

Module 8: The Argumentative Essay

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Course

English 101 – Composition I

English 101 – Composition I, 3 semester hours

The goal of English 101 Composition I is the development of critical and analytical skills in reading and writing expository prose. The general objective is for students to learn strategic steps and the rhetorical devices and modes used in collegiate writing. The specific objective is for students to write a minimum of eight essays according to the basic rhetorical forms: narration, description, definition, example, process analysis, comparison/contrast, classification/division, cause/effect, and argumentation. For each writing assignment, students are expected to (1) select a manageable topic, (2) have a thesis statement that implies or states the essay's plan of development, and (3) construct at least three paragraphs that develop the thesis with concrete, relevant, and cohesive support, using transitional words, phrases, and sentences. They are also expected (4) to use good diction and correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in 80% of the sentences. *Prerequisite:* Placement test or grade of C or better in English 100 or consent of department chairperson.

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Description

This module is designed to facilitate student fulfillment of specific objectives 2 and 3 of our 101 course syllabus. Unity, support, and coherence are the requisites for the effective collegiate essay in all rhetorical modes. The student examination of sample essays is an excellent way to master these concepts. Consequently, our modules propose to examine appropriate sample essays that demonstrate these requisites in each of the eight rhetorical forms. Our modules will enhance student understanding of the function of thesis, logical organization, topic sentences, supporting paragraph details, and transitional words in each of the sample essays. This exercise will reinforce the concepts of unity, support, and coherence required to effectively set forth and develop a point. Each sample professional essay taken from Langan (2001) is presented in four on-screen computerized exercises.

Transferability

The enhancement of critical and analytical skills in writing and reading expository prose is essential in all other English composition, developmental reading, and literature courses. It is, in fact, essential in all of the liberal arts that students have the skills to identify the main idea, major supporting points, and the effectiveness of those points when reading. It is equally important that students, when writing papers and exams, are capable of formulating an essay that has a clear thesis and coherent and adequately supported points. An on-screen computerized analysis of a sample professional essay in their discipline would be a reinforcement or refresher to what they have been taught in English 101.

Faculty Technology Skill

- The ability to manage the Windows or Macintosh computer operating systems
- The ability to use a wordprocessor (*Microsoft Word, WordPerfect*)
- The ability to open, print, and close a file.
- The ability to use a projector and computer for presentations

Student Technology Skill

- Need to know how to use a word processor
- Need to be able to open, print, save, and close a file
- Need to have the skill to use a mouse to do basic formatting—to make bold, to underline, to make italics

Faculty Equipment

- Individual computer with wordprocessor (*Microsoft Word, WordPerfect*)
- LCD Projector (PC and/or Macintosh compatible)
- Color Printer

Student Equipment

- Individual PC with wordprocessor (*Microsoft Word, WordPerfect*)
- Printer, b/w or color (optional)

Improvement on Teaching and Learning

The concept of a well-developed essay, centered around one controlling idea, and connected by logical transitions between sentences and paragraphs, is a difficult one for many community college students to master. This technological approach to sample essay analysis gives the student the opportunity to observe the essay on the screen and have the benefit of a classroom team approach to analysis. It encourages greater student involvement, and as an educational approach, it is far more engaging.

Nontechnology Comparison

Traditionally, study of the eight rhetorical modes has included student analysis of the appropriate sample essays as part of a homework assignment and then class textbook analysis of the essay to strengthen student understanding of the rhetorical modes. Students still need to study their sample essay and the theory of the rhetorical mode that it embodies before the class meeting. This teaching approach is much more engaging and interesting than the individual textbook approach because the student is no longer working as an individual in his or her own textbook, but as a part of a collaborative interactive classroom team in the essay analysis.

Pertinent Issues

Teachers need to be aware of . . .

- Possible limitations on copyrighted commercial work.
- The range of text-available Internet sites, fee and free sources (when model essays are used from sources other than the class textbook).
- Built-in limitations of older word processing programs and printers.
- Obstacles to learning presented by student lack of required computer skills.
- The fact that the module exercises can be adapted to the *Blackboard* course management system.

