

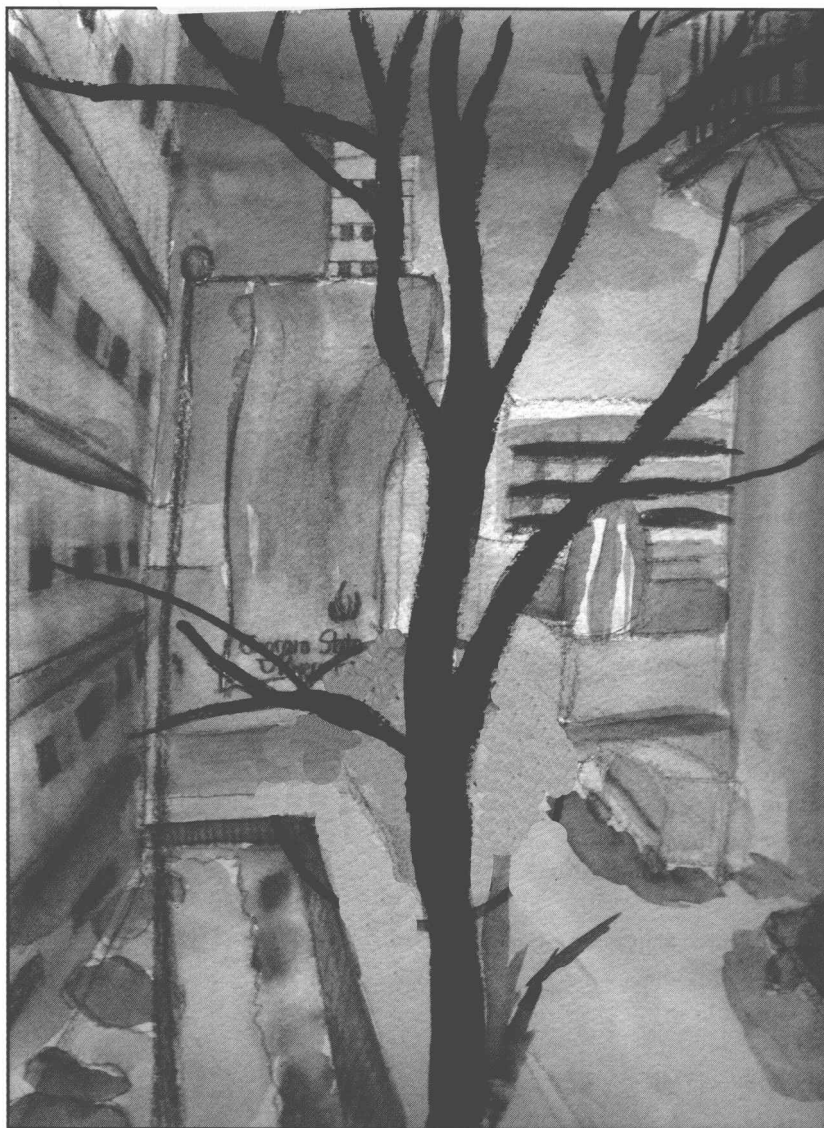


First Essays:

A Peer Approach to Freshman Composition

Georgia State University • Department of English

Fall 2007 - Summer 2008



FIRST ESSAYS *A Peer Approach to Freshman Composition*

Georgia State University • Department of English
Fall 2007–Summer 2008



Copyright © 2008 by Marti Singer, Georgia State University.

All rights reserved.

Permission in writing must be obtained from the publisher before any part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by an information storage or retrieval system.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-0-7380-2437-0

Hayden-McNeil Publishing
14903 Pilot Drive
Plymouth, Michigan 48170
www.hmpublishing.com

Singer 2437-0 F07

Acknowledgements

The third edition of *First Essays: A Peer Approach to Freshman Composition* serves as a resource for students and instructors in composition classes at Georgia State University. Like the previous editions, we have chosen to remove individual names from each student essay and from the peer comments in order to encourage students and teachers to view these essays as samples representative of first essays one might see in a freshman composition classroom.

Many people have contributed to this book of essays, and I wish to acknowledge and thank every one. I especially appreciate the many freshman students and their instructors who submitted essay samples for this text. I received many responses to the call for papers, but we used only eight in this edition. Each year we will ask for samples and update the essays, so I hope that students and instructors will continue to submit writing. The names of students whose essays and excerpts of essays were chosen for this edition are ordered alphabetically and do not reflect the order of the essays in the collection: Stephanie Buchanan, Chris Culwell, Karin Dederig, Robert Fierro, Chanell Heard, Queena Kou, Emilio Rodriguez, and Cindy Tran. Students contributed essays they wrote in their English 1101 course in the Fall semester, 2006–07, with one essay continuing from the 2nd edition.

