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WINNER

Fall 2016 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.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing. No undergraduate student's writing will ever be published in this archive.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

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

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Thursday, December 15. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2016 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do **not** staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Cait McDonald

Department EEB Course # and title BIOEE1640: Socially responsible wildlife conservation in a postcolonial world

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna Newton (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Thesis telephone

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature  Date 12/15/16

Constructing a strong thesis¹

Argumentative writing requires that you state a position and make a claim. Typically this main claim, or thesis, will come at the end of your introduction, where it functions to summarize of what you'll be arguing in your paper. Here are some thesis basics (some of which we've discussed before):

Thesis checklist: ask yourself these questions when developing and refining your writing.

1. Is my thesis debatable?
2. Is my thesis specific and narrow?
3. Does my thesis pass the "so what?" test?
(If the reader asks this question, you need to make the significance of your thesis clearer.)
4. Does my thesis pass the "how and why?" test?
(If the reader asks these questions, your thesis may be vague, or it may not provide enough guidance.)
5. Does my essay support my thesis clearly and specifically?

Weak thesis examples:

Not debatable:

There are many diverse ecosystems in sub-Saharan Africa.

Too broad:

Conservation science is a worthy undertaking in the 21st century.

Doesn't pass the "so what?" test:

All proponents of postcolonial theory would agree that Orientalism is a topic of paramount importance.

Doesn't pass the "how and why?" test:

Western conservation initiatives implemented in sub-Saharan Africa are inherently imperialistic.

Identifying a pseudothesis:² even some theses that are well written and that *sound* convincing may actually be flawed. