

Essential Goals for First-Year Writing Courses

Writing Program, Department of English, IUSB

The first-year writing program is designed to help students improve abilities vital to academic success: understanding and interpreting college level readings, explaining their own ideas in relation to the readings, and focusing those ideas into source-based, thesis-driven, well-organized, and well-edited four-page papers. The following guidelines identify those core goals and will be used to evaluate student writing in each of the three first-year writing courses W031, W130, and W131. Teachers apply the guidelines with increasing rigor as students move through this sequence of courses. Other aspects of writing also play into the evaluation of student writing, but overall these guidelines define the central goals of the first-year writing program.

The first six of these guidelines are central to the assessment of each student's essays. The final three guidelines address behaviors and practices essential for a student's productive participation in the many activities of each course. Additional guidelines may be added to specific courses and by individual instructors.

Six guidelines for evaluating papers:

- 1. Reading actively.** Successful essays show the student writer's ability to understand, explain, and analyze the course readings. Active reading goes beyond summarizing readings or class discussion by giving detailed analyses of quotations and using ideas from the readings to make larger points.
- 2. Developing a set of ideas.** Successful essays elaborate confidently on the writer's own ideas, on ideas from the readings, and on the relationships between them. These ideas are developed through detailed examples and analysis to create substantial and sustained explorations of the assigned topics. Because we value thorough and detailed investigation of issues, revised essays in W130 and W131 need to be at least four pages long; some W031 papers may also be that long, and the research paper in W131 will be longer. All finished papers will be in MLA format.
- 3. Connecting texts.** Successful essays discuss how one reading relates to (confirms, contradicts, complicates) another reading and the student writer's own experience (if the student wishes to include it). Because of this, most paragraphs incorporate evidence (key terms, ideas, examples) from two or more readings primarily through direct quotation supplemented by summary, paraphrase, and/or implicit references. Effective paragraphs establish relationships between different readings by testing theories and examples from one reading against theories and examples from another and by drawing conclusions about the significance of those relationships.

4. **Creating a thesis or theory.** Successful essays have a theory—sometimes called a thesis, an argument, or a controlling idea—that establishes the main issue, problem, or question to be explored in the essay and helps the writer to develop a response to that issue, problem, or question throughout the essay. Because each paragraph considers a new piece of evidence or a fresh perspective in relation to the theory, it provides focus and momentum to the essay.
5. **Organizing an essay and guiding a reader.** Successful essays guide readers through a well reasoned line of thought by providing transitions from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph and by showing how paragraphs build on one another, adding to the overall development of the theory.
6. **Editing for correctness and clarity.** Successful essays have only occasional passages with unclear wording or errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and formatting. They show that the student has worked throughout the semester to identify his or her patterns of error and has learned to correct them. In W130 the ability to edit independently must also be demonstrated in the final hand-written, in-class writing.

Three guidelines essential to productive classroom participation:

1. **Responding constructively to writing by class members.** Reading each other's work with insight and giving thoughtful responses contribute to students' development as writers and thinkers. Successful written responses are respectful but honest; they advance a classmate's revision process, often by bringing new insight from the readings or from personal experience.
2. **Revising and rethinking.** Successful thinkers and writers reevaluate their work. Such openness can be shown by changing successive drafts to bring in new ideas and examples, to discuss a reading more closely, and to show reconsideration of an idea in light of a new reading and feedback from classmates.
3. **Participating through involvement in classroom work.** Successful academic work is done in collaboration with others, a commitment which can be shown by regular attendance, having work ready on the day it will be discussed, and participating in class work. See the English Department attendance policy.

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Page Format for Your W031/W130/W131 Papers

All of your papers for W031, W130, and W131 should be typed and printed in the MLA style described in this essay. MLA style, one of the most common and widely-accepted college formats, provides you with an attractive, orderly way to present your written work. In this essay you will find the basic MLA requirements for such things as margins, spacing, titles, and page numbers. You will also find the W031/W130/W131 requirements for types and type sizes.

Headings and titles are easy in MLA style. Begin with **your name** at the left-hand margin, one inch from the top of the page. Double-space and type **the teacher's name**, double-space again and type the **course and section**, and double-space again and type **the date**. Double-space again and **center the paper's title**. Double-space again and start your first paragraph. Double-space all the sentences of your paper. Don't insert any extra space between paragraphs.

Most word processing programs will easily accept MLA's **one-inch margins** on top, bottom, left and right sides. Also set the program for **left justification**, so the left edge of type is smooth and the right edge of type is uneven, as you see in this essay. The only complication you might encounter might be setting **the header**, located one-half inch from the top of the page in the upper right hand corner. The header, which appears on every page **except page one**, should have **your last name, one space, and the page number**, and it should line up with the right

margin, as you see in the headers for this essay. Most word processing programs have a command for automatically inserting the correct page number in the header.

If you use a computer with a choice of typefaces, select **Times New Roman, 12 point**, double-spaced, with 23 lines of your writing per page, not counting the header, the same as you are now reading. All the IUSB campus computers and most recent home computers offer these features. If your home equipment does not offer this common typeface and font size, choose the closest typeface and font available. If the typeface, font, justification, margins, or other features of your home equipment are different from those described in this essay, you will need to write **the same number of words** as your classmates are writing. This may mean that your papers will have to be 5 or 6 or more pages long to match the number of words your classmates are writing in 4 pages using the MLA format. Base your calculation on 365 words per page for the standard format. For example, if your teacher assigns a 4 page paper, you will need to produce at least 1460 words to fulfill the assignment.