This project is truly a collaborative effort by an outstanding group of graduate and undergraduate students in the Department of English at Georgia State (see biographies). Each person on the editorial board participated in a variety of ways, from generating ideas, writing copy, editing, designing layout, proofreading, and handling numerous small tasks that were essential for bringing the whole work together. I am especially grateful to Cara Minardi, who served as an associate editor with me, as she oversaw all of the contributions, set up a virtual space for gathering writing, and encouraged the managing editors along the way. I am also particularly appreciative to Tim Blue and Carol Manget-Johnson, the managing editors for this edition, for their kind nudging as we worked through the process of this edition. Each board member shared a vital part individually and collectively to produce a book that became more than a collection of essays. The time-consuming task of editing and proofreading, headed up by Katherine Hyon, was invaluable toward the deadline. I also want to thank Jennifer Castellanos, the cover artist, for her contribution of the watercolor art, along with Tim Flowers from the Art Department, for helping with the art contest. My thanks also to the art committee including photographers Brooke Lucido, Darryn Campbell, Greg Gimpelevish, and Dan Norris for their contributions and to Rachel Courchene who collected photos and artwork in a photo file for this edition.

Finally, I would like to express our appreciation to Andrea Kinney, Mark Kesson, and the design team at Hayden-McNeil Publishing for their patience and help through the process. This project just keeps getting better.

Marti Singer, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
Director of Lower Division Studies
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA

Editorial Board

Tim Blue served as co-managing editor and wrote copy. He is currently working on a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition with a focus in pedagogy. Although he will teach high school English next year at a local school, he aspires to teach at the college level after he completes his degree.

Darryn Campbell participated on the assignment and peer impressions committees, wrote copy, and contributed photos for this edition. He is a post-baccalaureate student who also teaches ESL classes.

Rachel Courchene helped organize the art and photography for this edition. She is a graduating senior and hopes to make a career in publishing.

Abby Gay served on the layout committee for this book. She is a graduate student in English, focusing on Literary Criticism and History. She wants to work in the publishing industry.

Katherine Hyon managed the editing phase of this project. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Creative Writing (Fiction). She hopes to publish prolifically and to teach at the university level one day.

Brooke Lucido participated on the art committee, wrote copy, and contributed photos to this edition. She is currently a senior majoring in Secondary English Education. She plans to teach High School and eventually get her Ph.D. to be able to teach on at the college level.

Carol Manget-Johnson served as co-managing editor and wrote copy for this edition. She is a graduate student in Rhetoric and Composition working on a master's degree in English. She hopes to teach at the university level.

Cara Minardi served as Associate Editor and wrote copy. She is a second-year Ph.D. student in Rhetoric and Composition who has taught at the university level for six years, which she plans to continue after graduation. Cara's research interests include feminism and historiography.

Megan Motlagh wrote and edited copy for this book. She is an undergraduate English major in Rhetoric and Composition. Megan hopes to work in the advertising industry or as an illustrator.

Dan Norris served on the art, assignment, and peer editing committees for this book. He is a Journalism major who hopes to work for a music magazine.

Stacie Norris edited and wrote copy for this book. She is an undergraduate student, majoring in English Education.

Viktoria Ponizhaylo wrote copy for this book. She is an undergraduate English major graduating in May 2007.

Ranjit Tripathi wrote copy for this volume. He is a Film and Video major at the undergraduate level who wants to make films that enrich people's lives.

Sophie Weeks wrote copy and edited parts of this volume. She is a Ph.D. student in Victorian Literature and teaches Composition courses at Georgia State. She wants to teach or work as a French/English translator.

Introduction

You've just written an e-mail home telling your family how great school is going. Before that, you text messaged your friend asking what time everyone would be meeting at the coffee shop this evening. Now you are about to begin writing your essay for class and you freeze. You ask yourself, "How am I supposed to begin the essay? What exactly is my professor expecting my essay to contain?" Does this sound familiar?

We write everyday. We compose lists, e-mails, text and instant messages. We take notes in class and leave notes for our friends. However, learning how to write formal essays can sometimes make writing feel like a daunting exercise. This feeling is most apparent when you are asked to complete writing assignments. One of the concerns you may have is whether you understand exactly what the assignment calls for and what the teacher expects. Textbooks often contain essays written by professional writers to help illustrate the ideal outcome of your assignment; however, even though these essays help you think about issues and get ideas about style, they alone are not always helpful for composing your own ideas early in your college career.

