriate diction
- express ideas smoothly and fluently

## Customizing the Questions

You can modify the questions by changing the audience. These examples generally direct the student to write a letter to the editor of a local community newspaper or the school paper. You can modify the assignment by asking students to write a letter to the principal, to a teacher, to the school board, to the governor, to a state senator (or similar politician), to the city board, to their classmates, to the PTA president (or other officers), and so on. College students might write to students attending the high school they graduated from.

1. **School Uniforms.** There has been a problem in local schools with discipline and violence. Your school board has decided to institute a school uniform policy in order to cut down on these problems, based on the positive examples that they have seen at other schools. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position on this issue and supporting it with convincing reasons.
2. **Locker Searches/Personal Searches.** The principal at your school has instituted random locker and backpack/bookbag searches to check for guns, knives, and other weapons. Anyone caught with these weapons will be immediately suspended. The principal argues that the random searches will not only guard against illegal weapons at school but will also will help students feel safer. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.

3. **Too Much Homework.** Some of the parents at your school have started a campaign to limit the homework that teachers can assign to students. Teachers at your school have argued that the homework is necessary. What is your position? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.
4. **Censorship.** Your local public library has come under criticism for allowing patrons under the age of 18 to check out books that are unacceptable. The books are either explicit, describe graphic violence, or use questionable language. Most recently, a high school senior checked out James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The student's parents did not approve of the student reading the book and complained to the town council. As a result, the council is considering removing all questionable books from the library. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.
5. **Litter.** A litter problem has developed on your school's campus. Students are throwing trash on the ground, leaving empty soda cans and bottles outside on benches, and dropping napkins and other trash on the cafeteria floor rather than carrying them to the trash can. Your principal has asked students to take more care, but the litter problem persists. The principal has reacted by canceling all after-school activities until the problem is taken care of. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.
6. **New Highway Exit.** The state has created a plan to add a second highway exit to help shoppers access a busy shopping mall. The only problem is that the new exit will move the access road 500 yards closer to a near-by elementary school. Teachers and parents at the school complain that moving the road closer will increase noise at the school and provide unnecessary distractions. The state planners have included privacy fences to help cut down on the problems, but the protesters are unsatisfied. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.
7. **Computers in the Classroom.** As part of a new technology initiative, your local school district is increasing the number of computers in every school. The district plan provides for two computers in every classroom. Teachers at your school are

lobbying instead to place all the computers together, creating two computer-based classrooms so that all students in a class can work at the computers together, rather than only one or two students at a time. The district is worried about the additional cost of creating and maintaining these special classrooms and is concerned about how access to the classrooms can be provided fairly and efficiently. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your point of view and supporting it with convincing reasons.

8. **Bilingual Education.** As part of a proposed educational initiative in your state, local school districts are responsible for providing required courses in both English language and Spanish language in order to increase the success of their programs. Because your state has a large population of Spanish speakers, the state education department believes that teaching these students in their first language will help them learn better and more quickly. Because of the limited budget, however, the local school board is concerned that they may not be able to provide the additional teachers or training needed for this program. They fear that they will lose state funding and accreditation even though 90% of the district's students pass their achievement tests on the first try. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your point of view and supporting it with convincing reasons.
9. **Grade Scale Change.** One of the biology teachers at your school has decided to change from a ten-point grade scale (100 to 90 is an A, 89 to 80 is a B, etc.) to a seven-point grade scale (100 to 93 is an A, 92 to 85 is a B, etc.). The teacher is trying to encourage students to put more effort into their classes by raising the requirements. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.
10. **Online Schools.** The state department of education has provided funding for an experimental online school. All the classes will take place on the Internet, using email, online chat, and the world wide web. The students taking classes at this new online school will never meet each other face-to-face. They will only interact online with each other and with their teachers. The state is hoping this program will provide fairer educational access to students in outlying, rural areas. Opponents of the program argue that because of their lack of interaction with other students in a traditional classroom, the students who attend this online school will not develop the social skills that should be a component of their education. What is your position on this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your

local newspaper stating your position on this issue and supporting it with convincing reasons.



## Ten Prewriting Exercises for Descriptive Papers

1. **Five Senses.** What do you see? What objects, plants, or animals are in the place? What colors do you see? What do you hear? What would a hidden microphone record in the place you're describing? What does the air smell like? Is it annoying? pleasant? What does it remind you of? Where does the smell come from--are there blooming flowers? cooking food? cans of oil? What do you taste? Are you touching anything? (Skip any questions that don't make sense for the place you're describing.)
2. **Different Angles.** Consider the object you're describing from different angles. What does the object look like from the top? What if you were underneath the object? What would you see or notice if you were looking at the object from the right side? What does it look like from the left side? Make the object the Earth. You become the moon, and orbit the object. What do you notice as you travel around it?
3. **Focus on the Iceberg.** Only one-eighth of an iceberg is above the surface of the water. The majority of the iceberg is underwater, yet most people think only about the part that appears above the surface. There are two options for you to consider: choose the one that fits your object best. (1) Look only at the top eighth or so of the object. If you saw only the upper eighth, if the rest were submerged, what would you think about the object? What would you see? What would you make of the part that you couldn't see? (2) Think about your object creatively. What you see, there on the surface, is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. What is hidden below the surface? What might you think of the object based only on the surface appearance, and what is the significance of the parts of the object that cannot be seen?
4. **Tiny Ants.** When you're in a tall building looking down at the ground, the people and objects moving around can look like tiny ants. Take a bird's-eye view of your object. Put it in the world of tiny ants. From far above, what would you see? What would seem important? What features would be noticeable?
5. **Technicalities.** Write a technical description of your object. Look at the object as you might to describe it for a legal document or in a scientific report. Focus on the known facts, rather than opinions or impressions that you have of the object. Focus on an objective view.

6. **Create a Cartoon Version.** The cartoon world is a bit different from the real world. If your object were in a cartoon world, what parts would be exaggerated for comic effect? What parts would probably be omitted from the cartoon drawing? What cartoon would the object probably appear in? How does thinking of your object as a cartoon influence what you see?
7. **Different Days.** How does the object or place change from one day to the next? Is it different on weekends? Take me through a week in the life of the object. If you were to peek in on it every day, what would change? What would stay the same?
8. **Longshot.** Pretend it's twenty years in the future. Take a look at your object or place. What do you notice? How would you describe it twenty years from now? What characteristics would remain the same? What would change? What would you see? hear? smell? How could you tell that time had passed by just by looking at the object or place?
9. **15 Minutes of Fame.** According to Andy Warhol, everyone has 15 minutes of fame. What would your object's or place's 15 minutes be? Describe your object in a way that highlights the features that place it in the limelight. Add details that help me understand how your object or place gained its 15 minutes.
10. **Opposites.** You can learn a great deal about an object or place by defining the things that it is not. Describe the things that your object or place is not. What features and characteristics would never apply to it? How are these characteristics and features important? Why is their absence important?

## Ten Prewriting Exercises for Personal Narratives

1. Think of the different people involved in the event that you're narrating as characters in a piece of literature. In the same way that you'd write a character sketch for characters in a short story or play, write a paragraph on each of the people involved in the event you're writing about. Once you've finished, compare the details in your sketches to the details on the characters in your draft. Revise your draft, based on the differences that you find.
2. Sketch out the events as blocks in a comic strip. Don't worry about the artwork--just use stick figures. What events would you focus on in your sketches? What parts would you leave out? Comic strips don't show every single event that occurs; they focus on the events that are necessary to the overall message. Once you've sketched out your blocks, take a look at your working draft. Are the blocks that you include in your comic strip included in the narrative? Are they recognizable--how do the blocks in your comic strip relate to the organizational structure of your narrative? Are the ones that you've left out of the comic strip included in the narrative--if so, what do they add to your overall purpose?
3. Write a version of the events in your narrative for a newspaper article. Remember to include the answers to the journalist's questions (who? what? where? when? why? how?). Focus on the facts as they occurred. Use an inverted pyramid order--begin with the facts and details that are most important to readers and end with the facts that are less important. Once you've finished, compare the article to your working draft. Have you included all the facts in your draft that you included at the beginning of your newspaper article? Are the details that you include toward the end of the article (the ones that are less important) included in your working draft--are they emphasized or subordinate? Think about what you would want someone who read that newspaper article to know that isn't included in the article itself. Are those points included in your narrative?
4. Outline the events that occur in your narrative. Identify the places where you or others involved had to make a decision of some kind. For each decision point, brainstorm on the alternatives that could have been pursued. What other options were available? Once you've thought through the possibilities, examine the way that you discuss the decisions in your draft--do you include details on the alternatives? How do these other options affect the way that you think about the event now? Have you looked back at the event that you're writing about and thought, "Gee, I wish I had done that differently"? Add some depth to your

narrative by fleshing out alternatives as well as how and when they became important.