The next in this collection of supplemental handouts describes the MLA requirements for page citations. It will inform you of some of the ways you should give credit for ideas and quotations you borrow from the readings in W031/W130/W131. You will practice a fuller version of MLA page citation in W131. Since we handle so many papers in W031/W130/W131, you should probably protect your work by stapling it in the upper left-hand corner, and also keep a copy for your own records.

You will find that the requirements for MLA style quickly become a matter of habit, and so, with little effort, you will give your college papers a standard and professional appearance. This will give a good first impression to your readers and will leave them free of distractions as they concentrate on the ideas you are presenting in your writing. W031, W130, and W131 all

focus on content, on helping you present your best thinking in writing, but it never hurts to offer a reader a good-looking form as well.

Good luck in your work this semester--set high standards for yourself, plan your study time well, and carry through on your plans for success.

Summary of W031/W130/W131 Style Requirements

One inch margins at top, bottom, left, and right

Double space *everything* except the headers

No extra spaces between paragraphs, or before or after headings or titles

Use Times New Roman, 12 point

Writer's last name and page number set up as header at right margin, one-half inch from the top of each sheet

Header and 23 lines of type per page

Left justification

Start the paper with writer's name, teacher's name, course and section number, and date, each on a line at the left margin

Center the title on its own line

Use MLA page citations on all papers (see handout)

Note: all IUSB campus computers are equipped with Microsoft Word software that makes these features readily available. If you are using home equipment or software that does not offer one of these features, choose the nearest equivalent feature. For example, if your paper does not contain 365 words per page in that format, you will need to write additional pages to take your

paper fulfill the assignment's length requirement (a 4-page paper will have about 1460 words in the required format).

A Short Guide to MLA Page Citation

In all of your papers for college, you should show the source of any material you quote. Depending on your major field of study, you might indicate your sources with one of several documentation systems. If your professor does not ask you to use a particular system, you might want to learn and use the system most commonly used in academic journals in your major field. In a course where everyone reads the same texts, the following brief guide to the MLA system may be sufficient. This is a very basic version of the system found in the Sixth Edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, published in 2003.

The MLA format always requires a page number in parentheses, and sometimes also requires the author's name. This format does *not* include the word "page" or its abbreviation. Here are the most basic guidelines:

1. If your sentence includes a quotation from an author you have named within the last few sentences, give only the page number at the end, in parentheses, before the period:

Robert Scholes believes that readers make use of a "storehouse of cultural information" when they interpret a text (480).

2. If you haven't named the author within the last few sentences, or if you have been talking about more than one author in your paragraph, give the author's last name and the page number within the parentheses:

While Barnlund concentrates on barriers to communication, Rosaldo says that social customs are "busy intersections" where a lot of communication takes place (Rosaldo 389).

3. If your sentence ends with a quotation, put the parentheses after the last quotation mark and before the period:

According to Heath, the community's "literacy activities are public and social" (234).

4. If you are using quotations from two different authors, you may include two sets of parentheses to make each source clear to your reader (in most other cases, citation information goes at the end of the sentence):

Rosaldo's view of social customs as "busy intersections" (389) appears in marked contrast to Barnlund's sense of the enormous difficulty in understanding the "assumptive world" of another culture (49).

5. If your quotation is more than four lines long, quote it as a block quotation. Indent a block quotation 10 spaces, without quotation marks, and place the parentheses two spaces after the final period. Like the rest of your paper, the block quotation should be double-spaced. Use long quotations sparingly, only when they are really needed to advance your argument.

Seidler believes that it is difficult for many men to overcome their upbringing and share their emotions:

In the middle class, men have often grown up to be reticent, even scared, of sharing emotions and feelings, lest they threaten the control which sustains our very sense of masculinity. [. . .] We fear that others will see us as weak and unmasculine. (635)

This strong but buried sense of masculine fear plays a very important role in

Things Fall Apart.

A sample MLA "Works Cited" page is included on the next handout. If you need to use other parts of the MLA system, please consult the relevant sections in Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 4th edition or the most recent version of the *MLA Handbook*.

MLA Works Cited Sample Page

Refer to Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* (4th Edition).

The entries below are examples of the most common type of entry used in both W130 and W131. The first entry is an example of how to cite an introduction. (Your teacher may assign the introduction to your anthology as a course reading.) The next two entries show how to cite "work in an anthology" (Hacker 139, numbers 10 and 15). For other examples see pages 135-48 of Hacker. Entries are double spaced, appear in alphabetical order, and should not be numbered.

Works Cited

- Colombo, Gary, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle, Eds. "Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths." Introduction. Rereading America. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 1-15.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Serving in Florida." Rereading America. 6th ed. Eds. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 317-29.
- Florida, Richard. "The Transformation of Everyday Life." Making Sense. 2nd ed. Eds. Coleman, et al. Boston: Houghton, 2006. 194-209.

A Guide to Using Quotations

These are some of the accepted ways of presenting your ideas in academic writing. You will find that these conventions help you actively engage the readings. They also support the clarity of your writing and help give your papers a polished look.

I. Naming Authors, Characters, and Readings

- 1) Give the author's or character's whole name the first time you mention the person. Use the author's last name for all later references. Never call an author by his or her first name alone, unless that is all that is known. Never call a character by first name alone unless that is how the author usually refers to that person.

Ken Harvey, a character in Mike Rose's essay "I Just Wanna Be Average," brings Rose to a turning point concerning school. Unlike Harvey, Rose does not want to be just average.