With this thought in mind, we created *First Essays: A Peer Approach to Freshman Composition*. This is a collection of papers that addresses and illustrates one of the things that concerns you most: assignment outcomes. However, these essays are not written by famous authors; they are written by your peers—freshmen at Georgia State University. Because we are an urban university, located in the heart of Atlanta, we chose art and photos that reflect our city and our environment. Some of the pictures and essay ideas reflect our location and our diversity, our growth and our history. Some represent general ideas that many of us know or think about as we try to write—in classes and for ourselves.

For this edition, we have selected eight essays to present as samples of successful assignments. Even though we know that essays come in a variety of forms and modes, with a variety of purposes and forms, this edition of *First Essays* is organized in four sections or Chapters: narration/description, description/exposition, exposition/analysis, and analysis/argument. Our attempt with this organization is to emphasize the blending of modes and purposes that come naturally from our writing. At the same time, we try to break some of these into categories that match the essays we received and potential assignments in English 1101.

Each chapter includes an **Introduction** to the blended type of essay, a sample of a typical **Assignment**, the **Essay** which includes thoughts and questions in the margins, along with some questions for reflection at the end, a **Peer Impression** about the essay written by undergraduates as a response to the student essay, and a chapter **Summary**. For this edition both graduate and undergraduate English majors wrote each part of the chapter apparatus. The essays, of course, are all student-composed from our English 1101 classes.

By far, our primary concern regarding your experience with freshman composition is your success. We hope reading essays written by your peers will give you confidence and help you develop writing assignments into successful essays.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	vii

Chapter One: Narration/Description

Understanding Experience	1
Assignment	3
Student Essay, "My Relationship with Writing"	5
Peer Impression: "My Relationship with Writing"	10
Assignment	11
Student Essay, "In a Land of Forks and Spoons"	13
Peer Impression: "In a Land of Forks and Spoons"	18
Chapter Summary	19

Chapter Two: Description/Exposition

Describing Information	21
Assignment	24
Student Essay, "Starbucks Society"	26
Peer Impression: "Starbucks Society"	31
Assignment	32
Student Essay, "The Rexall"	34
Peer Impression: "The Rexall"	38
Chapter Summary	39

Chapter Three: Exposition/Analysis

Analyzing Information	41
Assignment	44
Student Essay, "Feeling the Illinoise"	46
Peer Impression: "Feeling the Illinoise"	52
Assignment	53
Student Essay, "A Nation in a Hurry"	55
Peer Impression: "A Nation in a Hurry"	59
Chapter Summary	61

Chapter Four: Analysis/Argument

Synthesizing Meaning..... 63

 Assignment 65

 Student Essay, “System Failure”67

 Peer Impression: “System Failure” 72

 Assignment 73

 Student Essay, “Truth in Advertising?” 75

 Peer Impression: “Truth in Advertising?” 84

 Chapter Summary 85

CHAPTER 1 NARRATION/DESCRIPTION



Antique. Photographer: Brooke Lucido

Understanding Experience

Narrative writing involves organizing events in order to portray an experience to an audience. It not only recounts events or experiences, but it also presents them in a way that the reader understands the significance of these events. The type of narrative writing you will see in this chapter, and writing you will probably engage in yourself, is often referred to as “personal narrative.” Writing a personal narrative asks you to look at experiences from your own past and organize them in a way that helps the reader to better understand how these experiences have influenced your own life and personal growth. Your purpose here is to expose your experience and let your reader know how certain events shaped you.

In this chapter, we will discuss and view examples of how we can purposefully use descriptive writing to move an audience through an experience with us, while showing the importance that experience has had in our life, instead of just telling what happened. It is important to keep your audience, as well as your purpose, in mind while you are writing. Be careful not to assume that your audience will be able to “see” in their mind’s eye what it is you are trying to illustrate. You’ll want your audience to sense each detail you share in the narrative that makes your experience unique. This is where your ability to describe—to show and not just tell—will play a key role in helping to communicate your message.

As we well know, time moves in a linear fashion. However, when recounting events to others, our minds loop back to different moments, scanning our memories for little snapshots of truth that will help us to gain perspective. In narrative writing, you can organize chronologically, using clear transitions and relaying the importance of an incident at the end of your essay. On the other hand, actually showing the “looping back” that occurs within our minds gives the reader a unique point of view. Starting at a point other than the beginning and using flashbacks to “show” the readers the incident, is an effective technique that will give you the opportunity to break away from the five paragraph format you may be accustomed to. Flashbacks, as well as proper use of foreshadowing, allow you to be creative enough to hold your audience’s attention, a very important part of any good essay.