5. Choose a time in your narrative when you and other characters are talking with one another. Script out the conversation as an exchange in a play. Try to capture the language in the style that would have actually been used. Make the dialogue accurate to the event; don't worry if it's not Standard Written English (personal conversations rarely are). Once you've scripted out your dialogue, move to your working draft. How does the dialogue that you've written in your script compare to the episode in your narrative? Can you add details from the script to your draft? How would adding the dialogue affect the purpose of your narrative?
6. Describe the events that occurred for a different audience. How does your narrative change if it is written for an older family member, someone interviewing you for a job, a younger student, or someone you had never met before? What would you leave out? What would you add? What would you describe in different language and style? How would the points that you emphasize change? Once you've thought about the differences, return to your working draft. Are the points that you DO include right for your audience? Are there parts of your alternate version that can be added to your working draft? As you revise, think about the details in the narrative fit your audience in particular.
7. Reflect on the events as you recall them. Readers will want to know why you're sharing the story. Your narrative needs to answer the question, "So what?" When your readers get to the end of the story, you should have answered the question for them. Draw a chart with three columns. Label the columns as follows:

Events | So What Do/Did I Think? | So What Do/Did Others Think?

Outline the major events in rows under the "Events" column; then, fill in the spaces under the other columns for each of the major events. For each of the columns, try to think about the "So What?" Explain why the event matters to you in the second column, and why the event matters to others who are involved (directly or indirectly) in the third column. Think about how the events mattered at the time and how they matter now, looking back. Once you've finished filling in the chart, move to your working draft. Are the "So what?" details that you included in the chart clear in your draft? Are there details that you can add to make the significance of the event understandable to your readers?

8. Think about the longevity of the event in your narrative. How will you remember the event five years from now? ten years? twenty-five years? As you think about the effect of the events in the narrative, you need to focus on how the events will matter to you and your readers. What kind of staying power do the events have?

Brainstorm or freewrite a few paragraphs on why you think this event will still matter in the future. Once you've written about the longevity and enduring importance, move back to your working draft. When you talk about events is their staying power clear to the reader? How do you communicate the enduring qualities of the events in your narrative? What details from your brainstorming or freewriting might you work into your draft?

9. Think about the details included in your narrative--facts, sensory details, and emotions. Draw a chart like this:

Facts | Sensory Details | Emotions

Then think about the facts that are important to your narrative, and fill in the chart. Work to find at least ten important facts. For each, think about related sensory details (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell), and consider the emotions related to the facts (fear, pleasure, sadness, etc.). For instance, a fact in my narrative might be "three fresh baked loaves of bread on the kitchen table." For sensory detail, I'd write about the smell of fresh baked bread, the warmth of the kitchen from the still hot stove, and the golden brown color of the bread. For emotions, I'd write about how the loaves of bread gave me a happy feeling as I remembered how my father always bakes bread for special holidays and how my grandmother always baked us bread when we visited her. Once you've finished working through the chart for the facts from your paper, move back to your working draft. Are the sensory details and emotions that you included in the chart communicated in your draft? Revise to add details, taking material from your chart whenever you can.

10. Write an account of the events in your narrative for a fable, a tabloid, or a television or radio interview. These options give you a lot of room for creativity. What happens if the people involved in the events were animals and you had to come up with a moral? If the events were reported in a tabloid paper, what would be emphasized? Where would things be embellished? What would be left out? Finally, if you were interviewed about the event, what would you include in your story--your answer depends on where you're being interviewed (by Barbara Walters once you're rich and famous? on a talk show by Oprah? on a late night show by David Letterman or Jay Leno?) Be sure to indicate where you're being interviewed. Once you finish your alternate account of the events, move to your working draft. Are there facts that you can add now that you've thought about the events in your narrative from a different point of view? Are there facts that seem less important? Can they be deleted? Did you add details and description to your account that can be revised and added to your draft? What parts of your alternate version wouldn't make any sense at all in your final draft of the narrative?

## Ten Television Analysis Writing Projects

1. **Gender.** Look at the characters in the shows that you've watched closely for this assignment, specifically focusing on the gender of the characters. How is their gender important to the roles that they play (or is it)? To what extent, are the characters in roles that could not have been played by an actor of the opposite gender? Are the shows playing with gender? Write a paper that explores the ways that gender enhances or detracts from the shows that you're examining--consider all the major characters of the program, looking particularly at any stereotypes and any roles that break with more traditional gender roles. Alternately, you might focus on a very specific character and write an analysis of how the program would be different if that character were the opposite gender. Here's an interesting example: originally, the creators of *The Practice* were looking for another male actor to add as a lawyer for the show. Instead, they found Camryn Manheim, who plays Ellenor Frutt. Once she was chosen, they wrote the script for her....but what if that character weren't in the program? How would it be different?
2. **Realism or Stereotype?** Consider the characters in the programs that you've watched. In what ways are the characters real, and in what ways do they seem to be stereotypes or caricatures? Do the characters have real emotions--and a full range of emotions? Or do they just have the emotions that seem politically correct for the time and place that the programs consider? Are their emotions predictable? Do they look like real people, or like models and pin-ups? Is their hair every mussed? Do they get dirty? Does anyone ever go to the bathroom? Do they every get sick? Do they grow at a normal rate? Write a paper that explores the degree of realism that the programs that you're examining for your paper. Alternately, write a two-part paper. For part one, rewrite one of the episodes that you watched from a more realistic perspective--you can write a short story rather than a script. For part two, explain the decisions that you made to make the show more realistic, giving details both on the changes that you made and why you made them.
3. **Commercials.** In addition to watching the television shows, pay careful attention to the commercials that come on. What products are advertised? What commercials are used? As you watch, make a complete list of the commercials and the order in which they appear--if there are repeats, be sure to note them. Once you have a list, look for connections. Just who is the audience for all those commercials--who would buy the products or services? Would the characters on the program be likely to buy the products or services? After you've gathered all the details on the audience for the commercials, apply that information to the television show. How does the audience for the commercials fit the programs? Based on the commercials that you see, who would you think that the television programs are aimed at? In your paper, explore the relationship between

commercials and television program, focusing on what you can tell about the audience for the program and their interests and desires. Alternately, you are an advertising executive. Choose a product or service that is not advertised during the program that you've watched. Write a proposal that convinces your client (the decision maker at the company that makes the product or provides the service) to buy airtime during the program. To make your proposal convincing, you'll need to identify connections between the audience for the program, the audience for the kinds of commercials that are now being advertised during the program, and the people who buy your client's product or service.

4. **Predictability.** To what degree are the shows that you are examining predictable? For example, most folks know the show Gilligan's Island. Do you remember the episode where Gilligan accidentally caused some trouble for everyone on the island? Who doesn't? All the episodes had that plot. What predictable things that happen in the shows that you're watching, and how do these things help the program? (or do they hurt it?) For your paper, explore the predictability of the programs that you've watched and the writers' and directors' goals in relying on predictable devices. Variation: brainstorm alternatives to the predictable devices that you've seen in the program you're examining. Choose two or three that are reasonable options, and write a paper that explores how the program would be different if these options were chosen instead and that accounts for the choice that the program's writers have made (an example: it's not reasonable to suggest that a giant meteor will wipe out the castaways on Gilligan's Island before the Professor can find a solution to whatever trouble Gilligan has caused.)
5. **Clothes.** How do clothes and costumes play a role in the programs that you've watched? For each major character, record the clothes and accessories that they wear in each show. Once you've assembled your list, look for patterns for each character--and among and between characters. To what extent does the show use clothing, jewelry, and the like to communicate information about the characters, their lives, and their interests? Consider how the program would be different if everyone wore a school uniform--or for that matter, what if they all had on jeans and t-shirts (and not skin-tight either!). Write a paper that explores the function that costumes play in the programs that you've watched.
6. **Ratings.** Many television programs now use a ratings system to help adults decide whether programs appropriate for children whom they are caring for. The scale ranges from a Y for young children to an M for shows that are suitable for adults only. You can check out the details on the scale at the PTA web site at <http://www.pta.org/programs/nbcguide.htm>. For your paper, pay attention to the

rating for the programs that you watched and consider whether the ratings were accurately applied. Your paper should pay attention to the details that are included in the definitions of the different ranks on the rating scale. Once you've analyzed the application of the ratings to your show and indicated whether the application was appropriate, you should go on to consider whether the scale itself is adequate.