- 2) Give the whole title of a reading the first time you mention some part of the reading. If the reading is a book, underline the title or use italics. If the reading is an essay, short story, or a chapter from a book, use quotation marks around the title.

In our textbook, *Rereading America*, the essay "The Achievement of Desire" demonstrates how Rodriguez struggles with negotiating two cultures.

II. Introducing and Discussing Quotations

- 3) Introduce each quotation by naming the author and providing any information the reader would need to understand the quotation's original context, how it relates to the author's larger point in the paragraph or the essay. Give some clue about what you want the reader to see in the quotation. Teach the reader what you are thinking about the quotation.

Weak: High school is a struggle for some students. "I just wanna be average," says one of them.

Better: Rose's essay highlights the struggle some students face in high school. One of Rose's classmates, Ken Harvey, for example, stopped fighting against the demoralizing aspects of school and decided only to do enough to get by. "I just wanna be average," Harvey said one day, shocking Rose into thinking about how much a person loses by not aiming for something higher (166).

- 4) Discuss the quotation after you quote it, using its key terms or its examples. Again, teach the reader what you are thinking about the quotation.

Weak: The editors of *Literacies* say that we “risk an encounter” when we read (xiv). Another author who talks about what is at stake in reading is Gary Colombo.

Better: The editors of *Literacies* say that we “risk an encounter” when we read (xiv). We encounter ideas and experiences that are new to us, and sometimes these are so powerful that we find that we must change our mind about something very basic in our lives. Because people are often conservative about their own values and resist change, and because change can be painful, we see that openly encountering the ideas of others is a risk. Gary Colombo further argues that we must risk challenging our cultural values to open ourselves to new ideas.

- 5) Don't start a paragraph with a quotation (since you won't be able to introduce it properly—see item #3).

Don't end a paragraph with a quotation (since you won't be able to discuss it properly—see item #4).

- 6) Avoid roundabout or wordy introductions to readings.

Weak: In the author William Maxwell's essay, which is called “Coming of Age in Indiana,” it [or he] says that geography divides our citizens more than it unifies them.

Better: In “Coming of Age in Indiana,” William Maxwell says that geography divides our citizens more than it unifies them.

Introductions to ideas, such as “I believe that,” “We see,” and “I think” are unnecessary and create further wordiness.

- 7) Integrate quotations into your sentences rather than letting them stand alone.

Weak: Mike Rose's account shows how important a role the teacher plays. “Students will float to the mark you set” (35). Teachers must respond to this truth with action.

Better: Mike Rose's account shows teachers that “students will float to the mark [they] set,” a truth that should challenge all teachers to action (35).

- 8) Revise so that quoted material meshes grammatically with the portion of the sentence

you have composed. If you need to add or change a word or two to make the quotation fit the grammar of your sentence, use square brackets to indicate the changes you've made. Make sure your changes do not alter the meaning or give a reader the wrong impression about the quotation. See “[they]” in example 7, above.

- 9) Explain the quotations in a group of sentences. Avoid dropping quotations without preparing the reader for their appearance or without working with them after you have used them.

Weak: Powell knows that nothing comes easily. However, he did have a lot of support to help him in the right direction. “You must set a goal and do your job well” (307).

Better: Powell knows that nothing comes easily, especially for minorities in mainstream American society. Consequently, he worked, but he also had a lot of support and direction from others. His parents told him “you must set a goal and do your job well” (307). Maud and Luther Powell, Colin’s parents, used their own lack of education as an example to encourage their son in setting goals for success and in working hard to achieve those goals.

III. Judging How Much To Quote

- 10) Quote only the parts of the passage or sentence that you are going to discuss.

Weak: Eli’s reading practices at home and at school have similar elements:

“When Eli got to school, he found a similar definition of reading in operation. He and Mary were helped to select and manage text. Their attention was directed toward what mattered in the text and away from what did not. They were helped to discover the single right answer to every question. They had only to recall information without interpreting or extending it in any significant way” (245).

It is precisely these habits that encourage continuity and stability in the Amish culture.

Better: Eli’s reading practices both at home and at school help develop his ability to “discover the single right answer” and “recall information without interpreting” (245). It is precisely these habits that encourage continuity and stability in the Amish culture.

- 11) Be sure to define your terms as briefly as possible, again using only as much of the quoted material as you need.

Weak: Barnlund says that human beings need to create meaning in their lives. “The world each person creates for himself is a distinctive world, not the same world others occupy. Each fashions from every incident whatever meanings fit his own private biases. These biases, taken together, constitute what has been called the ‘assumptive world of the individual.’ The world each person gets inside his head is the only world he knows” (53). Experience, then, becomes a matter of perspective.

Better: Barnlund says that because human beings need to create meaning in their lives they carve out a private world with rules, biases and prejudices that “constitute...the ‘assumptive world of the individual’” (53). Experience, then, becomes a matter of perspective.

12) Make sure your quotations aren’t truncated so much that they distort the meaning or mask the complexity of other parts of the reading.

Weak: Barlett and Steele say that “if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358).

Better: Barlett and Steele say that “the winners say if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358).

IV. Page References

13) Use the two previous handouts on MLA page citation and Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 4th edition, to help choose the correct way to include page numbers after each quotation.

What is a thesis or theory?