One of the challenges you might face while writing is getting your audience to see your experiences as vividly as you do. They will not be familiar with the people, places, and events you describe. Therefore, writing descriptively is imperative to creating a convincing narrative. Your audience will not see the importance of what you are writing if they do not believe what they read. The best way to understand something is to feel and experience it for yourself. Obviously, your audience cannot actually relive your experience with you, so you must give them the next best thing: vivid memories. The point is to submerge them as deeply as possible in sensory description so that reading your written account of a situation is like being there. What did you see, smell, taste, or touch? It is your job to describe, for instance, how a pear tastes, so that while reading, your audience should be able to see the firm, spotted brown skin and taste the grainy sweetness on their own tongues. You should try your best to pay attention to sensory qualities so that you may capture the essence of any place, object, or feeling. How one translates real life images and experiences into a written form gives an interesting glimpse into how that person experiences life. Show your audience everything they need to see to understand your point, but don’t lose your purpose in the description.

In this chapter, you are not only aiming to write a beautiful description of something, but you also have a purpose. Your purpose for this narrative is to share what you discover about yourself or your life through examination of a single event. Staying true to your experience, describing it in a way that invites the reader to live in your shoes for a few minutes, and of course, showing why it’s important to the reader (and yourself!), will help you succeed in writing a powerful narrative.

Assignment for “My Relationship with Writing”

Purpose

Your purpose for this assignment is to write a short essay describing yourself as a writer. After reflecting truthfully, you should describe the results of that examination to your instructor and your peers.

Objectives

- Engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics (brainstorming, for example), gathering evidence, considering audience, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading.
- Use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences.
- Produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations.
- Reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work.

Assignment

Reflecting upon where you were, where you are now, and where you are going as a writer will help you understand how your writing skills have changed over the years. For this assignment, you should view yourself through two lenses: first, describe how you move through your own writing process—how do you typically work on your writing assignments? What steps do you take from invention to actually writing your papers? Then, explain how you see yourself as a writer in terms of your past experiences (hindrances, disappointments, challenges, successes, confidence) and the goals that you aspire to in the near future (improvements, plans). You might take some creative license in the way you present your information. Perhaps you will choose to organize your essay chronologically, or you may find other organizational patterns more effective. In addition, if you believe that your development as a reader has played an important role in your development as a writer, you may want to interweave important moments from your reading history into your writing development if doing so strengthens your essay. Make sure that your tone and word choice are appropriate for your intended audience.

Requirements

3–5 pages in length

MLA Format:

- 1" margins top, bottom, left and right; left justified
- Name block includes your name, your instructor's name, the class (English 1101) and the date
- Header should be ½" from the top right margin and include your last name and page number
- The entire document should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times New Roman font

4 Narration/Description

Assessment

Your paper will be evaluated on the quality of the following:

- Thesis
 - Development of ideas
 - Organization
 - Mechanics
 - Usage and punctuation
 - MLA format
-

Student's Last Name 1

Student Name

Professor Name

English 1101

Date

My Relationship with Writing

My relationship with writing is one that is hard to live with and just as hard to understand. Writing and I have been acquainted for quite some time and have a very extensive history together. However, at the present moment, we are not on good terms. We have not been for a very long time. Whenever someone asks me why we associate only when necessary, I freeze up. My eyes glass over. Remembering the days when we went so harmoniously together fills me with bitter resentment for what we could have now. I do not think that anyone knows just how painful our split was for me. Usually, I do not like to relive “the big breakup” between the two of us, but this time I will make an exception.

Our relationship began at a very early stage in my life. I was young and naïve when Writing caught my attention. He was so flashy and smooth. I loved the way words flowed when we were together. I also loved how we could get lost in each other for hours at a time. Writing was perfect for me; however, I did not feel this way initially.

Reading, my first love, formally introduced us. It has come to my understanding that Reading and Writing are a package deal. In order to love one you must love the other, or at least be accepting of the other. Reading did not like that fact that I never wanted to do anything that involved his other half. If Writing was involved in an activity, I always opted out. This confused Reading completely. He asked me countless times why I did not want to understand Writing better. I could not bring myself to tell Reading that I was afraid. Writing scared me.

Writing and I had always been aware of each other's presence, but we had never acknowledged each other face-to-face. We were two separate entities and I was very wary of him. I thought that he was too flamboyant and much too

What literary device does the writer use in the introduction?

