

Writing in the Disciplines Faculty Fellowship

Portfolio

Submitted by

**Professor Miriam Simon
AELP Reading and Writing; English
Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus**

Process Piece for All Mini-Tasks

For these assignments, I wanted students to have an opportunity to reflect on the skills we have been working on and try to use them in a slightly different way. For all these tasks, I tried to use a question to get the students thinking. I really like what Bean says about allowing students to be curious and think in terms of answering interesting questions. So the title for each task is a question.

Reflections on “Informed versus Uninformed Opinion” Mini Task

Analyzing readings is one of the most important skills we work on in RD 103. Part of that is being able to distinguish facts from opinions. Once students are able to do that to a certain degree, we work on examining how authors support their opinions or whether they support them at all. As a final activity for this skill, I thought working in pairs would be a good idea since the students could pool their knowledge and come up with something on their own. Also, one of the patterns of organization we work on in RD and EL 103 is contrast (writing and identifying). Since this is a learning community, an activity like this allows them to use what they are learning in EL class (how to write a contrast paragraph) to concepts we are working on in RD (informed versus uninformed opinions). It also reinforces the need for good writing skills in non-writing classes.

Assignment RD 103

What is the difference between an informed opinion and an uninformed opinion?

Do you know the difference between an informed and uninformed opinion? To be a good critical reader, you need to be able to recognize opinions (as opposed to facts) and analyze whether the author has informed his/her opinion. If an opinion is uninformed, do we want to trust it and/or accept it as valid?

Here's what you and your partner need to do

- With a partner, brainstorm everything you know about informed opinions – make a list on a piece of paper.
- Next, with your partner, brainstorm everything you know about uninformed opinions.
- Use your textbook and notes to see if you need to add anything or if you have included inaccurate information (chap. 7).
- Finally, with your partner write a short contrast paragraph describing the differences between informed and uninformed opinions. You might want to start with an outline before you write.
- At the end of your paragraph include two examples of an informed opinion and two examples of an uninformed opinion. You may take these examples from your own experiences or from your readings (but please, not from chap. 7).
- After you write the paragraph, please be sure to edit and proofread your paragraph. See if you can write an error free paragraph.

Reflections on Implied Main Idea Task

For the implied main idea lesson plan, I thought it might be fun for the students to take the steps we have been working on all semester for identifying main ideas (implied and stated) in reading and figure out a way to explain the steps to someone else. Rita suggested that I include a reading for each pair (I had originally thought of allowing the students to opt either to work alone or with another person), so that they could actually “teach it” and get more practice themselves.

When I tried this in class, most decided to work along and many did not understand, or didn’t read the directions carefully, that is was a lesson, so they simply wrote what the 4 steps are that we have been talking about. One pair actually came up with an interesting game idea that I might steal for next semester.

When I try this again, I will definitely include readings for them to use and make it clearer that they need to design a lesson that they themselves would want to be part of.

Assignment RD 103 Implied Main Ideas

How would you teach someone to infer the main idea of a reading?

Imagine you and your partner are RD 103 instructors who are starting to work in class on identifying implied main ideas in a reading. How would you teach your students to identify the implied main idea of a reading? You may use your textbook and class notes to help you answer this question. You need to write a lesson that you would use with your students. Be creative! Try to make it interesting and relevant for your students; make it a lesson you would want to take part in as a student! Use the attached reading to use as a reading exercise with your students. If you prefer, you can find a reading of your own. If you are uncertain whether you have identified the correct topic and main idea, please ask.

Write a well-structured paragraph or two describing what you would do. Remember what you are learning in your EL 103 class and apply it to this writing. Proofread, proofread, proofread!

Be prepared to lead this activity in class!

RD 103
Implied Main Ideas

Today, a football team in possession of the ball has four plays to make a ten-yard first down, but during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the offensive team had three plays to make a five-yard first down, and passing was severely restricted, both by the rules and by tradition. As a result, coaches emphasized “mass plays” that directed the maximum amount of force against one isolated player or point on the field. The flying wedge was the most notorious mass play. It entailed players grouping themselves into a V formation and starting to run before the ball was put into play. At the last moment, the ball was snapped and passed to a player within the wall of the wedge. The wedge of runners then crashed into their stationary opponents. Given that their equipment was crude – players often played without helmets, and no helmet had a facemask—this use of a massed brute force injured hundreds of players a year. If such plays were not bad enough, referees rarely enforced the rules against punching, kicking, and piling on top of each other. During the 1909 season, such allowances resulted in 30 deaths and 216 serious injuries. Victory was the supreme object, and any method seemed justified in pursuit of that goal.

Topic: _____

Implied main idea: _____

Although many schools have increased funding for girls' sports (volleyball, softball, and basketball) and some have created coeducational teams (usually volleyball or swimming), few have opened up the “rough sports” to girls. Football, hockey, and wrestling continue to be male-dominated activities. Generally, the lion's share of spending goes to these exclusively male sports. When female athletes participate in sports as aggressive and fierce competitors, they face social stigma for demonstrating the same attributes that bring male athlete praise. There is a widespread myth that competing in sports masculinizes females and may even cause them physical harm. Consequently, many female athletes attempt to emphasize their “femininity” while competing by wearing hair ribbons, jewelry, or makeup.

