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Winner

Fall 2014 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

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The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Friday, December 19. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2014 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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Instructor's name CHRIS HESSELBEIN

Department STS Course # and title STS 1123 LIVING IN A TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

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PEER REVIEW / CONCLUSION WRITING EXERCISE

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature  Date 12-18-14

Peer review / conclusion writing exercise:

Today's peer review exercise will be slightly different than usual. Please take one of the giant Post-It sheets I've provided and glue them over the conclusion of the hard copy of your essay. Make sure that your peer reviewer cannot see the conclusion to your paper. Exchange your essay with that of your peer reviewer.

Read the whole essay very carefully and pay special attention to the introduction. What is the argument put forward? How is this argument presented to the reader in the introduction? What is the evidence provided in the main body to support this argument? More importantly, what are the conclusions that can be drawn from both the introduction and the main body?

Write a conclusion to the essay you've just read. Try to be as specific and convincing as possible based on the argument put forward in the introduction and the evidence provided thereafter.

Once you're done writing your conclusion, remove the Post-It note and reread the entire essay but this time include the original conclusion. How does this conclusion differ from the conclusion you've written? How does the original conclusion match up with the introduction and main body of the text? Look for things that can be improved. The introduction might need to be more focused, or there might be relevant evidence missing in the main body. Also, are the conclusions warranted or could they be more sharply formulated?

When you're both done, return the essay to your peer and read the conclusion he or she has written to your essay. How does it differ from yours? Discuss the differences between the conclusion written by your peer and your own conclusion. Tell your peer how they can improve their conclusion. Again, be as specific as possible. Don't just point out the problem but also offer suggestions for how the problems might be remedied. Needless to say, listen carefully to your peer reviewer's comments and make sure to incorporate them in your next draft.

Rationale

This exercise is meant to achieve two things, namely to provide students with feedback from their peers and to allow them to practice and reflect on the writing of conclusions. Making students write a conclusion based on an essay written by one of their peers forces them to think about the structure that links introduction, main body, and conclusion together. If the transitions between these parts of the text are illogical or difficult to follow, it also becomes harder to write a conclusion. In my experience, a dull or irrelevant conclusion is often the result of problems that haven't been confronted earlier on in the introduction and the main body. Being asked to write a conclusion ensures that students are forced to confront the numerous difficulties that are frequently present in a first draft. Moreover, rather than asking students to simply point out the problems in a draft, writing an alternative conclusion drives students to point out to their peer that important evidence is missing or that their problem statement needs to be more focused. There is, of course, a chance that poor students will write similar conclusions or will be unable to locate the problems in a draft together. For this reason, I think it's a good idea to follow this exercise up with a discussion of the conclusion to a text that you've assigned for that day's class. Alternately, this follow-up exercise could also precede the peer review/conclusion writing exercise. However, I think that performing it as a follow-up exercise works better since students' interest will have been primed and they will be more motivated to learn from a good example.