

Writing and Rhetoric: Rhetoric and Social Issues: Essay #1 Sequence: Revised 10/8**Essay #1: Reasons To Believe: Reflections on Ethical Values and Social Awareness**

Due Dates: Exercise 1 (see p.3) Mon. 9/14 by noon over email to instructor

Ex.1 Peer Review Thurs. 9/17
 First Version Sun. 9/20 by noon (by email) with cover letter

Workshop: Tues. 9/22
 Revision: Tues. 10/13 (submit with revision cover letter). **Bold**

changes!

Directions for Submission: Place your name, course section, assignment, version and date (single-spaced) in right-hand corner of page one (e.g., Name, 21W.011.01, Essay 1, Version 1, 9/20/15). Double space the rest of the essay; use Times New Roman font, 12 pt. **First Version: Email** your essay (Word document or PDF) with a cover letter (separate file) describing your view of the strengths and problem areas of the piece. **Revision:** When emailing your **revision**, include a new cover letter describing the changes made in response to instructor and peer feedback and your sense of the strengths and problem areas of the new version. When revising, **bold any changes from the original**; revisions should have at least **250 words (about one page)** that have been added to or differ from the first version.

ESSAY #1 Suggested length: 1250-1300 words (about 5 pgs.) typed, double-spaced.

This essay asks you to reflect on your own ethical values. As a writer, you have two choices in crafting this essay:

(a) You can narrate and reflect on the process of “coming to consciousness,” focusing on a personal experience(s) leading to a deeper awareness of a social or ethical issue or a more general commitment to social justice. For example, you might write about one or two key influences on your ethical development. The influence(s) may be person(s), experience(s), religion(s) or text(s) (e.g., books, films). For Essay #1, some students write about the development of a generalized social consciousness (like Edelman in “A Family Legacy” and Shepherd in “Daughters Without Borders”); others focus on their experiences of becoming aware of social issues such as climate change, hunger, gender inequality or unemployment.

(b) You can focus on “ethics in action,” reflecting on an experience or moral choice that affirmed a personal commitment to particular ethical or social values. Some writers may choose a pivotal life choice or moral decision, while others focus on “everyday ethics,” smaller expressions of ethical values such as compassion, cooperation or integrity in daily settings such as colleges, workplaces, homes, houses of worship or playing fields. Some students write about the difficulty of living up to their ethical standards, while others narrate their internal struggle or confusion about what they believe in respect to a particular question or issue.

The challenge of this essay is to work with the complex elements of personal narrative as evidence to support an argument in a piece written for a public readership. In creating your narrative, be richly descriptive in your prose. Take the reader inside the experience(s) to appreciate its power. When focusing on an individual or a setting, for example, use rich description; include

dialogue, if appropriate. Alternately, if you are writing about a film, book or political speech, select visual images, scenes, quotations or excerpts to communicate the power of the text(s).

The first version should be at least 1000 words (about four pages) in length; the revised version should be 1250-1300 words (about five pages). With the revision, include two outside sources and a separate “Works Cited” page attached to the last page of the essay. In class, we will review the use of outside sources in personal narrative.

Writing Ideas

If you are (or have been) involved in community service, this assignment enables you to draw on that experience. If you have a strongly held position on a social issue (e.g., for or against capital punishment, gun control, or abortion rights), Essay #1 offers you the opportunity to trace the roots of that stance or show how your position on this issue influences your daily life. Remember that writing about internal ethical conflict or confusion is an option.

Writing Challenges for This Assignment

A. Crafting a Reflective Essay

The challenge in this essay is to move beyond purely personal narrative or unprocessed experience. When writing an experiential narrative for a public readership, be sure that you are reflecting upon, shaping and framing your material for a wider audience. In crafting your essay, think about motive. Why do you want to tell this story -- to inspire readers, to challenge their preconceptions, to motivate them to care about an issue or, more generally, social justice (however you define the term)? Successful experiential essays bridge the gap between the personal and the public. Essays like this can inspire readers to ponder the sources of their own beliefs, recognize different pathways to social engagement, question preconceptions about particular kinds of issues or ponder the complexity of a specific problem.

B. Questions of Argument and Structure

Although Essay #1 focuses on personal experience, you are still making an argument, i.e., supporting a claim with evidence. For example, you might support an assertion that a specific event was “highly influential” by presenting examples of the power of that experience in a clear, reflective and well-structured format. If you state, “this experience changed my life”, you need to say what that means for you. Remember: “argument” takes many forms!

C. Voice and Style:

In essays like this, you can often be more conversational than in more formal academic prose. However, be sure that your language expresses the power of the experience(s) that you are narrating. Be clear and dynamic in your language. Consider your use of symbol and metaphor; vary sentence length, structure and word usage.

Prewriting:

Exercise 1: Due over email by Mon. 9/14 by noon. Suggested length: 375-500 words (one and one-half to two typed, double-spaced pages), Word document or PDF.

This exercise has TWO parts:

1) Write a vivid description (250-375 words or 1- 1 1/2 pg., double spaced) of either (a) a central influence upon your own sense of ethics, morality or social consciousness or (b) an important experience in which you made (or struggled with) an ethical decision or acted in a way that expressed your core moral values.

2) Write a separate paragraph, titled “Appeal for Readers” (125-150 words or half a page) describing why this story could appeal to a readership. If you decide to write essay #1 about this experience, what do you hope your audience would learn from your piece? Are there particular kinds of readers you want to reach? **Note:** Part #2, the “appeal to readers” is a note to yourself, intended to help you focus on your audience for this pre-writing exercise.

Part #2 should not appear in the first version of the essay submitted on Fri. 9/18.

Resources in Writing Essay #1:

Writing Tips, Essay #1

The Use of Outside Sources in Personal Narratives

Strongly Recommended: Review these examples of published student essays that successfully address themes of personal ethics and social responsibility. These pieces reflect different ways students might successfully fulfill this assignment.

Hailey Lee, “Memoirs of a Modern-Day Abolitionist” (2011)

Susan Shepherd, “Daughters Without Borders” (2008)

Joseph Gregg, “Que Sera, Sera” (2008)

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