Topic: _____

Implied main idea: _____

Ethanol, an alternative fuel source for our automobiles, is derived primarily from the starch of corn kernels, so it is biodegradable. Its emissions are cleaner than gasoline, thus reducing harmful levels of carbon monoxide, particulate matter, greenhouse emissions, and other toxic pollutants. Ethanol also “fuels” the economy. It's cheaper than gasoline, thus providing an immediate savings to consumers. But since it pollutes less than gasoline, it provides an indirect savings too. Namely, costly pollution control measures across many industries may be able to be reduced from having a cleaner environment. Another plus for ethanol is that it provides jobs for American workers. It is estimated that 200,000 people currently work for this industry, many in rural areas that are desperate for jobs. Some estimates project that figure could grow to 500,000 in the next decade. Lastly, ethanol permits our country to be less dependent on foreign oil and all its potential pitfalls. As long as there is farm land, there will be a supply of ethanol.

Topic: _____

Implied main idea: _____

And a longer reading

Education programs used to be widely available in the prisons in the United States, especially after the notorious Attica rebellion in 1971, which left 43 dead. Among the demands for inmates, who were pressing for improved prison conditions, was a better education program. This demand was met, not only at Attica but also in prisons around the country. Over the next decades, prison education flourished.

Then, in 1994, Congress effectively abolished all federally financed college education for prison inmates when it voted to eliminate the Pell Grants for federal and state prisons, despite strong resistance from the Department of Education. Critics pointed out that education greatly reduces recidivism; only one-tenth of 1 percent of the Pell Grant budget went to the education of prisoners anyway. But Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Republican of Texas, argues that it is unfair for felons to benefit from Pell Grants when as many as 100,000 low-income students were denied them each year. Why should prisoners be educated for nothing when so many honest people failed to get a break? And besides, she said, the federal government already spent far too much money on prison education and training programs. Today, what federal money is still spent on prison education goes largely toward vocational training.

Hutchison's arguments arose from a more generalized desire – not just among Republicans—to get tough on crime, or more precisely on criminals. Even though crime rates were actually dropping in the 1990s, many argue that judges were letting felons off too lightly and that the “rights” of victims needed to be taken into account. Thus, beginning in the early 1990s, prison regimens were tightened, even as mandatory minimum sentences and three-strikes laws meant more and more people came into the system and stayed. In this climate, few politicians were ready to stand up for higher-education programs for prisoners. Before 1995, there were some 350 college-degree programs in the United States. Today there are about a dozen, four of them in New York State.

Topic: _____

Implied main idea: _____

Reflections on Critical Thinking Mini Task

Critical thinking and reading are the most important skills (along with handling textbook readings) I work on throughout the semester. This task allows the students to put several critical reading skills together to arrive at their own opinion, which should be, obviously, an informed opinion. Throughout the course, I try to design activities that have the students apply what they are learning in different circumstances (they also analyze Web sites – see my RD 103 Lab Assignments).

I incorporated Rita's suggestion that they also come up with a couple of examples of both types of opinions. Sometimes I don't quite take a lesson idea to its logical conclusion. This is something I realize I need to work on. For all of my mini tasks, Rita suggested adding just that bit, which makes the tasks so much more valuable to the students.

Assignment RD 103 Are You a Critical Reader?

Being a Critical Reader means reading and thinking, not simply passively accepting all the author's ideas, but questioning what you read and deciding for yourself whether the author's ideas have merit. We have talked about main ideas (stated and implied), major and minor supports, and opinions (informed and uninformed) and facts during this semester. We have also discussed logical fallacies. Now is the time to put it all together and use these skills to analyze a reading. You might want to apply some of the other skills we have worked on such as identifying patterns of organization, purpose, and tone.

Read the article "Extreme Philanthropy" by Stephanie Strom on pages 617-619 of your textbook. Be sure to dress your reading! After you have read it carefully and are confident you understand what the author is saying (which might mean reading it more than once), answer the following questions.

1. What is the topic of the reading?
2. After I finished reading the article, what did the author want me to agree with (main idea)?
3. The author was/was not successful in presenting her opinion (main idea). In other words, did she manage to persuade me to agree with what she argues?
 - a. How was the author successful? Explain!
 - b. How was the author unsuccessful? Explain!

Be sure to answer each question thoughtfully and carefully (that is what a critical reader does...).

After you have answered the questions, write a one page response to the article. Remember, a response does not mean retelling what the article says. A response means that you write your reactions to the article. The above questions should help you develop that response. Remember to use your EL 103 writing skills to help you plan and organize your response. And don't forget to proofread and edit your paper (look for the errors you make most frequently).

**Assignment 4 – Argumentation
(The Last Writing Assignment)**

EN101A Spring 2007

For your last essay this semester, you must write an argumentative/persuasive essay that relies on either a reading from the *Bedford Reader* or outside research using the library databases.

Please carefully read and follow all of the instructions. If you have questions or don't understand, be sure to ask.

Page Length: approximately 3 – 4 double-spaced, typed pages [6 paragraphs in length]

Document Format: MLA Essay Format (follow the format in LB handbook).