A thesis or theory is the main point or argument you make in an essay. The thesis is stated clearly somewhere in the opening paragraph and then tested and developed throughout the essay. Although “argument” and “thesis” are probably the most common terms used to describe this crucial component of an essay (most handbooks will use one or both of these terms in their indexes) the term “theory” provides a useful way of understanding how a thesis becomes more than simply the central claim you make in a paper. A theory is your own discovery—your interpretation—that comes out of synthesizing other authors’ ideas as well as your own life experiences in relation to a particular issue, question, or debate. It establishes a controlling idea that gives an essay organizational focus and momentum from beginning to end. Every paragraph in the essay becomes an opportunity to introduce fresh evidence from the readings that will help you test and expand on that main idea. Once you develop a theory about some question, problem, or issue in relation to a particular set of readings, that theory provides a direction to your essay and a way of deciding which material to include and exclude (see guideline #4 of “Essential Goals for First-Year Writing Courses”).

A successful paper from W031, W130, or W131 needs a strong theory. A strong theory can help you establish a set of ideas that you can elaborate on confidently (see guideline #2) and can help you to organize your paper based on a coherent line of thought (see guideline #5). We can understand the features of a strong theory more clearly by contrasting it with a weak theory. Here are two theories from early and rewritten drafts of a paper exploring the subject of education.

Weak theory: *Education truly promises students a path to success.*

This short, simple and obvious idea (one that repeats common knowledge or truisms) does not challenge the writer or the reader to think extensively about the topic in any complexity. While everyone certainly wishes that this statement were true, everyone also knows that the real interactions between the education system and students’ lives are much richer and more complicated. The statement above does not open up the discussion to any of this richness or complexity.

Revised theory: *While education promises success, students can realize that promise only if they can come to feel entitled to the kinds of satisfaction and achievement that academic work makes possible. Only then can they feel the commitment necessary to make their education work for them.*

This statement contains the old, weak theory, but goes beyond it, saying something about the real complexity and challenges involved in pursuing success through academic work.

The writer now has more precise ideas and key terms (*entitlement, commitment*) to work with throughout the discussion. The writer can explore how feelings of entitlement and commitment can grow, and analyze the obstacles that arise to achieving such a perspective. The writer might also explore, in another section of the paper, the specific ways in which academic work can provide satisfaction and a sense of achievement, as well as what it means for students to “make their education work for them.”

In short, in revising and developing this stronger theory, the writer now has a set of ideas, expressed in several interesting key terms and phrases, to elaborate on and unpack throughout the rest of the essay. Also, the idea is strong enough to be tested and challenged, as well as supported (for example, the writer might question her own assumption that students are primarily responsible for pursuing entitlement and commitment by considering the role of teachers and other mentors in that process).

So, in summary, **what does a strong theory do?**

- It offers *key terms* that are precise and flexible enough to guide the paper's line of thought clearly, as the writer unpacks and elaborates them.
- It helps the writer to *explain, interpret and connect several readings* actively and extensively.
- It establishes *a set of ideas* that come from the writer's own perspective and are expressed in her own voice, ideas which the writer can then *support, develop, test and question* throughout the rest of the discussion.

NOTE: Don't expect to have an effective theory already formed when you first begin to draft your paper. Strong theories are almost always discovered and developed through the processes of drafting and rewriting, reading and rereading. Wise writers often wait to construct their theories out of the strongest opinions, conclusions and insights gained from early drafts of an essay.

Here are some other examples of strong thesis statements:

Sample 1: “Social environment often makes a substantial impact upon an individual, and will result in a choice to conform, rebel, or combine both behaviors. Despite the pressure that the social environment may exert, each individual has the power to choose to conform or to seek his or her own independence.”

Sample 2: “Family and society encourage us to be individuals, but, at the same time, they force us to conform to their ideals. As an individual, you can either conform to this

ideal or become a rebel to conformity and possibly face ridicule and punishment. However, this punishment may be just if your idea of individualism is extreme.”

Sample 3: “Factors such as race and disability powerfully shape a person’s identity because it is extremely difficult not to be affected by other people’s perceptions and expectations. However, where some people try desperately to perform according to mainstream expectations in order to achieve acceptance, others deal with this obstacle by creating a separate subculture of their own.”

What is an opening paragraph?

You are, no doubt, familiar with writing opening paragraphs for papers. For instance, you may have been told that an opening paragraph should act as a funnel, starting from a more general point of contact with your reader and moving toward the specific statement of your thesis or main idea. But what might an opening paragraph look like in a first-year course that introduces you to academic writing? In this setting, the opening of that funnel does not have to establish common ground with a huge, general audience (“We are all individuals”); instead, it can address an audience of educated readers looking for intellectual engagement and debate (We are all individuals, but there is always the constant pull of conformity preventing us from being totally individualistic”). This semester, you will adapt that funnel and the other things you already know about introductory paragraphs in order to create openings that are effective within the particular context of academic writing and intellectual debate.

In academic writing, your opening paragraph functions as a kind of a road map that helps guide your reader through your paper. Your readers this semester include your classmates and your teacher, all of whom are familiar with the class assignments and the readings from the textbook. It is important to practice writing your papers as well for readers who are less familiar with the material. If you imagine yourself explaining a particular issue using examples from particular readings to someone who is interested but a bit confused about the whole topic, you will get into the habit of including the specific details and explanations that help your readers see what you want them to see.

What follows is a description of one way to construct an opening paragraph that will address the needs of these readers. You have many other choices as a writer for how you will structure this initial relationship with your readers (see the Webpage version of this handout for links to other sample opening paragraphs) but this model is useful in explaining the key elements that most often characterize effective opening paragraphs in W031, W130, and W131. Effective opening paragraphs

1. Orient readers to the topic
2. Introduce and establish relationships among the key sources being used in the paper
3. Establish a thesis or theory that will give the essay focus and purpose.

