

Writing in English 134

While each section of English 134 has the instructors' unique approach to teaching writing embedded within the curriculum, these sections still tend to follow a basic template, thereby ensuring that each section meets the same goals. While the papers you write in your course may not be exactly the same as the assignments described below, you will likely be writing papers that are very similar in focus and approach. Rather than arranging *Fresh Voices* according to these assignments, as we have done in the past, you will see that the essays are grouped together by theme. We believe this arrangement points to the creative ways in which English 134 instructors approach these standard assignments.

Sequence I: Your Writer's History

This essay is often written during the first week of English 134—although some instructors require students to revisit and revise it again at the end of the quarter. In these essays, students reflect on their experiences as writers, drawing attention to the importance of developing a writing process, the challenges of writing, and the sense of accomplishment they experience after recognizing their development as writers. You may find yourself nodding in agreement as you read these essays because you may have had similar experiences in your own “writer’s history.” Ultimately, these students are assessing their own abilities as writers so they can better understand the work they have before them in English 134. Please note that these essays go beyond just telling a story: they each have a discernable focus and a goal. As you read, consider your own experiences with writing. How did you become the writer you are today? What challenges will you face as you develop your skills now that you are writing for a college audience?

Sequence II: Profiling a Person, Place, or Event

For the profile sequence, instructors select a theme—such as the environment, media, local culture—and ask students to interview people who work within this area, while others simply ask students to use this assignment to become better acquainted with an aspect of someone’s life, a well-loved place, or even social trends. For many instructors, conducting an effective interview is essential for this sequence because your interviewee’s vantage point needs to be fully depicted. You will need to devise provocative questions that allow your subject to give fully developed responses. But remember, this essay is created and shaped by you. In other words, your profile subject needs to speak *with* you as a writer, not *for* you.

You will find that this assignment challenges you to synthesize multiple texts and viewpoints: including your analytic response to your interviewee’s work, the interview itself, and, when appropriate, your own experiences and responses. In addition, you must account for and write to an audience that does not have knowledge of your essay’s subject matter. In other words, you need to present your own “insider’s perspective” about the profile subject.

In each of the profile essays included in this volume of *Fresh Voices*, students carved out distinctive approaches to the assignment—approaches that permitted them to explore exceptional elements found in cultures surrounding them. As you read these essays, note the ways in

which the writers attempt to allow the profiles' subjects to teach you about the talents of their family members (whether weaving or snapping photos), about activities in which they have a personal interest (including DJ-ing and sword fighting), and about their chosen vocations (such as joining a Buddhist monastery).

Sequence III: Public Rhetoric and Argumentation

For this sequence, students choose a public issue and write a persuasive essay supporting their viewpoint. The authors explore their subjects, often in terms of their life experiences, and address the concerns of those who hold different positions. Though the persuasive essays in this book cover a broad range of topics—including stem cell research, music in education, sustainability, and video gaming—the authors have a personal stake in their chosen topic, an important component which can bring energy to any persuasive essay. Some of the writers propose a vision of the world they would like to see in the future.

You will soon learn that a well-written and fully-supported argument requires you to conduct research both to support your own claims and to fairly depict opposing viewpoints. You will also learn to use the rhetorical appeals of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (defined below) to persuade and connect with your chosen audience. Regardless of the topic you choose, it's generally best to select a focus that matters to *you*, something you want to understand better. Moreover, try not to approach your topic with a firmly held point-of-view. Rather, as you conduct research and learn about your topic, your position may shift. Rhetorical inquiry and engagement requires this kind of flexibility.

The Three Rhetorical Appeals

Throughout your English 134 course, you will encounter three rhetorical concepts that may be new to you: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. We have borrowed these terms from Aristotle, who long ago argued that every writer who wants to address his or her audience effectively must account for these concepts. If, when writing an essay, you forget to consider how to best communicate with and persuade your reader, your essay may not be deemed successful.

So when writing, keep these three concepts in mind:

***Ethos*: Credibility**

When we use this term, we are simply talking about credibility. In other words, writers must develop a strong *ethos* in their essay in order for readers to regard the argument as credible. Audiences are most persuaded by writers who have the knowledge to write intelligently about a given subject, and audiences trust writers who present information accurately and fully. On the other hand, they don't trust writers who leave out relevant information or who don't work with reliable sources. For instance, if a writer continually relies on web pages with no clear authors or publication dates, the argument may not be convincing. However, if a writer uses sources that have a track record of presenting information without a great deal of bias and that promote writers who do trustworthy research, the writer's own *ethos* is increased and the audience is more likely to be persuaded. *Ethos* can also be developed when a writer simply shares a relevant personal experience that gives him/her insider knowledge. So if you want to write an essay about water politics and your family owns a farm that struggles to obtain an adequate

amount of water, it would make sense to share that information in your essay in order to build credibility as a writer. There are many ways to develop your *ethos*—some of them quite subtle. You will study these approaches in your course.

Pathos: Emotion

Writers want their readers to have *some* emotional response to their writing. But, in order to ensure that readers share your emotions when reading your work, you must first attempt to predict the elements that will encourage your readers to engage with your writing on an emotional level. But the question is, *how* do you want the readers to feel? Do you want them to feel anger? Frustration? Sadness? Joy? Do you want them to feel motivated to go out into the world and make changes? How do you get a reader to feel as intensely about a subject as you do? When deciding which words best convey your ideas, keep in mind which words convey emotion. And keep in mind the beliefs and values and other personal attributes that readers respond to emotionally.

Logos: Reason

Though a piece of writing must make some attempt to rely on *pathos*, emotions must still be balanced with logic. *Logos* refers to the entire structure of an argument. Does the argument overall make rational sense? Have you selected the kinds of sources that will encourage your reader to be persuaded by the logic of the argument? Perhaps you will want to look at scientific studies. Perhaps you can find some useful statistics to back up your ideas. But look for smaller ways to build a logical argument. Using language like, “everyone knows . . .” automatically forces the reader to question your logic. After all, is there anything that “everyone knows”? Can you really account for everyone? As you conduct research and structure your essays, keep in mind that audiences like to see information presented rationally and logically.

Using the Appeals Together

Clearly, every effective paper has all three of these elements coursing through it. However, some arguments—depending on their subject and purpose—may require that one appeal be stronger than the other two. For instance, if you are writing an argument about a highly technical subject, you may find yourself relying on *logos* more than *pathos*. Conversely, you can also find support for an argument that relies on all three appeals equally. For instance, you may find a statistic about the harm done to the marine life in the recent Gulf Oil Spill. This one bit of evidence approaches the topic logically (*logos*), makes your reader feel both angry and sad (*pathos*), and, because the evidence is from a good, independent source, helps develop your credibility (*ethos*).