Due Dates:

Detailed outline: including sources **Tuesday, April 17th**

First Formal Draft: including, outlines, self & peer readings, & works cited page **Tuesday April 24th** (double-spaced, typed, edited, and spell-checked),

Final Formal Draft: (with process piece, all outlines and self and peer evaluations, double-spaced, typed, edited, spell-checked), **TBA**

(The paper should be written in Times New Roman, 12-point font, and formatted according to MLA rules).

Papers that are not correctly formatted will not be accepted.

For this paper, we are working on achieving the following objectives:

- Make your own position and views very clear. Start with a question in mind that you want to answer. The answer to your question will be your thesis statement.
- Demonstrate a deep understanding of what other's are saying
- Develop and support your ideas, using evidence from either a text or outside research
- Anticipate opposition and address it
- Make sure that your own thinking is clear
- Do additional research for relevant sources and/or use the ones provided to best advantage.

You must once again be careful not to plagiarize and will need to use the MLA style, including in-text cites.

Your essay needs to meet the following requirements:

- Clear thesis statement – last sentence of the introductory paragraph
- Clear topic sentences that support/explain the thesis
- Coherence and unity both within the essay and paragraphs
- Well developed ideas that are clearly explained and supported
- Few if any grammar errors -- show the audience that you can produce error free writing! Yes, spelling counts!
- No plagiarism -- conscious or not, it will cause your essay to fail.
- Using your sources well and demonstrating that you understand them.
- MLA format for the essay, in-text citations, and Works Cited page. Use the resources available to you: the LB Handbook, librarians, and library Web site. You need to demonstrate that you can pay attention to detail and follow a format.

Write your essay keeping in mind the following writing situation:

Audience: Your essay should be written for a general college-level audience. Make it interesting. Come up with an interesting title. **Don't assume that your reader will be patient or that he or she has to read what you've written. Write in a way that makes a person want to read.

Tone: Your tone should be serious and objective.

Purpose: Your purpose is to effectively persuade your audience to agree with your opinion/point using argumentation and evidence. Sadly, most people don't value our opinions since we are not experts, so you need to support your opinion by using outside sources, logic and analysis.

And please keep in mind, the paper should be reasonable and avoid extremism. Avoid stereotypes, offensive language, and hurtful speech. You want to express an attitude of toleration and openness to other points of view.

Argumentation/Persuasive Topics – Last Essay

Select one of these topics for your last essay. If you choose option two, please be sure to have your topic approved.

Option One / Formal Response to An Argument: Write a formal critical response 6 paragraphs in length to one of the following essays: Gloria Naylor's "The Meaning of a Word" (486-489), Christine Leong's "Being a Chink" (492-495), Chitra Divakaruni's "Live Free and Starve" (448-453), "A Vegetarian Philosophy" (552-557), or Laura Fraser's "Why I Stopped Being a Vegetarian" (546-551). You need to be sure you clearly understand the author's point and opinion (if you need help with this, ask).

Structure: Your essay should summarize the reading in the introduction and state a position (either in agreement, disagreement, or a middle ground position – middle ground is a little more difficult to do). You can come to the thesis by asking yourself the question, "Do I agree with what this author is saying?" The thesis statement may preview the structure of the paper, stating the four supporting points (do this if it helps you stay on track). The body paragraphs should explore your supporting points, and support the thesis statement (either in support of the essay's thesis, in disagreement, or with a middle ground stance). **You will need to quote from the text properly and analyze quotes. Work closely with the essay.** Summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting from the essay are an essential part of this assignment topic. You must be able to clearly state what the author says and respond to it. This requires using in-text cites following the MLA format.

Option Two / Open Topic:

Write a formal argument paper (6 paragraphs in length) where you express an opinion on an important issue or topic. In the paper state a position and back up your position with facts and correct information. The topic can be local, national, or international. If you want to write on this topic, review your journal to see if any ideas jump out at you; do some more journal writing, brainstorming or freewriting to generate good topics. Think in terms of questions – do I agree, disagree or am I somewhere in the middle about this idea. If you choose this option, your topic must be approved by me.

- The paper should be "new" and work with a "fresh" topic; in other words, it should not re-use the research or findings from your other essays or from another essay in another course.
- The paper will require a small amount of research: you need to rely on at least two outside sources, using the library databases Kathy Swanson has shown us. Please feel free to work with Kathy or other librarians to help you with the research – that isn't cheating, it is being smart and resourceful.
- The paper must argue for something.
- Write for an audience that is inclined to disagree with your opinion. In other words, use careful wording so as not to alienate your readers and to win your audience over.

Structure: The paper must state its thesis clearly in the introduction; the thesis may preview the main points if you want to and if you find that it helps keep you on track; the paper should have three main points that are adequately developed in the body paragraphs (one body paragraph for each point); the paper must include a paragraph that addresses the concerns of the other side; and the paper must have a conclusion. This can be done in 6 paragraphs. The

paper should use at least two outside sources. Use the outside sources to support your opinions and ideas. They cannot speak for you, but used appropriately, provide the expert information that helps give your ideas validity.