

# Letter from the Director of Writing

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Dear Composition Student:

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Fresh Voices*, a collection of writing that represents the effort, commitment, and talent of last year's English 134 students. While enrolled in the very course you are taking right now, over one hundred and fifty of last year's students submitted their work to be considered for publication in this collection. While the selection committee (which is comprised of English 134 instructors) only accepted nineteen essays to be included here, we were fortunate to have had many ambitious and dynamic pieces from which to choose.

However, we do not present these essays to you because they earned "As" (frankly, we don't know what grades these essays received) or because they are perfect. Rather, the essays featured in the collection are typical of the intellectual engagement encouraged in Cal Poly's writing classes. We value the work of these writers because they took sophisticated approaches to the same assignments you are likely to meet in your English 134 course. In effect, our intention is not for you to imitate these essays. Your English 134 instructor will have designed a unique approach to these assignments, and you may not see an essay that perfectly fits the task you are being asked to complete. The editors' notes that precede each essay are intended to guide you as you read. I suggest reading each essay in this collection with an eye toward your own writing. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from students who have successfully completed English 134?" The essays featured here will offer you new ways to consider your own writing, perhaps in terms of how to craft an introduction, how to integrate quotations, or even how to develop and support your essay's thesis.

At the end of the collection, you will also find some basic information about writing at Cal Poly, including information about the University Writing and Rhetoric Center, the Graduation Writing Requirement, and advice that could help you succeed in your composition course. I also encourage you to become familiar with the "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism" section. And finally, at the end of collection, you will find information for submitting your own work for consideration in next year's *Fresh Voices*.

As the Director of Writing at Cal Poly, my job is to ensure that you receive progressive and innovative approaches to writing instruction. Indeed, one of Cal Poly's stated University Learning Objectives (ULO) is "effective communication," which means that you will be honing your writing skills throughout your Cal Poly career. You will soon find that writing at the college level requires you not only to perfect the skills you have been building throughout your educational career, but also to develop new approaches to writing that you have not considered previously.

In my experience directing the writing program and teaching English 134, I have noted that students who stick with their old methods of writing—despite what they are learning in the class—tend to struggle the most in the course. In other words, take advantage of the opportunity to revise; spend time with your instructor's carefully considered feedback; dismiss the notion that you "write" best under the pressure of time constraints; and be prepared to receive assessments of your writing that are different in tone and purpose than the feedback you received in high school. For instance, you will be asked to write essays that do not follow

the five-paragraph structure—or other formulaic approaches to writing—you may have encountered in high school. Instead, you will be held accountable for the choices you make as a writer. You will be expected to select an organizational strategy that suits your topic, to use language and punctuation that most effectively conveys your meaning, to address your audience appropriately, and to select essay topics you care about. Perhaps you have been waiting to exercise some control over your own writing. I suspect that you will find a space to make effective rhetorical choices in English 134.

The selection committee and I welcome you to composition at Cal Poly!

Dr. Brenda M. Helmbrecht  
Director of Writing  
Department of English