7. **Same Subject, Different Shows.** Choose television programs that consider the same subject or the same issue, but from different perspectives. For instance, if you wanted to think about lawyers and legal issues, you might choose *Ally McBeal*, *The Practice*, reruns of *LA Law*, and *Judge Mills Lane*. While these shows all consider similar issues and all focus on lawyers, they go about it in different ways and with different attitudes. You could choose different issues of course--shows on medicine and doctors, shows on police, and so on. For your paper, compare the ways that the issues are dealt with--which things remain unchanged regardless of the show you're considering, and which things change? In addition to thinking about the similarities and differences, be sure to consider the reasons for the changes.
8. **Time Capsule.** Imagine that the programs that you've watched are all that have survived to tell future generations about our life and times. Imagine that a video recording of these programs has been discovered 500 years from now. Miraculously, the discoverers have found a way to watch the programs. What would they think of us and our world? Take on the role of one of the discoverers, and write a report to your home office explaining what you've learned about your ancestors based on the programs. Be sure that your report draws clear connections between the details of the program and the conclusions about your ancestors.
9. **Role of Television.** Edward R. Murrow said, "Television in the main is being used to distract, delude, amuse, and insulate us." In light of Murrow's quotation, what role would you say that the programs that you're examining play? Do they distract? If so, from what, and how? Or do they delude? Who are they deluding? What methods do they use? If they amuse, whom do they amuse, and what techniques do they use? If they're insulating us, what are they insulating us from, and how do they go about it? Do they fill several of those roles? Or do you seem them as filling roles that Murrow has not allowed for? In your paper, explain the roles that your television programs fill, providing examples and explanations from the shows that support your analysis.



10. **Music & Sound Effects.** What roles do music and sound effects play in the programs that you watched? Are certain sounds associated with particular characters or themes? Are sounds matched to the mood of a character (or characters)? What do the sound effects add to the program--are they an integral part of the show, or just extra noise? In your paper, create a system for identifying the kinds of music and/or sound effects. Your system should account for the characteristics of the music or sound effects as well as when and how the music or sound effects are used. If certain pieces of music and sound effects are a regular part of the show, how are they used? And in what circumstances are additional pieces added?

# Ten Ways to Ask Students to Re-think the Classroom

1. Place your students in the future. It's the year 3098. A team of archaeologists discovers your classroom, exactly as it is now. What do they make of their discovery? How do they describe the space? What do they imagine happened in the place? How do they support their findings--that is, what things in the space support their conclusions? Students could form teams (writing groups) and work in online InterChange conferences to gather ideas about the space. They might write a group paper or individual papers reporting their findings to the organization that funded their archeological dig. Or they could write a "newspaper article" (whatever the equivalent to a "newspaper article" is in 3098). You might even ask them to write about their discovery as an email message to a friend or family member.
2. Ask your students to work as ethnographers in the classroom--explain the idea of participant-observers, and have your students observe the community in your classroom. What social structures exist? How do members of the community interact? How do the physical structures in the classroom affect the community? By comparison, you might ask students to observe the ways that computers work in other places on your campus--what kind of community is built (or not) in public access computer labs, around workstations in the library, and so forth. Students might examine the differences: how does the community change, and why does it change?
3. Make your students classroom designers. Give them carte blanche to rethink the set-up and layout of the room--move the desks, tables, machines, and so forth. Add equipment, furniture, and/or resources. If you have a drawing program on your computers, they might even sketch out their designs. After their rethinking, have students write a proposal to implement their changes--ask them to include an explanation of the changes they would make AND a detailed justification for the changes. For example, saying that they want to add a conference table to the room isn't enough--ask them to explain why the conference table should be added and how it will affect the learning that takes place in the space.
4. Enter an online discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the computer-based classroom. Ask students to use pseudonyms--Your discussion should include campus administrators, teachers from other disciplines, family members, politicians, teachers from other schools, alumni, and students from other schools (including, say, high schools, other colleges, and so forth). You might assign roles or have students choose for themselves, but work for a range of aliases. Urge your

students to think carefully about the point of view of the speaker that they represent. Before the online discussion, students might write position papers from their speakers' point of view, to help gather their ideas and think through the opinions. You might use the transcript later--analyze the range of perspectives, revise the position papers based on the group discussion, and so forth.

5. If your students are used to coming into the classroom, logging in (nearly or completely) on their own, and getting down to work, begin one day NOT on computers. As your students enter, tell them that you want them to wait so that you can make some announcements. Once it's time for class to start, take a survey. How many students followed your instructions? What did those who followed the instructions do instead of working online? What did those who didn't follow the instructions do? Move to an online discussion about student-centered versus teacher-centered learning. Encourage students to discuss the ways that they are responsible for their learning and how the computer-based classroom compares to the other classrooms where they attend classes.
6. Have students choose a historical figure they are interested in. Give them a chance to do some background research on the figure, and then tell them that their figures have been plopped down in your classroom. Ask them to write a paper giving their figures' analysis of and reaction to the space. You might set some parameters to help avoid papers gone wild with make-believe--the figures know, for instance, that the space is used for education. The point of the assignment is for students to think about the computer-based classroom from another point of view. Students might participate in online discussion, in the persona of their historical figure (see Robin Wax's "History Comes Alive on the Little Screen," NEA Today, Sept. 1994, p.25).
7. Think of your school as a human body, where does this classroom fit? Where do other places, people, and organizations in the school fit?--assign your students a paper that explores where your classroom belongs in the bigger organism. Ask them to consider the ways that your computer-based classroom fits with other kinds of classrooms on campus, how your computer-based classrooms adds or detracts from the bigger whole, and so forth. If you don't like the metaphor of the human body, try another: the school as an ecosystem, the school as a city, the school as a company, and so on. You might encourage students to choose their own metaphor for the school.

8. Assign students the task of writing a letter to entering students at your school who will encounter your computer-based classroom for the first time. What can they tell these new students about the space and how it works? What information do they wish they had had when they first began using the classroom? You might combine this writing assignment with the student ethnography paper (#2, above)--asking students to write their letters after having observed the space and thought about the community that exists in it.
9. Turn your students into computers (metaphorically, of course). From the computer's perspective, ask them to observe, analyze, and evaluate the humans in the room. If the assignment seems hard to get started on, appeal to popular culture. Ask students to assume a thinking persona for the computer in the same way that Star Trek: The Next Generation's Data, Voyager's The Doctor, or Lost in Space's The Robot take on human qualities even though they are machines. Ask them to think about how the machine would evaluate the space. What role would the machine think it fills? What does it think of these humans who sit down in front of it? Papers might be first-person narratives on a day in the life from the computer's point of view ("I was resting here happily, drawing fractals. I was sort of pleased with the fuschia one, and then I felt one of them reach over and move my mouse. Damn. They want me to work again. Don't they understand how peaceful it is to sit and draw fractals?"), position papers (a computer writes, "Why I Should Be Networked"), or a reflective essay evaluating the roles that it has played over time (e.g., a hand-me down computer from the Math Lab reflects on the things it's seen and the differences between the two labs it has lived in).
10. Put your students in the future, looking back at your classroom. Ask them to imagine that they have come back for their ten (or twenty, etc.) year reunion. They run into one another and decide to find the old classroom. Miraculously, it's still there (though it's very likely to have changed greatly). For their assignment, ask students to reflect on their experiences in the place and to comment on how the computer-based classroom influenced their education (and the things they are doing now that they are graduates). The point is to ask them to think about what they think that they will value (or not) about having had a class in your computer-based classroom once they have moved on to other places and experiences. They might write their thoughts in the format of a letter or article for the alumni newsletter, or they might compose their reflections in a letter to a politician or campus administrator, urging more (or less) support for computer-based classrooms.

