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FIQWS Fall 2018: Phase 2 Assignment Prompt The Exploratory Essay

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The Exploratory Essay

Reading for college often involves engaging with new types of texts—sometimes longer or denser than what you’re used to; sometimes surprising in their content; sometimes loaded with new concepts and vocabulary; and sometimes just opaque and confusing. Reading for college in many ways is not so different from meeting new people in college. Meeting new people requires that you pay attention to and learn about who’s in front of you, maybe listen in before contributing to the conversation, and perhaps ask questions in order to position yourself more comfortably and confidently. Meeting new people also means that at some point you have to figure out what you know and understand and think. Your new acquaintances will expect to hear your voice and ideas.

For the Exploratory Essay we’d like you to carefully consider the ideas of our course readings and compose an essay that demonstrates your engagement with those ideas. The essay will require you to do several things with texts: you’ll need to figure out what the readings say and do, and in what ways their ideas and arguments differ and in what ways they connect; you’ll need to determine a point of entry for yourself—that is, decide which ideas in which texts are worth further attention and exploration; and you will eventually need to take stock of your own ideas, find a “place to stand” in relation to texts, and piece things together in an organized academic essay.

The **rhetorical purpose** of your essay is to demonstrate the ways in which your thinking about language and literacy has developed so far in the course; it should engage your audience (your classmates, instructors, and other college students) in a new, more complicated or more thoughtful way of thinking about the language and literacy issues you discuss. The **topic** you choose to explore should fall under our course theme of “language and literacy” and should emerge from (in one or many ways) to several of our course readings. The **evidence** you provide will be based on your interpretations, ideas, and examples (~50%) as well as passages from four or five sources (~50%).

Summary, synthesis, and crafting effective thesis statements are the primary critical reading and writing strategies required of you in this assignment. As you do writing throughout your college experience, you will find yourself continuing to draw on these three strategies.

- First, the essay requires that you **summarize** texts, identifying and articulating their rhetorical situations (especially the authors’ arguments, purposes, and key passages).
- Next, the essay also asks you to **synthesize**, to create something new out of several different elements. This is different than merely comparing and contrasting. You’ll be challenged to put the ideas from multiple texts in conversation with each other—to show complicated and dialogic (conversational) relationships across the three texts.
- Lastly, the essay challenges you to **construct effective thesis statements** that demonstrate where you stand in the dialog you’ve shown with your synthesis. You might find yourself more aligned with one text’s ideas and feeling like your perspectives differ (a lot or even just slightly) from another; you might appreciate one writer’s ideas but want to complicate those ideas (yes, such-and-such is true, *but...*); you might find yourself generating an entirely new perspective as a result of seriously considering what others have argued. What’s most important about your thesis statements is that they show that your thinking has evolved over the course of your paper due to the close work you’ve done with synthesizing sources.

General Requirements

Your Exploratory Essay must be informed by **4-5 sources** comprised of the following:

- 2-3 of our shared course readings
- 2-3 sources specific to your topic that you locate (1 of which must be a peer-reviewed academic research article)

Your Exploratory Essay should be **5-6 pages** (12-point font, 1-inch margins, double spaced) plus any images you choose to include. Please use MLA citation within the body of your essay and on a Works Cited page, and please compose a relative and inviting title for your essay. You are encouraged to personalize the delivery of your essay as you see fit. Thus, you decide the order, tone, style, and language you'll craft in order to best reach your audience. You're welcome to draw on your "native," "home," or "other" languages, literacies, and ways of being as you so choose.

A full draft of the essay is due for peer review on **Monday, October 29** and your final draft is due **Friday, November 2**. This essay is worth **20%** in both your Topic and Writing sections.

Evaluation Criteria for the Exploratory Essay	Points Possible
1. Summary. How effectively does the essay introduce and summarize the rhetorical situations and main ideas from each source used? How accurate and thorough are those summaries?	5
2. Synthesis. How effective is the synthesis in the essay? Are the perspectives across texts treated dialogically and are the relationships across texts named explicitly? That is, how well are the ideas from across texts shown as supporting, extending, complicating, and/or challenge one another?	5
3. Thesis. Are new and more complicated ideas/conclusions pulled out from the synthesis to establish the writer's thesis/stance? Is the thesis relevant, explicit, specific, qualified, and complicated? Does it evolve as the essay progresses and as new perspectives are raised?	5
4. Development and Revision. How effectively are ideas introduced and supported in the essay? Are the ideas contextualized and organized logically so that an unfamiliar reader would understand? Are there appropriate and specific examples or passages from texts used as support throughout? How well are the writer's ideas distinguished from the ideas of sources presented in the essay? Does the essay show evidence of thoughtful revision?	5
5. Were all general requirements for length, source use, and due date met?	
TOTAL POINTS	20