1. Orienting the Reader

It's a good idea to begin your paper by orienting your reader to the topic you will be discussing in your paper. Sometimes you can accomplish this with a pithy sentence or a quick example that reveals the essential problem, question, or debate you plan to tackle: "A person's social class will determine the kind of education he or she is offered unless that individual finds some avenue of escape from the system." Since your teacher will be asking you to explore a larger issue such as education and social class by drawing on ideas and examples from the assigned readings, you can also give the paper an immediate sense of focus and purpose by introducing your topic in the context provided by the key readings you'll be working with in the paper. You might begin by giving the author's full name and the title of the most important essay you'll be using, followed by a brief, two to three sentence summary of the essay. Summarizing is not an easy task! Since there is always more to say about an essay than can be included in a couple of sentences, you must make choices about what information to provide for your reader. A good way to think about your choices is by asking yourself how that reading helps you address the assignment topic. For example, if the assignment were asking you to talk about the relationship between social class and education, your orienting sentences should show what each reading reveals about that topic:

In Mike Rose's essay "I Just Wanna Be Average," Rose argues that he did not get the education he deserved because the school labeled him as working class. Rose recounts his struggles in vocational education and the defense mechanisms he and his classmates employed in order to cope with a curriculum that didn't challenge them. What are the consequences for society, Rose's essay asks, if certain segments of our population achieve less than what they're capable of achieving?

This is not a complete summary of Rose's essay, of course, but you must select the details that are important for your paper. A detail such as Rose's sadness over his father's death may not be an important link to the assigned topic. Consequently, you must work on revising your sentences, or eliminating summary sentences that, finally, are not relevant to your discussion.

2. Creating Relationships Among Essays

It's easy to fall into a listing pattern when you introduce your essays. Here's an example:

The first essay I'm going to use in my paper is _____ and it is about _____.

The second essay I'm going to use is _____ and it is about _____.

And so on.

Opening paragraphs that rely on a listing structure are monotonous and usually don't help your reader see how each author's ideas work *together* in your paper. The next essay you introduce may confirm or challenge Rose's findings, provide a new perspective on the topic, and thereby extend and complicate your own views. Another essay may help you to see something about social class and education that you did not see in Rose's essay. To clarify this point, and to give an example of how to connect essays in the opening paragraph, let's return to the example of education and social class and build on the three sentences about Rose. Say you decided to incorporate "Achievement of Desire" by Richard Rodriguez. Some good questions to ask first are these: What is the relationship between Rose's essay and Rodriguez's essay? Do these essays have similar things to say about education and social class? Do they challenge one another? What you say next will depend on your interpretation of the material. An orientation of Rodriguez's essay in relation to Rose could look like this:

While Rose's essay focuses on how a person should but often does not benefit from education, Richard Rodriguez acknowledges what a person can lose by obtaining an education. Rodriguez's essay, "Achievement of Desire," helps explain why some students who come from the lower classes experience academic failure. Like Rose, Rodriguez recounts his experiences in school; the values and practices of mainstream American culture pulled him away from his family's customs and traditions which created ambivalence about education.

Each essay provides an additional layer of meaning for you to explore and analyze. By introducing Rodriguez through a detailed contrast and then comparison to Rose, you get away from a listing structure and your paper begins to develop a shape. Let's look at what we have so far:

In Mike Rose's essay "I Just Wanna Be Average," Rose argues that he did not get the education he deserved because the school labeled him as working class. Rose recounts his struggles in vocational education and the defense mechanisms he and his classmates employed in order to cope with a curriculum that didn't challenge them. What are the consequences for society, Rose's essay asks, if certain segments of our population achieve less than what they're capable of achieving? While Rose's essay focuses on how a person should but often doesn't benefit from education, Richard Rodriguez acknowledges what a person can lose by obtaining an education. Rodriguez's essay "Achievement of Desire" helps explain why some students who come from the lower classes experience academic failure. Like Rose, Rodriguez recounts his experiences in school; the values and practices of mainstream American culture pulled him away from his family's customs and traditions which created ambivalence about education.

The opening now demonstrates that you are seeing relationships between readings, you are involved in serious academic inquiry, and you are accomplishing the goals of the course.

3. Establishing a Thesis or Theory

The relationships you create between the essays you're using often provide the springboard to the thesis or theory that will guide the entire paper. By identifying how a general issue such as education and social class takes on a particularized and original life when considered in the context provided by Rose and Rodriguez, and by thinking about how Rodriguez's experiences relate to Rose's, you will have begun to develop a theory that explores this topic in complex and revealing ways. Your theory, then, is your own discovery—your interpretation—that comes out of synthesizing other authors' ideas as well as your own life experience in relation to a particular issue, question, or debate. It is common to see the theory stated in the last few sentences of the opening paragraph.

(For a more in-depth discussion of theory, see the handout “What is a thesis or theory?”)