## Ten Ways to Explore a Writer's Background

1. Write a fable, tall tale, Uncle Remus tale, or fairy tale that will tell me about you as a writer and about your understanding of the writing process. Think about the genre of the tale you'll use. A fable, for instance, includes animal characters and tells a short didactic tale. Fables end with a moral, a short, pithy saying that summarizes the lesson of the story. It's a lot like putting your thesis statement at the end. To compose a fable about writing, think of a lesson you've learned as a writer and compose a tale that fits the characteristics of the genre. [When I use this assignment, I usually narrow down the option and provide explanations for all the genres that are included. I'd probably offer two options rather than all four. To keep the example short here, I've only included details for the fable assignment.]
2. How do you compose? If there were a hidden camera recording everything you did as you worked on a paper, what events would it capture? How do you get started? When do you start revising? What do you do when you revise? Describe the events using basic chronological order (that is, describe the first thing that you do, then the second, then the third, and so on).
3. Describe your biggest success as a writer. Pretend you are about to be interviewed on a show such as Today or the Barbara Walters special. The interviewer is giving you the opportunity to show off--what would you say? What writing accomplishments would you talk about? Script out the conversation using descriptive language to show why your writing was successful.
4. List the top ten tips you would share with someone who has asked you for advice about writing a paper, and explain why you've chosen them. Think about something you wrote before you came to my class--maybe a research paper that you wrote for a class last year, an answer for an essay exam, or a letter to a friend or family member. A friend, a family member, or maybe another student is asking you for help now. What guidelines would you give? Be sure to be specific!
5. What has been the biggest influence on your writing? Your job here is to write a cause and effect essay--the way you write now is the effect. What was the cause? How did you become the writer you are? To get started, first you have to think about the qualities that you possess as a writer. What kind of writer are you anyway? After you think about what you are, think about what makes you who you are as a writer. What happened? What changed? Show me enough about you

before, you as a writer now, and the thing that influenced you to help me understand why this influence has been important.

6. Describe yourself as a writer by using an analogy. Begin by completing this sentence: "As a writer, I am like a \_\_\_\_\_. " Or this one: "When I write, it's like \_\_\_\_\_. " For example, you might complete the sentence this way: "As a writer, I am like a gardener." After you've come up with your comparison, draft a paper that explores the analogy you've chosen. If I were comparing myself to a gardener, I'd compare the way that I get started on my papers to the way that I start work on a garden. You have to do two things in this paper--show how you write, and draw comparisons to help make the way you write clearer to your readers.
7. What's your language background? What languages do you know? What have you studied? What is your family's language background? What language does the community you are a part of use? Think of your background as a crazy quilt or a collage. Write several short paragraphs describing what you know about language and how it works. Once you've drafted your parts, piece them together. You might connect the various pieces like a hypertext. You could use a very large piece of paper and create your own graphic organization, putting each piece in a bubble and creating connections with links.
8. What are your earliest memories of reading and writing? Write a flashback. Jump in a time machine. What do you remember about reading and writing from when you were younger? Try to be as specific as you can--do you remember the titles of books you read? details about the plot? Do you remember a particular story that you wrote? What has made these items memorable? Why do you think these memories have stayed with you? How do they relate to the way you read and write now?
9. How do you know when a paper is done? When you bake a cake, you can tell it's down by using a toothpick or tapping the top. When you're filling up your gas tank, you can tell you're done when the tank is filled to the top. How do you tell when something you're writing is done? Are there misleading things to look out for--can you be tricked into thinking something you're writing is done when it's not? Describe the process you would go through to test a paper, and tell us what you're looking for in your tests and how you decide whether it's passed--how you decide it you're finished.

10. Construct a writing kit. Think about the things that come in a first aid kit, a sewing kit, a bicycle repair kit, or a starter kit for something like using the Internet or building models. The kit includes supplies, tools, and instructions. Describe your writing kit--what tools and supplies would you assemble? What things are essential for writing? What items would you include "just in case"? List the items you'd include, and then compose the instruction booklet that would accompany the items.

Follow-up:

The exact follow-up I use depends upon the question students have worked on. For assignment where students compile advice or reflect on their language and literacy backgrounds, I like to have students share their lists or pieces either in small groups or as a whole class (depending upon the class size). I ask them to look for connections among the lists, to search for places where they have similar practices or experiences. After they've drawn out the similarities, we might have an oral discussion about what all those similarities indicate about language, writing, and/or learning.

For assignments such as writing a fable, I'd probably have students collect the fables in a class anthology. And, as above, have them read the collected stories and look for similarities and differences.

For a long-term follow-up, I like to make copies of the papers and put them away for the term. At the end of the term, I return the papers and ask them to think about how the information in the paper has changed over the term. This reflection exercise works best for assignments such as a description of the composing process or describing yourself as a writer by analogy.

## Ten Ways to Play with Literature

I get tired of cardboard essays on literature that we're reading--those general and uninteresting five-paragraph themes that are as boring to the students as they are to me. One way that I've found to get around these flat essays is by assigning paper and discussion topics that don't lend themselves easily to the five-paragraph theme but that still encourage critical and analytical thinking.

There are two parts to each of these ideas, but I'm only listing the first part below since the second part is the same for every essay. First, writers consider the work from some unusual perspective, producing a text of some kind. Second, I ask them to add a reflective piece that explains the choices that they have made in their essay. It's not enough simply to write the papers below--they have to explain the interpretation and analysis of the piece of literature that led to the ideas in their writing.

1. Have a character in a reading or the author of a piece endorse a product--design a letter or short narrative where the character or author tells readers why the product is one they should purchase or support. With all the celebrity endorsements in mass media today, this assignment is fairly easy to set-up. Students have to think carefully about the endorsement--it has to fit the character's or author's knowledge, and it has to be a product or service that the character or author would be likely to endorse. It makes sense for Huck Finn to endorse a travel agency, for instance, or a particular kind of boat--or a brand of white paint. He'd be less convincing, however, endorsing denture creme.
2. Begin a class discussion by asking students to brainstorm silently, completing at least three "what if's" for their reading. For *A Raisin in the Sun*, for example, students might write questions such as "what if Willy had shown up at the train station and he and Walter Lee had gone to Springfield?" or "what if Ruth weren't pregnant?" After they brainstorm, have them share their "what if's"--if you have a computer classroom, you can have them post their responses in Mail or a real-time conference tool such as InterChange. In a traditional classroom, everyone can write on the board. Once the "what if's" are gathered, have them look for similarities--are there questions that occur repeatedly? can they be divided into categories--perhaps by the character they refer to or the plausibility of the question? Finally, writers choose one of the questions and write a narrative answering it. Alternately, students might participate in group discussion of three or four of the questions that appear most frequently.
3. Consider a piece of literature from a different cultural perspective. This assignment works best for me after I've done some work with fairy tales from different countries--I have several versions of Cinderella from different cultures.



As a next step, students rewrite something they've read--usually a short, short story--from a different perspective. In ESL classes, you can have students rewrite American tall tales and Uncle Remus stories from the perspective of their native culture. Students might write narratives or even script scenes.

4. Translate a section of something you've read into another style. This assignment does double duty--helping you talk about writing style and analyzing the events that occur in the reading. Students might read Russell Baker's "Little Red Riding Hood Revisited" as an example. It's often more successful to work with a story that they know well--having them translate a fairy tale, for instance, into a jargon-filled version as Baker has. But they need not stop there--if you're working with Shakespeare, you might have students modernize a passage to "standard," modern version. Or get experimental, and have them write a rap version or an exaggerated and flowery version. To add fun, have students work on different passages (as groups perhaps); then, share the results and have them guess what the original passages were.
5. One fun exercise is to ask students to think through the "movie version" of a piece they've read recently. There are several ways to set up the writing for this project: students might write individual pieces outlining how they would produce their movie version, groups might work together to outline their production plan, or students might actually script a section of their version. What makes the assignment the most fun is having students work with a range of kinds of movies for the same reading. You can set up several small groups--one does the "big Hollywood blockbuster" version, another does the "Disney" Version, yet another works on the "PBS/Ivory Merchant" version, and a fourth might work on the "made-for-TV" version. They choose actors, settings, and so forth. Once they've worked out their versions, you can have them share--then compare and contrast the productions.
6. Another way to ask students to consider different perspectives on a piece they've read is to ask them to write a newspaper report of the events that occurred in the reading. You can ask all students to write the same kind of newspaper report, or mix it up by letting them choose among several options. They can discuss the differences between a newspaper report on the events in *The Scarlet Letter* today and those that would have been included in the report written in a newspaper at the time. You can add a twist to the assignment by letting them write the *National Enquirer* version, the *Entertainment Tonight* version, and so on.