At this point the writer has discussed aspects of her relationship to both Reading and Writing. Do you find the discussion of this "love triangle" helpful to the essay's message, or should the writer stick with a discussion of Writing by itself?

complicated to comprehend. I had seen him boggle the minds and break the spirits of my older siblings and friends. I did not want to be hurt in the same way. However, much to Reading's enjoyment and to my own displeasure, my attraction towards Writing grew. As the three of us became closer a new world began to open up to me. At this point in my life, I had no idea of how important Writing was going to be. All that I knew was that I wanted more of what he had to offer. I wanted to know more.

Ravenously, I began to write any chance that I got. The more that I read other authors' works the more that I wanted to write stories of my own. Of course, this meant that Writing and I spent countless hours together. Honestly, I do not believe that I was in love with Writing at the time. Hindsight provides clarity and I realize that I was only infatuated. I knew little of Writing and how selfish he could be. How unfair and demanding he could be with my time was of no issue to me. I enjoyed Writing's company. Having him around meant stability. Knowing that I was sacrificing the best years of my childhood was of little consequence. It did not matter that I had become socially withdrawn and rarely hung out with my friends anymore. I had Writing and Writing had me.

Fast forward four years into the future and our relationship is still going strong. I am, by this time, completely enamored by Writing. We had accomplished so much together. I won my first essay contest and scholarship. Without him, that never could have been possible. In school, we were inseparable. Writing essays had become customary for middle school students and I aced every one. I felt like Writing and I had become so accomplished that we could put assignments off until the day before they were due. This generally worked. My skills with Writing were so far above everyone else's that the teacher never seemed to notice when I did a rushed job. At least, I did not think that she did. Boy, was I wrong about that.

I suppose that my flirtation with laziness began to bother Writing. Writing did not like that we no longer spent hours and hours together. The cracks in our relationship did not begin to show for a long time. In fact, they did not show

Student's Last Name 3

until I wrote my first paper in high school. Had I been paying close attention to our relationship, I could have easily seen this coming.

Progress forward two more years through high school. I am thoroughly enjoying myself. I have made new friends and learned how to balance my time. I do not write anywhere near as much as I used to. Writing is still a big passion in my life, but he is not my main one anymore. I had given my heart to other activities such as painting and photography. I gave a substantial amount of my time to my friends as well. As a result, my writing skills began to atrophy from lack of use. I earned my very first 'C' paper. I was aghast. When I received the paper all that I could do was stare at it. How was it that I received a 'C'?

At one point, I had been so far ahead of my peers that I was untouchable. Now, I apparently had fallen behind. I felt like I was a failure and that Writing had let me down. My heart began to harden. I spent less and less time focusing on Writing and put more effort into other endeavors. Every paper that I received after that only made matters worse between Writing and me. I no longer made 'A's on my papers. Everything that I got back was a 'B' or lower. Much to Reading's discontent, I vowed to never spend more time with Writing than absolutely necessary from that day on.

My extreme lack of enthusiasm towards Writing is visible even now in college. I simply do not like to write anymore. My fingers no longer itch to pick up a pen and scratch things out on paper. My heart does not belong to Writing anymore.

When I am assigned an in-class essay, I attempt to prolong the inevitable for as long as possible. I do not plan or brainstorm. I stare at my desk, the chalkboard, my pencil and my teacher. I never seem to focus. Reuniting with Writing is always painfully heart-wrenching for me. It is always so awkward. There are many times when I would rather fail the assignment than begin doing it. Failing is unacceptable to me, so I always do what needs to be done, perhaps a little begrudgingly, but assignments are always finished.

Note how the writer has shifted from a romantic description to an academic one. Does this throw you off as a reader, or does she transition successfully?

Now the writer begins to answer the essay prompt more explicitly. How does she make the shift? Is it successful?

This writer has a unique and engaging voice. How does the writer's romantic metaphor contribute to her voice?

As far as having a writing process, I do not have one that can be easily explained. Writing and I were once so in sync that I never really had to brainstorm for any ideas. I read the essay prompt and kept all of the ideas for the paper in my head until I could jot them down on paper. I still do the same thing, but ideas are in very short supply for me now. I have to be truly inspired to write what is considered a good essay. I also have to be willing to compromise my vow a bit. That rarely happens though.

When I look back on how things once were between Writing and me, I become nostalgic. I think that we could have reconciled had I not been so stubborn and hard headed. I really felt like I deserved at least a 'B' on my ninth grade paper, but I should not have allowed for a grade to tear us apart. I was so stupid. Maybe it is my writing process, or a lack thereof, that has been hindering us from growing close again. It could be the bittersweet feelings towards what Writing and I once had together. Maybe I *should* start spending more time writing. It seems as though we are going to be together for a long time. We may as well forgive, forget, and get along.