Frequently asked questions:

- **Should I use quotations in my opening paragraph?**
Opening paragraphs can be effective with or without quotations. It is particularly important to use quotations sparingly in the opening paragraph. Long quotations are best used and explored in the body of the paper. There may be, however, a sentence or part of a sentence that contains a key idea or key term that will be essential in your discussion. If so, feel free to use a brief quotation in your opening paragraph.
- **How long should my opening paragraph be?**
There is no hard and fast rule about the length of an opening paragraph, but since the papers you'll be writing in W130 are four pages long, opening paragraphs should be no shorter than a half page, and no more than a full page in length. Papers that adequately orient the reader to three essays are usually not complete until they're about three quarters of a page in length.
- **Why is revision so important?**
When students begin the course they are more comfortable writing in a linear way, that is, from beginning to end, opening paragraph first, followed by the second paragraph, and so on. Consequently, students can spend a lot of time worrying about the perfect opening paragraph even before they have begun to explore their ideas. This is a difficult habit to break as most of us are used to doing things in a

linear order. However, if you are to become a successful writer in the academic community, you must think of revision as your most valuable tool. You might begin by assembling some of the basic elements you plan to include in your introduction but wait until you have worked through a draft or two before you try to hone those opening sentence. Once you explore various quotations by positioning them next to one another to see what they reveal, you can begin to think about your opening as fluid, not set in stone. Writing is a process of discovery, so don't let a new idea that you've uncovered today slip by because it doesn't fit with yesterday's original plan. Writing is recursive: it is a back and forth process of rethinking, reseeing, and revising. It's useful to have a rough theory in the early stages of writing, but think of it as a working theory, a theory in process.

Example #1

The Power of Friction

To create a work of art a sculptor must utilize opposing forces to define its structure. Molding, stretching, and re-stretching its form creates tension and friction that makes the process arduous and painstaking. But in the end, these conflicting forces are what make the work beautiful and unique in its essence. The beauty of art is in the ultimate harmony of its discordant notes; not despite the differences but because of them. This unsettling power of art “[that] make[s] everyone a little nervous and unsure” is what Dorothy Allison describes in her essay “This Is Our World” as the deepest and richest form of engagement. (45). Allison vividly expresses her idea of art as being an intellectual and emotional catalyst that requires the complete devotion of the viewer. Sven Birkerts describes this same “vertical engagement” in his essay, “The Own Has Flown,” as the process by which unsettling or thought-provoking materials force an individual to become aware of himself outside the movement of time (75). This upsetting power grabs the viewer and engages his mind, body, and soul to produce a “deep time” that transcends distractions and resonates with the profound wisdom of eternity (75). The awareness that is produced through strenuous and often upsetting mental engagements does not come naturally to anyone. It requires patience. Barbara Mellix learned to accept this resonating wisdom in her essay “From Outside In” when she found harmony in the union of Proper English and her own dialect despite their apparent inharmonious nature. Mellix became aware of the “generative power” and began to harness the infinite power of her own imagination when coupled with the English language. Human empowerment is achieved in the acceptance of these opposing forces as occasions for growth, change, and fulfillment. The friction in these moments shows us who we are currently and who we could be, only if the uncertainty is understood as an opportunity and the anxiety we experience is channeled into a positive force for personal transformation.

Example #2

Class Movement: The Illusion of Inclusion

In his essay, “The Transformation of Everyday Life,” Richard Florida presents a comparative analysis of today’s social and economic structure with that of the 1950’s organizational age. At the center of this comparison is the issue of identity. One of Florida’s driving contentions is that, although true of the organizational age, it is no longer our social ties that define our identity, but rather we now “[define] our identities along the varied dimensions of our creativity” (201). This, however, was not the case for Julie Charlip. In her essay, “A Real Class Act,” Charlip examines the psychological influence of one’s social class and the effect of one’s background on her ability to negotiate class identity. Although Charlip’s father owned his own business, his middle-class income prevented his family’s inclusion with the area’s upper class. The contradiction in her father’s job title and economic status frustrated Charlip’s efforts to identify her family’s class. Charlip’s real life experience clearly disproves Florida’s claim of a society empowered by self-defined identity and acutely depicts society’s gravitation toward group identity. What is it that drives individuals to become associated with a particular class? Striving to unravel the complicated and fascinating allure of group identity, Susan Willis presents a case study of the Disney World culture in her essay, “Public Use/Private State.” Willis argues that by submitting to the programmed environment that is Disney World, its visitors exchange personal control for the illusion of belonging. It is Willis’ belief that this exchange occurs without the conscious approval of its victims. However, it is the relative ease with which one can belong at Disney World that draws millions to its gates each year. Personal control is a small price to pay to belong when compared to the high cost of obtaining a desired social class identity. Each social class bears its own rules and expectations for inclusion, as well as a unique set of stereotypes enforced not only by those outside the class, but by those within the class as well. Adhering to the expected pattern of behavior provides an individual with a sense of belonging to his class and labels him with the stereotypes of his position. It is the psychological branding of these stereotypes that frustrates the process of upward class mobility and limits the opportunity to belong to the realm of illusion.

Constructing Body Paragraphs

The paragraphs between the introduction and conclusion of an essay are often the most productive and flexible paragraphs available to a writer. They are the place where you begin to work through your sources, where you generate ideas, and take the most risks. Often it's in the process of revising those body paragraphs that you develop the thesis or theory that will get moved up to your introduction, and where you test and expand on that theory by seeing what new aspects of particular example it reveals. Similarly, it's often in working through the transitions, the logical connections from paragraph to paragraph that you figure out the most effective ways of organizing and presenting the points you want to make.