How to Use This Module in the Classroom

It is imperative that a preliminary general discussion of rhetoric—the elements of the essay—precede any specific consideration of rhetorical mode. Therefore, prior to teaching each lesson on a specific rhetorical mode and the specific module given here to enhance that mode, the instructor must begin the 101 course and each unit of rhetorical mode—illustration, narration/description, process analysis, definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, argumentation—with a review of the general elements of the essay.

The initial units of the English 101 composition course should thoroughly cover general rhetorical theory. The chapters and exercises therein may be assigned for homework. The instructor may lecture on this rhetorical theory and as a classroom activity allow the students to orally review the chapter exercises. At the completion of this unit, the student should understand the following general rhetorical theory:

- **Elements and Language of the Essay**

An *essay* is a relatively short piece of nonfiction in which a writer attempts to develop one or more closely related points or ideas.

The *thesis* of an essay is its main idea. Sometimes, it is implied rather than directly stated. The thesis determines the content of the essay: everything the writer says must be logically related to the thesis statement. A good thesis statement identifies the topic and makes an assertion about it. A well-written essay should be *unified*; that is, everything in it should be related to its thesis, or main idea. There should be no digressions. A unified essay stays within the limits of its thesis. Your essay is unified if you advance a single point and stick to that point. If all the details in your essay relate to your thesis and supporting topic sentences, your essay is unified.

An effective essay requires a good *introduction* or beginning and a good *conclusion* or ending. A good beginning should catch a reader's interest and then hold it. In addition to capturing your reader's attention, a good beginning frequently introduces your thesis and either suggests or reveals the structure of the essay. The best beginning is the one most appropriate for the job you are trying to do.

A conclusion may summarize; may inspire the reader to further thought or action; may return to the beginning by repeating key words, phrases, or ideas; or may surprise the reader by providing a particularly convincing example to support a thesis.

The *paragraph*, like the essay, has its own main or controlling idea, often stated directly in a *topic sentence*. It should be unified, with every sentence relating to the main idea. Like the essay as a whole, the paragraph should be coherent with sentences and ideas arranged logically using appropriate transitional words. Moreover, like the essay, the paragraph requires adequate development—enough examples to convince the reader of the topic sentence.

Transitions are words and phrases used to signal relationships between ideas in an essay and to join the various parts of an essay together. Writers use transitions to relate ideas within sentences, between sentences, and between paragraphs. The most common type of transition is the *transitional expression*, such as *furthermore*, *consequently*, *similarly*, *granted*, *nevertheless*, *for instance*, *elsewhere*, *simply stated*, *finally*, *to conclude*, and *subsequently*. Pronoun reference and *repeated key words* and *phrases* are the other important ways to make transitions. Good transitions enhance *coherence*: the quality of good writing when all sentences, paragraphs, and longer divisions of an essay are effectively and naturally connected.

- **The Argumentative Essay**

Assign the chapter to your students for homework. They should read the theory and complete the exercises in their textbook. Upon completion of your lecture, the classroom discussion of theory, and the review of textbook exercises, your students

should have gained the following understanding: The argumentative essay attempts to convince the reader of a *controversial* point of view, to make a decision, or to pursue a course of action. The chief purpose of this essay is to set forth a point of view. The other purpose is the rebuttal of any opposing views. The writer must predict objections that may be raised and select the most effective evidence, rhetoric, language, and style to advance his or her case. *Persuasive* and *logical appeals* are two types of argument. *Persuasive appeals* are directed at the readers' emotions and involve sophisticated selection of language. *Logical appeals* are directed to the intellectual faculties and involve a reasoned movement from assertion to evidence to conclusion. The best argumentation should include both appeals.

Now you may announce to your students, “To further enhance our understanding of this rhetorical mode, let us leave our textbook this class session and examine a model student essay that is not taken from our textbook” (Langan, 2001, p. 177).

Exercise 1

First, let us look at scrambled sentences from a paragraph of this essay and unscramble them to test our understanding of logical organization.

Many people argue that working can be a valuable experience for the young.