7. Write a letter to the author of the work or to a character in the piece. This assignment is pretty standard, but you can make it more lively if you play with it. Try combining the letter assignment with the "What if" assignment (#1)--asking students to write to the author about how they think the story might have been different. Or you can have students give the author or character advice--You might have your students set themselves up as advice columnists for a newspaper who respond to characters in their reading. A two-part assignment could have students first assume the role of a character in the piece who writes a letter an advice columnist; then, they exchange papers and assume the role of the advice columnist by responding to their classmates' letters. Another possibility is having students assume the role of the character in the reading, and having that character write to the author (or vice versa).
8. Have students choose a scene that isn't included in the reading and write their version of the events that might happen. Students can concentrate on events that are referred to, but that aren't explored in the piece; or you can have them focus on a time period that passes without comment. What happened the night before the events that open *A Raisin in the Sun*? Describe a scene from either Othello's or Desdemona's childhood--that is, before they met. What happened before Mr. Mallard went to work in "The Story of an Hour"?
9. If you're also teaching technical or business writing, have students write a resume for a character in a story they have read. Students can check a current newspaper for job listings, find a job that their character qualifies for, and write the resume or letter of application that shows that their character is the best one for the job. The exercise asks students to analyze their characters carefully, looking for all the skills and know-how that they demonstrate. And at the same time, it gives them a chance to think about how to cast the characters experiences so that they support the implicit argument that the character is the best one for the job. Working with characters who have no given job can be best--concentrating on the kind of job Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer might apply for allows more creativity than writing a resume to help Willy Loman get a new job. You'll get 99% sales applications for Willy, and students won't work far beyond the "known" details. With characters such as Huck and Tom, they have to do more analytical thinking.
10. Where will the characters be in twenty years? A series of invention questions can help students think about the range of options. The specific questions depend upon the story you're working with, of course. A brief piece such as Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool" can work well because it gives students a lot of room. For Brooks' poem, you might ask students to answer questions such as these: did

the character you've chosen get married? go to school? end up in jail? Do they really "Die soon"? What might happen if they dropped by the Golden Shovel twenty years later--what has happened to the place? Once students think through their characters' experiences, they can write a narrative, a letter to another character, or perhaps something such as an address to their high school class at the 20-Year Reunion.

## Ten Ways to Respond to Student Drafts

1. Have students write a reflective piece on the drafts that they are submitting and respond to their reflections in your comments, rather than to the draft itself. This is one of the old stand-bys. I ask students to tell me what their concerns and focal points are; I respond to their perceptions of the text. Since it's as important for writers to be able to read and think about their text as it is for them to do the actual writing, this technique works well--and it keeps me from telling them what I think about their text. Instead, we enter a conversation about THEIR perceptions of the text. If you've not tried this before, you might begin by asking students to include responses to three issues:
  - (a) What part of this draft is the strongest?
  - (b) What part of this draft will you work on next?
  - (c) Turn in 3 what-if's. Imagine at least 3 things that you might do to change this text: tell me what they are and why you're thinking of doing them. Begin your response with "What if"--for example, What if I cut the second paragraph completely?
2. Use a template that focuses on student-generated guidelines for the assignment. Have your students read examples of drafts written by students who have worked on a similar assignment in the past and/or professional examples in their books. They create criteria for the assignment and then shape the criteria into a response template or checklist. The criteria might have broad categories such as "Readability, Clarity, Interest Level, and Organization" or "Ideas, Purpose, and Meaning." Focus your response on the areas they have identified, referring to the guidelines and examples they agreed on in class. Since the students own the guidelines used for the evaluation, you're simply applying their criteria--not the inscrutable eccentricities of an English teacher.
- 3.
4. Use journalist's questions to structure a response--not all of the examples are questions, strictly speaking, but they provide a nice paradigm for moving through feedback to a draft. Modify the questions as appropriate for the draft and assignment. For instance, the "when" question below would work best for a draft that is close to completion. If you were working with an earlier draft, you could change the question to something such as "When I read the details in your draft, I..." You can use these as thinking questions, asking students to respond to you, entering a conversation about their text either online in Daedalus Mail, in conferences, or in writer's journals (see #10 below).
  - Who is this draft written for? Who is the audience?
  - What is this draft about? What is its purpose?
  - Where do details and specifics stand out? Where does the text SHOW well?

- When I get to the end of the draft, I...? [complete the sentence & explain--for example, "I wondered whether the hidden money would ever be found."]
  - Why did you...? It's an interesting choice/technique/etc. Why did you choose it?
  - How would your draft change if you ...?
5. Respond to the draft from three different points of view. I like to use this technique when we've been talking about the different audiences for a piece and the ways that different readers respond to a text. Depending upon the subject of the draft, I might respond as another student, as an older student, as someone else who has read the same work (or seen the same work of art/movie)--or as someone who hasn't, and so on. I try to fit these points of view to the particular assignment. For instance, if the assignment is a letter to the editor of the local paper, I might respond as the editor of the paper, as a concerned citizen who is interested in the same issue, and as a citizen who didn't realize that there was a problem. Once I get two or three concrete responses written, I add one silly one. For instance, I might respond as Bart Simpson or a character in a story we've read recently. I try to use several different characters in each class for variety--especially since students enjoy sharing the silly responses with one another.
6. Write two paragraphs in response to a draft. In one, use you-language, and in the other, use I-language. In the "you" paragraph, echo things that you have read in the paper, giving writers the chance to compare what a reader sees in the paper with their intentions. For example, I might write, "you seem to be sad that the playground has been torn down." I focus on what I see as the writer's intentions, goals, and strengths (not the weaknesses). In the "I" paragraph, I indicate my feelings about the text. For instance, I might write, "I was confused about the garden. It is mentioned several times, but I couldn't understand why it was important" or "I felt sad reading the details about the playground equipment piled in the trash heap."
7. Respond to a partial draft by outlining what you think will happen next and why. This kind of response works well early in the drafting process, especially with narrative papers or arguments. I generally write two short paragraphs. The first summarizes what happens in the text up to the end of the draft. The second guesses at least three things that I think might happen next. As is the case when I

use three different points of view (see #4), I include one silly response--something absurd or unlikely or humorous.

8. "Talk Less, Ask More." I attended a keynote by Alfie Kohn last week here in Austin. Kohn urged us to "talk less and ask more"--rather than telling students what they have or haven't done correctly. Ask them how they feel about their text, why they have included the details that they have, what they want to try next. Ask them what concerns they have, and what they think can be done to address these concerns. These techniques work best when you respond online in Daedalus Mail, in conference, or in a writer's journal (see #10), since you're asking students to share details about their writing.
9. Write a review of the draft. This technique works well after we've done an assignment where students have written a book review or a movie review or after we've considered reviews of a text, artwork, or film in class. In response to their papers, I write a short review of my own. This works especially well with narrative or creative assignments.
10. Work on the connection between reading comprehension and writing: respond with summary, implied main idea, logical conclusions. Demonstrate how reading comprehension techniques apply to reading rough drafts. Write a one-sentence summary of the draft, write a sentence identifying the draft's main idea, and write a sentence or two drawing conclusions about the text. Be sure that each is labeled clearly, and then talk about how to use the information (e.g., writers should think about whether the implied main idea you've identified fits the purpose they had for writing? You might ask them whether there is anything they might change to make the main idea clearer to readers.)
11. Use a Writer's Response Journal over the course of the term. It might be unfair to include this as technique. It's a way to create on-going conversations with writers. When I am working in a computer-based classroom, I can use Daedalus Mail to enter into extended conversations about writing. When that is not possible, I use a writer's response journal--students turn in a journal with their drafts. In the journal, they should give me details about their text, questions they want to ask, and so forth. I include my response to their draft in their journal rather than as an end comment on the paper. My response is likely to include questions for them--based

on techniques like those above. As work progresses during the term, I encourage students to reread their journals and note changes they see. Periodically, I read back over older entries as well. The interaction in the journal is much like that of Daedalus Mail messages or conferences, but it can be a stronger tool in the long-run because it collects all the comments in writing and in one linear space. When time constraints or the workload make journals impossible to use for the entire term, I use them for a major project or research paper.

## Ten Ways to Use an Old Stack of Magazines

1. Assume that you work for an advertising agency, and your job is to create a classification system that explains the kinds of advertisements in a particular magazine to help account executives determine whether their client's products would fit in the magazine. You need to explain what kinds of advertisements are normally included in the magazine, including some detail about how the advertisements present the product or service to readers. Here's a possible way that the document would be used: an account executive is placing ads for a new children's breakfast cereal that is targeting health-conscious parents. The executive would pull your document to see whether the ad would fit in the magazine that you've examined.

