

Letter from the Director of Writing

Dear Composition Student:

Welcome to the second volume 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 of last year's students submitted their work to be considered for publication in this collection. While the selection committee only accepted nineteen essays and three images to be included here, we were fortunate to have had many ambitious and dynamic pieces from which to choose. We selected work without regard for authorship, which is why some students who submitted multiple essays had more than one chosen for publication.

However, it's important to note that we do not present these essays to you because they earned "A's" (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. In effect, our intention is not for you to imitate these essays. Rather, 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. Moreover, your English 134 instructor will likely 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 composition courses at Cal Poly. This year we have also included a list of advice for students enrolled in English 134. In addition, I encourage you to acquaint yourself 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. Thus, you will soon find that writing at the college level requires you not only to hone the skills you have been building throughout your educational career, but also to develop new approaches to writing that you have not considered previously. Your instructor will expect you to work hard and to keep an open mind and a positive attitude. In my experience teaching English 134, students who are committed to their old methods of writing (those who refuse to revise, who do everything at the last minute, or who rest on the praise they may have received in high school) tend to struggle the most in the course. 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. In other words, 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. As you write, never forget the rhetorical situation before you. The relationship between writers, readers, and the essays you compose is complex and must be understood for writing to be effective.

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

Dr. Brenda M. Helmbrecht
Director of Writing
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