"The pressure for teenagers to work is great, and not just because of the economic plight in the world today; however, working more than about 15 hours a week is harmful to adolescents because it reduces their involvement with school, encourages a materialistic and expensive lifestyle, and increases the chance of having problems with drugs and alcohol. The concern we have is when the part-time work becomes the primary focus." Much of it is peer pressure to have a little bit of freedom and independence, and to have their own spending money. These are the words of Roxanne Bradshaw, educator and officer of the National Education Association.

Exercise 2

Now, let us look at these scrambled paragraphs, which appear out of their correct order in the essay, and match them to their appropriate topic sentences. In addition, in **orange**, let us underline any sentences that do not advance the topic and thereby violate paragraph unity. This exercise enhances our understanding of paragraph unity and support.

Paragraphs	Topic Sentences
Teens who put in long hours may seek a quick release from stress, just like the adults who need to drink a couple of martinis after a hard day at work. Stress is probably greater in our society today than it has been at any time in the past. Also, teens who have money are more likely to get involved with drugs.	Another drawback of too much work is that it may promote materialism and an unrealistic lifestyle.

<p>As more and more teens have filled the numerous part-time jobs offered by fast-food restaurants and malls, teachers have faced increasing difficulties. They must both keep the attention of tired pupils and give homework to students who simply don't have time to do it. In addition, educators have noticed less involvement in the extracurricular activities that many consider a healthy influence on young people. School bands and athletic teams are losing players to work, and sports events are poorly attended by working students. Those teens who try to do it all—homework, extracurricular activities, and work—may find themselves exhausted and prone to illness. A recent newspaper story, for example, described a girl in Pennsylvania who came down with mononucleosis as a result of aiming for good grades, playing on two school athletic teams, and working 30 hours a week.</p>	<p>Finally, teenagers who work a lot are more likely than others to get involved with alcohol and drugs.</p>
<p>Some parents claim that working helps teach adolescents the value of a dollar. Undoubtedly, that can be true. It's also true that some teens work to help out with the family budget or to save for college. However, surveys have shown that the majority of working teens use their earnings to buy luxuries—video game systems, CD players and disks, clothing, even cars. These young people, some of whom earn \$400 or more a month, don't worry about spending wisely—they can just about have it all. In many cases, experts point out, they are becoming accustomed to a lifestyle they won't be able to afford several years down the road, when they no longer have parents paying for car insurance, food, lodging, and so on. At that point, they'll be hard-pressed to pay for necessities as well as luxuries.</p>	<p>School work and the benefits of extracurricular activities tend to go by the wayside when adolescents work long hours.</p>

Exercise 3

For another exercise in logical organization, let us look at the scrambled five paragraphs of this essay and put them into logical order.

Scrambled Paragraphs	Logical Order
<p>Teenagers can enjoy the benefits of work while avoiding its drawbacks, simply by limiting their work hours during the school year. As is often the case, a moderate approach will be the most healthy and rewarding.</p>	
<p>“The pressure for teenagers to work is great, and not just because of the economic plight in the world today. Much of it is peer pressure to have a little bit of freedom and independence, and to have their own spending money. The concern we have is when the part-time work becomes the primary focus.” These are the words of Roxanne Bradshaw, educator and officer of the National Education Association. Many people argue that working can be a valuable experience for the young. However, working more than about 15 hours a week is harmful to adolescents because it reduces their involvement with school, encourages a materialistic and expensive lifestyle, and increases the chance of having problems with drugs and alcohol.</p>	
<p>Finally, teenagers who work a lot are more likely than others to get involved with alcohol and drugs. Teens who put in long hours may seek a quick release from stress, just like the adults who need to drink a couple of martinis after a hard day at work. Stress is probably greater in our society today than it has been at any time in the past. Also, teens who have money are more likely to get involved with drugs.</p>	
<p>School work and the benefits of extracurricular activities tend to go by the wayside when adolescents work long hours. As more and more teens have filled the numerous part-time jobs offered by fast-</p>	