To get started, pull all the advertisements from your magazine that take up a full-page or more (in other words, also pull ads that take up two or more pages). Now go through the advertisements, and create a classification system to organize them into piles. For example, you might use a classification system based on the kind of product, the persuasive appeal used in the advertisement, or the segments of the audience that the advertisement is targeting. Once you've created these large categories, look for sub-categories that fit the ads (for instance, use of color, amount of text, and so on). When you've divided all the ads, write a paper that explains your classification system.

[TWO TIPS: (1) If you ask students to bring their own magazines to class for this assignment, be sure that they understand that they need to bring a magazine that they are willing to destroy. (2) This assignment can be adapted by asking students to do an analysis of the magazine readers based on the advertisements that they find in the magazine.]

2. Write an analysis of the readers who write letters to the editor for your particular magazine. Because there are only a handful of letters in any magazine, you might want to look at the letters from two or three issues to simplify the process of drawing conclusions about the people who have written the letters. Who are these readers? Based on these letters, what are the readers of your magazine interested in? What issues are important to them? What is the purpose of their letters? Do the letters show differing opinions or agreement? What conclusions can you draw when you think of the letters as a collected group--what do they have in common?

You need to turn in the pages from your magazine that include the letters you're analyzing. If you're working with your own magazine and you don't mind tearing out the pages, you can pull the original pages out and staple them to your paper. If you don't want to tear up your magazine or you're working with a borrowed magazine or a magazine at the library, attach a photocopy of the pages. Be sure to include all the letters for each issue that you examine.



3. Analyze the document design for your magazine. How have the magazine editors used page layout, colors, graphics, and fonts to highlight and present information in the magazine? How are white space, paragraph length, and indentation used? What clues in the layout help indicate the significance of an article? How can you tell a featured article from a regular column? How does the cover relate to the contents? How does the layout on the cover draw your attention to the contents of the magazine? Draw all your ideas together in an analytical paper that explains the design principles that are used by the magazine.

[TEACHING TIP: For shorter papers or more focused pieces, ask students to look at the magazine cover only or the layout for a particular article or column.]

4. Consider the absences in your magazine--what's left out? Begin by going through your magazine and taking notes on the kinds of things that are covered in the articles and shown in the pictures. If you had to describe the magazine to someone, how would you complete these sentences:

This magazine covers \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

It uses lots of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ to emphasize articles.

The pictures in the magazine show \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

The readers of this magazine are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

Now think about the things that fit the theme and audience for the magazine but that aren't included in this magazine. Are there issues that fit the magazine's focus and audience but that aren't mentioned anywhere? Are there things that are explained but not pictured (or things that are pictured but never discussed)? Are there categories of readers who are never shown in the pictures? Explore the things that are left out of the magazine, and write an essay that discusses the things that are missing. Why do you think that they are missing?

A note: Don't focus on anything silly--while it's true that Sports Illustrated has no articles on baking pastries, it's a silly point. Articles on baking pastries would not fit the theme and audience for Sports Illustrated. Be realistic--look for things that fit the magazine but that are not included.

5. Choose three major articles in your magazine. Compare their content, technique, and presentation. Why are the three of them in the same magazine? Begin by looking closely at three areas in the magazine:
  - A. What common ideas or issues do they discuss? How are the three related to the audience for the magazine? Why do the people who read this magazine care about the issues that these articles cover? What makes the ideas significant? The editors could have included a great number of articles; why did they choose these three?

- B. How does the technique--the organization, the genre, description, style, and so forth--compare? What similarities and differences do you notice?
- C. Finally, take a look at the document design. If you just looked at the three articles, without reading them, would you know that they were from the same magazine? What visual clues does the magazine use to provide continuity from one article to the next?

After you gather all your observations together, write a paper that analyzes the similarities and differences between the articles and draws conclusions about their relationship to one another and to the larger magazine as a whole.

[TEACHING TIP: You may need to give students guidance in choosing their articles. The assignment provides the widest range when students work with unrelated articles. The magazine a student is working with may have a section of related pieces (for instance, a news story on a recent happening, an interview with someone who was involved in the event, and an editorial commentary that considers the significance of the event). Urge students to work with only one of these three articles, choosing their other articles from another section of the magazine.]

6. Write a letter to the editor, responding to one of the articles or issues that is covered in the magazine. First, you'll need to go through the magazine and choose an article that catches your attention. You need to choose an article that covers something you are interested in and can say something about.

Next, gather your ideas for the letter by completing these sentences:

- I am interested in this article because \_\_\_\_\_.
- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about this article because it \_\_\_\_\_.
- In response, I want to say \_\_\_\_\_ to the editor.

With your ideas gathered, you can begin shaping your letter. The letter should begin by indicating the article that you're responding to and a brief statement of the reason that you're writing. The letter should then explain each point that you want to make to support your argument. Turn to the letters included in the issue of the magazine you have for examples. Remember that you need to follow letter format, beginning with "To the Editor" and ending with a signature block.

[ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT: Students might write a letter to an author whose article appears in the magazine.]

7. You're an editorial assistant working for a publisher. The publisher is interested in launching a new magazine, and your job is to examine the competition to help the publishing company focus their efforts. Write a complete analysis of one of the competing magazines. What themes, ideas, or issues are the main arena of the magazine? What do the articles cover? What kind of depth and detail does the

competing magazine use? Who reads the magazine? What can you tell about the audience? Think about questions such as these: how old are they? What are their hobbies and interests? do they have children? and so forth. What style does it use? How does the magazine use document design? What is the "look and feel" of the magazine? What makes it stand out in the rack of magazines at the store? What makes it different and identifiable? In your paper, outline the characteristics that make the magazine that you're examining special, with an eye to the special features that your new magazine will need to be aware of.

8. Take a look at the Table of Contents for the magazine you're examining. What information is included? How do the titles listed in the Table of Contents compare to those on the actual articles? What do the short descriptions under the titles say? Are author's names listed? How are color and layout used to highlight articles? How are pictures and graphics used? How many pages are used for the table? How are the articles divided into categories? How are the sections subtitled? Write an analytical paper that explores the way that the Table of Contents represents the magazine and the persuasive techniques that the editors have used to draw your attention to the articles.
9. Write a short sales letter for the magazine, urging the reader to subscribe or to purchase a gift subscription. Take a look at the articles and advertisements in the magazine to get an idea of who reads the magazine and what their interests are. Brainstorm a list of things that readers look for in the magazine, the reasons that they would want to read the articles. Once you've gathered your list, shape the ideas into a letter that persuades someone to subscribe to the particular magazine. To help shape your language, take a look at the way that things are phrased in the magazine. Think about the style that the magazine uses and the way that style affects the style that you use in your sales letter.
10. Brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you think of the magazine that you're examining. The words might describe the focus of the magazine, the ideals that are important to the readers, or qualities that the readers possess. Once you've created your list, choose one term and write a paper that discusses how that term is represented in the magazine. Explore how the magazine defines the term in its presentation of articles and advertisements. If this magazine were your only way to know what words like "beauty," "fitness," or "love" mean, what would the definition be? Be sure that your paper (1) gives the definition and (2) provides details from the magazine that support your definition.

## **Ten Ways to Use an Old Stack of Newspapers**

1. Assume that you work for an advertising agency, and your job is to create a classification system that explains the kinds of advertisements in a particular newspaper to help account executives determine whether their client's products would fit in the newspaper. You need to explain what kinds of advertisements are normally included in the newspaper, including some detail about how the advertisements present the product or service to readers. Here's a possible way that the document would be used: an account executive is placing ads for a new children's breakfast cereal that is targeting health-conscious parents. The executive would pull your document to see whether the ad would fit in the newspaper that you've examined.

To get started, pull all the advertisements from your newspaper that take up a quarter of a page or more. Now go through the advertisements, and create a classification system to organize them into piles. For example, you might use a classification system based on the kind of product, the persuasive appeal used in the advertisement, or the segments of the audience that the advertisement is targeting. Once you've created these large categories, look for sub-categories that fit the ads (for instance, use of color, amount of text, and so on). When you've divided all the ads, write a paper that explains your classification system.

[TWO TIPS: (1) If you ask students to bring their own newspapers to class for this assignment, be sure that they understand that they need to bring a newspaper that they are willing to destroy. (2) This assignment can be adapted by asking students to do an analysis of the newspaper readers based on the advertisements that they find in the newspaper.]

