

First Writing Assignment

This assignment gives you a chance to examine *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* in greater depth. It is also a chance for you to work together with your colleagues on developing written arguments in the most effective way possible. In this assignment, participation in the pre-writing and group editing activities is just as important as the final product itself.

What to Do for Class #5.

Consider the following three questions.

1. In what sense is Benjamin Franklin a “self-made man”? Does the *Autobiography* help him achieve his goal of “arriving at moral Perfection”? Or, by contrast, did Franklin undermine this goal when he wrote the *Autobiography*?

2. In “The Way to Wealth,” Benjamin Franklin urges his readers to “Be *industrious* and *free*; be *frugal* and *free*,” and throughout the *Autobiography*, Franklin is concerned with achieving a sense of freedom. By contrast, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), the modernist writer D.H. Lawrence disparages Benjamin Franklin as a “virtuous little automaton” who was a slave to his own vision of self-mastery and moral perfection. With whom do you agree? Is Benjamin Franklin free, or not?

3. Choose a portrait by John Singleton Copley, either one that we have viewed in class, one that you identify through research, or one that you view in person at the Museum of Fine Arts or the Fogg Art Museum. How do the portrait and the *Autobiography* express similar or different understandings of the self in eighteenth-century America? You may focus on any aspect of the self that you wish, but you should draw on specific passages of the *Autobiography* and talk specifically about the paintings. (Please note: If you want to do research on the web for this question, be sure to find a high-quality reproduction. Also, your images must be from the website of the collection that owns the original painting. For example, a discussion of the painting *Epes Sargent* (1760) must use the website of the National Gallery of Art in Washington.)

You do not have to write a finished paper for class #5. You do not even have to write a complete rough draft. What you should do is choose **two of the three** questions, and for each one, write the first paragraph of what would be an essay, and then, in outline form, give examples or quotes that support the argument that you have laid out in the first paragraph.

That’s it. Make sure you bring two copies of both paragraphs with you. We will be working in class #5, on peer editing and workshop activities. The aim of these activities is to help you figure out which essay topic you are most interested in and which you can most successfully write.

What to Do for Class #6.

On Class #6, you should hand in a finished essay of **3 to 5 pages** on **one** of the questions that you drafted a response to during the first week.

Whatever you do, be clear in your view on the theme you choose, state it clearly in the opening paragraph, and use direct quotations from the original works to demonstrate your points. The paper should be double-spaced with standard margins. As with all assignments, extensions will be granted only for good reasons explained well in advance; computer malfunctions are never an acceptable excuse for a late submission. Proper academic citation is required, but you may use whichever standard style you prefer.