Because body paragraphs do different kinds of work, they come in all shapes and sizes. Some paragraphs include quotations from two different sources in order to demonstrate an important contrast or comparison or in order to explore what one source reveals about the other. Some paragraphs follow through on a previous point or connection between readings by offering a further exploration of its significance or by introducing an additional comparative or contrastive source. Because of this, there is no single grid for constructing successful paragraphs in an academic essay. However, most effective paragraphs in W031, W130, and W131 contain some combination of the following elements:

- An opening sentence that signals a transition from the previous paragraph and establishes the topic, main idea, or central claim to be explored in the paragraph.
- Introduction of new evidence/examples from one or more of the readings that helps to explain and develop that topic, idea, or issue (normally this evidence is presented through a combination of summary and direct quotation--see "A Guide to Using Quotations").
- A discussion of that evidence that explains it, unpacks it, analyzes it, interprets it, shows your readers why it is significant.
- A follow-through sentence or two that tells your readers what they have learned from that particular evidence and how it connects to/builds on the thesis or theory of the essay.

A Further Note on Transitional/Topic Sentences: The first sentence in a paragraph is normally doing two different jobs: identifying the specific idea or issue you will be discussing in that paragraph and signaling how that particular idea or issue relates to/follows from the previous paragraph. By calling this sentence the "topic" sentence,

writing teachers often emphasize the first job more than the second, but both jobs are equally important. An effective opening sentence can often do both jobs at the same time (though a writer might also choose to separate these two jobs into two sentences).

For example, the following sentence sets up a well-defined topic for a paragraph but tells us little about how this might connect to the previous paragraph:

Both McKnight and Allen experience “double consciousness” when they are singled out at school for the way they speak.

Whereas the revised example makes an effort to gesture back toward the previous paragraph:

Both McKnight and Allen experience this struggle with “double consciousness” when they are singled out at school for the way they speak.

Here, the writer established the same topic for the paragraph but uses “this struggle” to hint at the work accomplished in the previous paragraph—probably a definition of the term “double consciousness.” If the writer said “McKnight and Allen also experience... we might guess that the previous paragraph offered examples of the way these same two writers experienced “double consciousness” in settings other than school.

In establishing a topic for each paragraph, the writer usually tries to narrow down the larger subject matter of the paper to a specific claim that might reasonably be explored in the length of a paragraph. For instance, where the previous example identified a point of commonality between two essays, an additional paragraph might address a point of contrast:

Unlike McKnight, Allen learns an entirely new way of speaking and behaving in order to fit in at school, yet she is far more successful than McKnight at “performing” this new identity.

This paragraph might bring in new evidence from both essays that helps to demonstrate the key differences, but, more likely, it focuses on specific evidence from the Allen essay in order to explore the level and quality of her success.

Writing a Conclusion

In first-year writing courses at IUSB, your writing assignments will challenge you to look at two or more readings and ask you to reflect on the authors' ideas. If you work through such an assignment with appropriate care and attention to detail, you will have written a paper with ideas more complex than can easily fit into the traditional five-paragraph theme that includes an opening, closing, and three supporting paragraphs. Rather than using your conclusion to give the last word on an issue or simply to drive home your main point once again, think of your concluding paragraph as an opening up rather than a closing down of the material. When you get to the end of your paper, instead of asking "What have I said?" which will lead you to a recap of your discussion, try to answer one or two of the following questions:

1. What have my readers learned beyond the information I gave them in the first paragraph?
2. What is the significance of my findings?
3. Why is this an important topic to write about?
4. What impact does this topic/discussion have on society? On me?
5. What new questions does this topic raise, perhaps for further inquiry?

Answers to these questions lend credibility to your ideas. Consequently, your readers will take you seriously, consider your ideas more thoughtfully, and will be provoked into new thinking. Your paper will be more interesting—more lively—and you will have succeeded in keeping the dialogue going between readers and writers, the cornerstone of university learning.

Thinking About Titles

What's the story with titles, anyway?

An effective title can catch readers' attention and provoke their interest while orienting them to the key question or issue that will be discussed in your essay. Accomplishing all that in one pithy phrase can be a challenge for any writer, no matter how experienced. However, taking some time to create and rework a title can help direct favorable attention to your essay and may also help you revise the essay itself.

Make an impression on your reader

One way to think about titles is to think about your readers. If your title isn't distinctive, your essay will probably make little positive first impression on the reader. For example, if the assignment is to develop some ideas linking the essay by Stuart Ewen, in which he describes middle class values in North American society, to the short story by Alistair MacLeod, the teacher will probably see some titles like these:

- Ewen and MacLeod
- MacLeod and Ewen
- Links Between Ewen and MacLeod
- Middle Class Values in Ewen and MacLeod
- and so forth...

Fairly or unfairly, these titles imply that the essay won't show original thinking, but rather will just echo the main ideas of the readings in a passive way. They give the impression to a reader (or a teacher who is reading a big stack of essays!) that the essay will probably be a lot like many of the other ones. Even though everybody might try not to judge a book—or essay—by its cover, that's hard to do. A bland or unexpressive title, or one that merely echoes the assignment sheet, probably invites a prejudiced reaction from a reader, and it's a shame to do that after you've put in all the work on the essay itself. Instead, spend some time and come up with a distinctive title that indicates something about what you actually say in your essay. Give your reader a reason to sit up and take notice of the work you do with ideas, starting with the title.

What a title can tell you about your own essay

A good title indicates something about the best original idea the writer will be advancing in the essay. When a writer is still struggling in a draft to get beyond summary of the readings or class discussion or beyond the most obvious response to the readings, he or she will probably have trouble getting beyond the most obvious title, such as “Ewen and

MacLeod.” You can use that knowledge to your own advantage. Get in the habit of writing a title for each of your drafts, and along the way, as you revise your essay, look at the title and consider whether it shows that you have found a distinctive focus for your essay. If the title is bland or generic or obvious, then ask yourself whether the essay has gone far enough yet. Does the essay really have something of its own to contribute, or does it mainly restate the source materials? Use the working title to give yourself one strong clue about how far your essay has developed and whether it needs more time and effort. If you do that, you make a title work for you as an aid to revision.