2. Write an analysis of the readers who write letters to the editor for your particular newspaper. Because there are only a handful of letters in any newspaper, you might want to look at the letters from two or three issues to simplify the process of drawing conclusions about the people who have written the letters. Who are these readers? Based on these letters, what are the readers of your newspaper interested in? What issues are important to them? What is the purpose of their letters? Do the letters show differing opinions or agreement? What conclusions can you draw when you think of the letters as a collected group--what do they have in common?

You need to turn in the pages from your newspaper that include the letters you're analyzing. If you're working with your own newspaper and you don't mind tearing out the pages, you can pull the original pages out and staple them to your paper. If you don't want to tear up your newspaper or you're working with a borrowed newspaper or a newspaper at the library, attach a photocopy of the pages. Be sure to include all the letters for each issue that you examine.

3. Analyze the document design for your newspaper. How have the newspaper editors used page layout, colors, graphics, and fonts to highlight and present information in the newspaper? How are white space, paragraph length, and indentation used? What clues in the layout help indicate the significance of an article? How can you tell a featured article from a regular column? How are graphics placed in relationship to the articles? How does the layout on the cover draw your attention to other articles in the newspaper? Draw all your ideas together in an analytical paper that explains the design principles that are used by the paper.

[TEACHING TIP: For shorter papers or more focused pieces, ask students to look at the newspaper cover only or the layout for a particular article or column.]

4. Consider the absences in your newspaper--what's left out? Begin by going through your newspaper and taking notes on the kinds of things that are covered in the articles and shown in the pictures. If you had to describe the newspaper to someone, how would you complete these sentences:

This newspaper covers \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

It uses lots of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ to emphasize articles.

The pictures in the newspaper show \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

The readers of this newspaper are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

Now think about the things that fit the theme and audience for the newspaper but that aren't included in this newspaper. Are there issues that fit the newspaper's focus and audience but that aren't mentioned anywhere? Are there things that are explained but not pictured (or things that are pictured but never discussed)? Are there categories of readers who are never shown in the pictures? Explore the things that are left out of the newspaper, and write an essay that discusses the things that are missing. Why do you think that they are missing?

5. Choose three major articles in your newspaper. Compare their content, technique, and presentation. Why are the three of them in the same newspaper? Begin by looking closely at three areas in the newspaper:
  - A. What common ideas or issues do they discuss? How are the three related to the audience for the newspaper? Why do the people who read this newspaper care about the issues that these articles cover? What makes the ideas significant? The editors could have included a great number of articles; why did they choose these three?
  - B. How does the technique--the organization, the genre, description, style, and so forth--compare? What similarities and differences do you notice?
  - C. Finally, take a look at the document design. If you just looked at the three articles, without reading them, would you know that they were from the

same newspaper? What visual clues does the newspaper use to provide continuity from one article to the next?

After you gather all your observations together, write a paper that analyzes the similarities and differences between the articles and draws conclusions about their relationship to one another and to the larger newspaper as a whole.

[TEACHING TIP: You may need to give students guidance in choosing their articles. The assignment provides the widest range when students work with unrelated articles. The newspaper a student is working with may have a section of related pieces (for instance, a news story on a recent happening, an interview with someone who was involved in the event, and an editorial commentary that considers the significance of the event). Urge students to work with only one of these three articles, choosing their other articles from another section of the newspaper.]

6. Write a letter to the editor, responding to one of the articles or issues that is covered in the newspaper. First, you'll need to go through the newspaper and choose an article that catches your attention. You need to choose an article that covers something you are interested in and can say something about.

Next, gather your ideas for the letter by completing these sentences:

- I am interested in this article because \_\_\_\_\_.
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- In response, I want to say \_\_\_\_\_ to the editor.

With your ideas gathered, you can begin shaping your letter. The letter should begin by indicating the article that you're responding to and a brief statement of the reason that you're writing. The letter should then explain each point that you want to make to support your argument. Turn to the letters included in the issue of the newspaper you have for examples. Remember that you need to follow letter format, beginning with "To the Editor" and ending with a signature block.

[ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT: Students might write a letter to an author whose article appears in the newspaper.]

7. You're an editorial assistant working for a publisher. The publisher is interested in launching a new newspaper, and your job is to examine the competition to help the publishing company focus their efforts. Write a complete analysis of one of the competing newspapers. What themes, ideas, or issues are the main arena of the newspaper? What do the articles cover? What kind of depth and detail does the competing newspaper use? Who reads the newspaper? What can you tell about the audience? Think about questions such as these: how old are they? What are their hobbies and interests? do they have children? and so forth. What style does it use? How does the newspaper use document design? What is the "look and

feel" of the newspaper? What makes it stand out in the rack of newspapers at the store? What makes it different and identifiable? In your paper, outline the characteristics that make the newspaper that you're examining special, with an eye to the special features that your new newspaper will need to be aware of.

8. If your newspaper has a Table of Contents, look at it carefully. What information is included? How do the titles listed in the Table of Contents compare to those on the actual articles? What do the short descriptions under the titles say? Are authors' names listed? How are color and layout used to highlight articles? How are pictures and graphics used? How many pages are used for the table? How are the articles divided into categories? How are the sections subtitled? Write an analytical paper that explores the way that the Table of Contents represents the newspaper and the persuasive techniques that the editors have used to draw your attention to the articles.
9. Write a short sales letter for the newspaper, urging the reader to subscribe. Take a look at the articles and advertisements in the newspaper to get an idea of who reads the newspaper and what their interests are. Brainstorm a list of things that readers look for in the newspaper, the reasons that they would want to read the articles. Once you've gathered your list, shape the ideas into a letter that persuades someone to subscribe to the particular newspaper. To help shape your language, take a look at the way that things are phrased in the newspaper. Think about the style that the newspaper uses and the way that style affects the style that you use in your sales letter.
10. Brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you think of the newspaper that you're examining. The words might describe the focus of the newspaper, the ideals that are important to the readers, or qualities that the readers possess. Once you've created your list, choose one term and write a paper that discusses how that term is represented in the newspaper. Explore how the newspaper defines the term in its presentation of articles and advertisements. If this newspaper were your only way to know what a word such as "patriotism," "local interest," or "civic duty" means, what would the definition be? Be sure that your paper (1) gives the definition and (2) provides details from the newspaper that support your definition.

# Ten Ways to Work on Grammar Collaboratively

1. Find a message that you've written and choose the first three sentences of more than 5 words each. Find all the verbs in the passage and replace them with the infinitive version in square brackets. Here's an example:

Sentence from my message:

When I arrived on campus yesterday, I learned that our class had been moved from the classroom to the library.

Rewrite:

When I [to arrive] on campus yesterday, I [to learn] that our class [to move] from the classroom to the library.

Send the three sentences with the square brackets in a message to the class. Once you've sent your messages, read the sentences posted by the others in your group. Reply to the author, changing the infinitive in square brackets to a sensible verb form.

Once everyone has had a chance to rewrite the sentences, post a Mail message that discusses the differences in your group member's versions of the sentences. Did everyone change the infinitive in the same way, or were there a variety of responses? Did the sentences match your original sentence? What do you make of the way that the rewrites matched (or didn't match) the original and one another?

2. Write three multiple choice questions on comma splices and/or fused sentences and post them to your group. Your questions should be something like this:

My brother and I are going to a concert tomorrow night, after the concert, we're going to drive to Dallas so that we can see the band again Friday night.

The correct punctuation is:

- a. My brother and I are going to a concert tomorrow night; after the concert we're going to drive to Dallas, so that we can see the band again Friday night.
- b. My brother and I are going to a concert tomorrow night. After the concert, we're going to drive to Dallas, so that we can see the band again Friday night.
- c. My brother and I are going to a concert tomorrow night. After the concert, we're going to drive to Dallas; so that we can see the band again Friday night.



- d. My brother and I are going to a concert tomorrow night. After the concert, we're going to drive to Dallas so that we can see the band again Friday night.
- e. No revision. The sentence is correct as is.

Once you've written your questions, post them to the members of your group; then read and reply to the messages of your group members. When everyone has had a chance to answer the questions, your group can discuss the correct answers.

NOTE: If your teaching students who are also preparing for an exam like the TAAS exam, you might use an example from the exam itself and mention that the multiple choice question is like those that they will see on the exam.