<p>food restaurants and malls, teachers have faced increasing difficulties. They must both keep the attention of tired pupils and give homework to students who simply don't have time to do it. In addition, educators have noticed less involvement in the extracurricular activities that many consider a healthy influence on young people. School bands and athletic teams are losing players to work, and sports events are poorly attended by working students. Those teens who try to do it all—homework, extracurricular activities, and work—may find themselves exhausted and prone to illness. A recent newspaper story, for example, described a girl in Pennsylvania who came down with mononucleosis as a result of aiming for good grades, playing on two school athletic teams, and working 30 hours a week.</p>	
<p>Another drawback of too much work is that it may promote materialism and an unrealistic lifestyle. Some parents claim that working helps teach adolescents the value of a dollar. Undoubtedly, that can be true. It's also true that some teens work to help out with the family budget or to save for college. However, surveys have shown that the majority of working teens use their earnings to buy luxuries—video game systems, CD players and disks, clothing, even cars. These young people, some of whom earn \$400 or more a month, don't worry about spending wisely—they can just about have it all. In many cases, experts point out, they are becoming accustomed to a lifestyle they won't be able to afford several years down the road, when they no longer have parents paying for car insurance, food, lodging, and so on. At that point, they'll be hard-pressed to pay for necessities as well as luxuries.</p>	

Exercise 4

Now, let us look at this sample for the last time and better perceive the logic and coherence of essay organization by drawing a **red** line under the thesis or main idea; a **blue** line under the topic sentences in the body, which support that thesis or main idea; and a **green** line under the transition words that enhance coherence between these paragraphs.

Teenagers and Jobs

"The pressure for teenagers to work is great, and not just because of the economic plight in the world today. Much of it is peer pressure to have a little bit of freedom and independence, and to have their own spending money. The concern we have is when the part-time work becomes the primary focus." These are the words of Roxanne Bradshaw, educator and officer of the National Education Association. Many people argue that working can be a valuable experience for the young. However, working more than about 15 hours a week is harmful to adolescents because it reduces their involvement with school, encourages a materialistic and expensive lifestyle, and increases the chance of having problems with drugs and alcohol.

Schoolwork and the benefits of extracurricular activities tend to go by the wayside when adolescents work long hours. As more and more teens have filled the numerous part-time jobs offered by fast-food restaurants and malls, teachers have faced increasing difficulties. They must both keep the attention of tired pupils and give homework to students who simply don't have time to do it. In addition, educators have noticed less involvement in the extracurricular activities that many consider a healthy influence on young people. School bands and athletic teams are losing players to work, and sports events are poorly attended by working students. Those teens who try to do it all—homework, extracurricular activities, and work—may find themselves exhausted and prone to illness. A recent newspaper story, for example, described a girl in Pennsylvania who came down with mononucleosis as a result of aiming for good grades, playing on two school athletic teams, and working 30 hours a week.

Another drawback of too much work is that it may promote materialism and an unrealistic lifestyle. Some parents claim that working helps teach adolescents the value of a dollar. Undoubtedly that can be true. It's also true that some teens work to help out with the family budget or to save for college. However, surveys have shown that the majority of working teens use their earnings to buy luxuries—video game systems, CD players and disks, clothing, even cars. These young people, some of whom earn \$400 or more a month, don't worry about spending wisely—they can just about have it all. In many cases, experts point out, they are becoming accustomed to a lifestyle they won't be able to afford several years down the road, when they no longer have parents paying for car insurance, food, lodging, and so on. At that point, they'll be hard-pressed to pay for necessities as well as luxuries.

Finally, teenagers who work a lot are more likely than others to get involved with alcohol and drugs. Teens who put in long hours may seek a quick release from stress, just like the adults who need to drink a couple of martinis after a hard day at work. Stress is probably

greater in our society today than it has been at any time in the past. Also, teens who have money are more likely to get involved with drugs.

Teenagers can enjoy the benefits of work while avoiding its drawbacks, simply by limiting their work hours during the school year. As is often the case, a moderate approach will be the most healthy and rewarding.

Recommendation for Assessment

It is highly recommended that instructors using this module assess learning by selecting a model essay from a source other than the student textbook.

Reference

Langan, J. (2001). *College writing skills with readings*. New York: McGraw-Hill.