
MERCER street

2008-2009

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 2012:

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

In your writing courses, the essay will be the coin of the realm. 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. After more than forty years of teaching, that mind-in-action seems now the most fundamental characteristic of all.

Said another way: *We see the mind moving deftly but confidently across the pages of good essays, transforming evidence and being transformed by it, creating a field of intellectual energy that draws writers and readers into relationship as they fall under the spell of the essays' ideas.*

Your predecessors have all wanted to know, *Why Am I Writing Essays and Not Something Else?* The simplest answer is this: if you can write real essays successfully, you will have learned the fundamental writing, thinking, and imagining skills that you need in all your other courses. But there is more. Every essay that you write will be something only you could have created. In every essay, you will develop your own idea from evidence that you have gathered through research, whether your research focuses on other essays, scholarly articles, art objects, newspaper reports, laboratory data, or your own lived experiences. The essay records your thoughts about the evidence—what it means and why it is important.

Learning to write an essay establishes the foundation for all the writing you will do as a college student—reports; surveys and summaries of literature from any academic discipline; laboratory results; response papers. Essay writing, while teaching you the skills associated with each of these tasks, requires

that you go beyond preliminary reading, preparing summaries, listing findings, and organizing reports to develop your own ideas.

As you learn to write your essays, you will also learn 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 and learn to see patterns and suggestions that only active, open minds can see, rather than applying a preconceived conclusion to the evidence you consider. Such reasoning—which always begins with the particulars gathered through research—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 to the best answer you can formulate from the evidence, given your own limitations and those of your body of evidence. Your idea about the evidence, your thesis, is always subject to further analysis, the pool of evidence itself subject to expansion and purification.

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. Given the chance, these writers will help you create your own compelling and persuasive essays. Call on them often.

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
Professor of English

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