Learning from models provided by other writers

Although your title is designed to point your reader toward your most original idea, the way you construct a title can be based on effective examples from other writers. Try looking through the titles included in the anthology or readings assigned in your class. Notice which titles seem most effective in piquing your interest while giving you an accurate idea of the main subject matter of the essay. Although you will find many different kinds of titles, some less effective than others, you may notice that many academic writers use some combination of the following strategies:

- **Short and catchy** (these can risk not revealing enough about the content of the essay: “Blue Jeans” (Fred Davis, *Signs of Life*); “The Loss of the Creature” (Walker Percy, *Mind Readings*); “Social Memories” (Eviatar Zerubavel, *Mind Readings*); “Proletarian Dreams” (Student Example); “Fragile Identities” (Student Example).
- **The intriguing question**: “What’s So Bad about Hate?” (Andrew Sullivan, *Mind Readings*); “What’s in a Package?” (Thomas Hine, *Signs of Life*); “Whose Self Is it, Anyway?” (Philip Kitcher, *Mind Readings*); “Why Look at Animals?” (John Berger, *Mind Readings*); “The Social Escalator: Going Up?” (Student Example); “What’s Wealth Got to Do with It?” (Student Example).
- **The internal contradiction or identified debate**: “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying” (Adrienne Rich, *Literacies*); “Listening for Silence” (Mark Slouka, *Mind Readings*); “The Artifice of the Natural” (Charles Siebert, *Mind Readings*); “Columbus: Gone But Not Forgotten” (bell hooks, *Mind Readings*); “From Outside, In” (Barbara Mellix, *Literacies*); “Finding the Truth in Myth” (Student Example).
- **Key term combos**: “Observing and Intervening” (Steven Rose, *Literacies*); “Class and Virtue” (Michael Parenti, *Signs of Life*); “Rights and Kindness: A Can of Worms” (Paul Shepard, *Mind Readings*); “Language and Masculinity” (Victor Seidler, *Literacies*); “Jazz, Hope, and Democracy” (Cornel West and Wynton

Marsalis, *Literacies*); “The ‘Assumptive World’ of Cross-Cultural Communication” (Student Example).

- **Attention grabber combined with a subtitle using a colon:** “Heart to Heart: Sex Differences in Emotion” (Deborah Blum, *Mind Readings*); “‘Careful, You May Run Out of Planet’: SUVs and the Exploitation of the American Myth (David Goewey, *Signs of Life*); Political and Cultural Cross-Dressing: Negotiating a Second Generation Cuban-American Identity” (Flavio Risech, *Literacies*); Taste: the Social Sense” (Diane Ackerman, *Mind Readings*); “Building Memories: Encoding and Retrieving the Present and the Past” (Daniel L. Schacter, *Mind Readings*); “Masters of Desire: The Culture of American Advertising” (Jack Solomon, *Signs of Life*); “Goin’ Mobile: The Impact of Technology on Identity” (Student Example); “The Lure of Individuality: The Illusion of Freedom and the Message of Conformity” (Student Example).

Department of English

Statement on Plagiarism

The following is a statement of the English Department's policy regarding students' written work:

The teacher accepts a student's written work as his or her own original composition. Therefore, the student may not submit work that he or she has copied, wholly or partially, from a book, article, essay, newspaper, another student's paper or notebook, or any other written or printed source.

1. a. Direct Quotations

The student may, however, include another writer's phrases, sentences, or paragraphs if the student presents them as quotations within quotation marks and acknowledges the sources.

b. Paraphrases

The student may also submit written work that paraphrases other written or printed material provided that he or she acknowledges the sources of paraphrased material.

c. Ideas in General

(1) The student may, of course, incorporate ideas from other authors in his or her written work provided that the student documents the source of each idea and (2) the student may incorporate in written work any ideas which have arisen from class discussion or any ideas that are so familiar to the general public that citing sources is unnecessary.

2. a. Correcting and Revising

The student may correct and revise written work with the aid of reference books such as dictionaries and textbooks. The student may consult the teacher or others concerning details of correction and revision; nevertheless, the student may not ask any other person to correct and revise written work in its entirety.

b. Typing Assistance

The student may have another person type his or her written work only if the typist does not change any punctuation, spelling, words, ideas, or organization. The student should proofread carefully all such typing.

3. **Written Work for Another Course**

The student may submit written work prepared for another course only if he or she receives special permission from both teachers.

Any violation of these principles constitutes plagiarism, and the usual penalty for plagiarism is a grade of "F" for the course.

In accordance with procedures outline in the **Indiana University South Bend Faculty Handbook**, 1998 edition, cases of plagiarism are reported to a senior administrative officer in Student Services, currently the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Academic Support Services.

Department of English Attendance Policy

The Department of English requires students to attend class. Academic success depends on awareness of the sequence and deadlines of class assignments, preparation for class, and participation in class, whether as an attentive listener and note-taker or as an active discussant of the content and methodology of the course. The department recognizes that occasional absences from class may be unavoidable. However, academic success depends on regular attendance. More than three absences are excessive.* The department expects each student to know the attendance policy, to accept its provisions, and to be responsible for all work assigned and for material covered during absence.

*Individual instructors will inform their students of the consequences of excessive absences in their courses.

(Policy approved 4 May 1998)