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2007-2008

a collection of essays from the expository writing program

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EXPOSITORY WRITING PROGRAM
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE

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To the class of 2011:

Welcome to the challenging world of New York University. Your predecessors in the previous class have left you a gift and a legacy—yet another collection of fine essays that can make your own intellectual journey during this next year less daunting.

These essays come from our foundational course, Writing the Essay, and from a variety of advanced writing courses—all available to first-year students. As different as these collected essays are one from the other, they have in common essential features shared by all academic essays: interesting, cogent ideas; clarity of expression; solid, convincing evidence; and a voice of reflection that continually links evidence and idea.

In your writing courses, the essay will be the coin of the realm. The essays you write will be exploratory as well as persuasive; they will move forward as a form of inquiry. Every good essay yearns to be *sui generis*, unlike any other. But, of course, even the most unusual essay has features in common with all the others: a three-part structure (beginning, middle, ending); an idea, or, more properly, a network of ideas that shape and bind the many parts of the essay together; and, finally, a written record of a mind-in-action making sense of evidence. That mind-in-action seems now, after more than thirty-five years of teaching, the most fundamental characteristic of all.

Said another way: The mind moves deftly but confidently across the pages of good essays, and we are permitted to see that mind transforming evidence and being transformed by it, creating a field of intellectual energy that draws writers and readers into relationship as they consider the essays' ideas.

As you learn to write your essays, you will also be learning about the importance of inductive reasoning. Inductive thinking encourages clear, unbiased reading of and reasoning about evidence, no matter what that evidence may be. Such thinking requires that you consider disparate pieces of evidence (from scholarly journals, other essays, films, fiction, newspapers, laboratory experiments, your own experience) and that you learn to see patterns

and suggestions that only active, open minds can see. Inductive reasoning—which always begins with the particulars gathered through reading (and other forms of research, including that conducted in the laboratories of the various sciences)—moves from those particulars to a generalization (or hypothesis) about them, moves to a conception about the meaning of the evidence. That conception, or idea, is almost never final and conclusive. Induction does not lead to certainty; it leads us to the best answer we can formulate from the evidence (given our own limitations and that of the evidence we have managed to collect). Our idea about the evidence, our thesis, is always subject to further analysis, the pool of evidence subject to enlargement and purification.

Deductive reasoning, unlike inductive, leads to greater certainty, to conclusiveness—but only if certain complicated conditions are met in the formulation of the argument and the development of the premises on which the argument depends. Your courses will teach you more about these differences and will help you understand how these two types of reasoning complement one another in all of the work you do in the university.

Essays, you will learn, do not prove, repeat, or reiterate. Instead, essays, like ideas, develop, change, expand, turn on themselves—and captivate the reader when the writer gets the words right. As you read these collected essays for your own pleasure and instruction, know that the student writers are asking you to see—just for a moment—as they see. They are trying to convince you that their ideas have merit.

When one of these essays surprises you—perhaps confuses you—pause to figure out what the writer is doing. During that long pause, you may unearth a hidden secret—a writing technique that enlivens the essay and gives you an idea for your own writing. Assume always that either surprise or confusion warrants further study and that the secret is worth discovering. These writers, given the chance, will help you create your own compelling and persuasive essays. Call on them often.

Look too, if you will, at the final section of this collection, “Reflections.” There you will see how teachers and students work together collaboratively to create stunning essays. That collaborative work takes place in the classroom and in individual conferences. What you see in the two teachers’ reflections reveals just what you can expect in your own classes.

All of us in the Expository Writing Program wish you the very best during your first year at New York University.

Pat C. Hoy II
Director, Expository Writing Program

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Professor of English

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