- 3. Discuss the ways that grammar, mechanics, and usage affect style? Style Checkers gather details on the words, sentences, and paragraphs, but it cannot evaluate for things such as subject-verb agreement or comma splices. How do these issues affect a document's style?
- 4. What do you remember about learning grammar? Who do you think influenced the way that you talk and write the most--a parent? grandparent or other family member? a teacher? someone else? Describe your first memories of learning grammar. How do your memories of learning to read and speak compare to the ways that you've been taught in formal settings such as classrooms?

NOTE: The idea with this discussion starter is to explore biases and misconceptions about how we learn grammar.

- 5. Check any of the Mail messages posted last week and send me a message demonstrating examples of the following grammar structures:
  - a. A compound sentence
  - b. A complex sentence
  - c. A sentence using passive voice
  - d. A sentence written in past tense
  - e. A subordinate clause

Include details on the message where you found your examples (the author, subject, and date of the message).

- 6. Examine all the messages that you wrote last week. Count the number of times that you used passive voice. Choose several examples that demonstrate the ways that you use passive voice. Post a message to your group that shares your findings and suggests some conclusions about how and when it's appropriate to use passive structures.
- 7. This exercise has two parts.

First: Write a message using only present tense that describes an event that you participated in or observed recently. You need only a paragraph. If you need help,

check your handbook for details on the difference between past, present, and future tense. Post your message to your group.

Second: Read the messages of the other members in your group, and then rewrite the paragraphs in past tense and post them back to the list. Once you've finished, your group can discuss the process of changing the tense for the paragraphs--did you all write the same thing? Which parts were difficult to rewrite (and which parts were easy)?

8. This exercise has two parts.

First: Write a personal narrative paragraph, using first-person. Tell a very short story about something you've done recently. You only need a paragraph. If you need help, check your handbook for details on using first-person. Post your narrative to your group members.

Second: Read the paragraphs written by your group members. Rewrite the paragraphs in third-person, and post the results to the class. Once you've finished, your group can discuss the revisions--what do you notice about the changes that you and your group made to the originals as you changed to third-person?

9. This exercise has a homework assignment. You might skip the homework and bring your own collection of advertisements to class for students to use.

Homework: Find a full-page advertisement that relies on fragments to sell a product or service. Type the text of the advertisement in a plain text file.

Class Exercise: Paste the text of your advertisement in an ASCII text file; then skip down a few lines and write complete sentences that incorporate the fragments. Post your message to the class. Once all your group members have posted messages, read the messages and engage in a discussion of the difference between the fragmented version and your rewrite. As a group, sketch out some rules that seem to guide when and how to use fragments in advertisements, and consider how the rules for advertisements compare to the rules you would follow in your formal and informal writing.

10. Write a message to your classmates that explains comma splices and suggests how to avoid them in your writing. Consider your message as a rule sheet for your classmates--you're explaining the rules for them to use as they prepare for a test or exam. Use these example in your explanation:
  - The car outside the football field was filled with cheering fans, as we passed by their car, they broke into the school fight song.
  - All the dogs in the neighborhood began barking at once, I knew right away that something was wrong.

In addition, write two example sentences of your own. Once you've finished, post your message to the class.

NOTE: This exercise works well as a review--you can assign a different rule to every student. Or students can write a grammar rule message every week to gather their ideas together before moving on to the next topic, creating a personal journal of grammar rules.

## Ten Ways to Write about Style

1. Choose a passage from the novel or short story that we're reading and translate it into another style. You can choose any style you want. You might choose a very formal style, a jargon-filled technical style, or persuasive, business writing style. You could even try the style of a children's picture book or a personal interest story in a newspaper. Whatever style you choose, be consistent through your entire translation. Use one style from beginning to end. Once you finish your translation, skip down a few lines and add a paragraph or so that explains how you made the decisions that you did as you were translating.

ALTERNATE VERSION: Translate a fairy tale, folk tale, or fable that you've read into another style. Or get experimental, and have them write a rap version or an exaggerated and flowery version.

2. You undoubtedly use several styles in your day-to-day communication with people. Some are probably formal; others may be less formal, dialectical, or technical. Write a classification paper that organizes the styles that you use most often. To begin, jot down what you know about the styles that you use. Next, look for connections--and differences. Which styles can you group in the same category? What sets the different categories apart? Write a paper that outlines the different classes of language that you use and defines specifically the ways that the language in each category is unique.
3. Choose three paragraphs from a story or novel (averaging at least fifteen words per paragraph), and analyze the stylistic choices that the author has made. Start by taking some notes on the purpose of the passage. Summarize the passage, and outline its significance. Next, think about the way that the author has used style to make a point or emphasize a detail. What words or phrases are repeated? What sentence structures are used? How would you label the text--formal? informal? objective? chatty? Write a paper that analyzes the style that the author uses. Identify both the stylistic elements that the author uses and their relationship to the characters involved and/or to the main point of the story.
4. Write the same message in three different styles. Choose a short message--perhaps an invitation to a party, a description of a small object, a note announcing a new policy. Choose three different styles, and write the message in each of the three styles. You might choose a formal, informal, and objective styles. You could choose a particular slang style, a business writing style, or a legal style. You could write the message using an active style, a passive style, and a natural blend of the two.

5. Write a paper which explains an English slang word or a jargon term that you know to an foreign exchange student or a friend from another country who is planning a visit to your home. Here is the situation: Your friend has been reading WWW pages about the region where you live and found a slang word or jargon term which he or she didn't understand. Your friend sent you an email message asking you to explain what the word means. For your paper, write the message you'd send to your friend. Explain what the slang word or phrase means and how it is used.
6. The word "style" is used to describe a lot of kinds of expression. Write a paper that explores a kind of style that DOESN'T involve word choice and sentence structure. You might outline the "rules" that apply to the style that you've chosen or compare/contrast two related styles (in the same way that you might compare formal and informal writing styles). You might describe the style of clothing that you wear. Or consider the stylistic flair of a particular athlete--think about the variety of styles of slam dunks and backhands. There's a wide range of options: hairstyles, musical styles, and so forth. Just choose a style that you're familiar with and write a paper that explores and explains that style.
7. Imitate the style of a passage. Choose a descriptive passage from one of the texts that we've been reading. Think about the stylistic choices that the author makes--what word choice and sentence structure has the writer used? Once you've analyzed the text that you're modeling your piece after, describe the view from your room's window or from a similar location imitating the style of the passage that you've chosen. Try to use similar word choice, sentence structure, and organization. Be sure to include a copy of the passage that you're using as your model when you submit your paper.
8. Choose an informative newspaper or magazine article that reports details on a recent event and rewrite the article as a personal interest story (or vice-versa). The facts are the same whether you're writing a news story or a personal interest story--the difference is often the style: the ways that the story is structured, the specific words and phrases that are used, and the ways that the ideas come together in sentences. Think about the difference between the way that someone might be described. A news article might include a description such as "the 6'6" firefighter" while a personal interest story focusing on the man might describe him as "the towering hero." Your rewrite should recast the words and sentences in the original to fit the style of the new version.

9. Your textbooks explain complex ideas and issues. Regardless of the subject matter, textbooks need to balance the technical jargon and style of the field being covered with explanations and details that make the ideas clear to someone new to the field. Analyze the style that is used in one of your textbooks. What kind of words are used? How often are technical terms included--and how are those terms presented? What kind of sentences are used? What terms and structures are repeated? In your paper, outline the stylistic choices that the textbook's authors have made and explain how they help (or don't) make the material appropriate for readers.
10. Lewis Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" adopts the style of an adventure tale but uses make-believe words to describe the events. Carroll mixes known and unknown words in phrases such as "vorpal blade." His sentence structure and syntax make sense even though the words that he's chosen are nonsensical.

For this writing assignment, choose one of these options:

- a) Try your own hand at a "Jabberwocky" tale. Choose a model that you're familiar with and imitate the style for that model, telling a slightly nonsensical story as Carroll does. You don't need to stick with the romantic adventure that Carroll uses as his model--you might write a sports article, a personal interest story, a news article, or an advertisement. After you've written your "Jabberwocky," write a short reflection that identifies your model and explains the choices that you've made.
- b) Translate Carroll's tale into another style. What would the story have been if Carroll were writing a newspaper report or a technical report? How would the piece be different? Choose a style that makes sense for the story, and write a version of the events using that style. This assignment has two parts: (1) translate the story into a new style, and (2) write a paragraph that identifies the new styles that you've chosen and that explains how you made your decisions as you were translating.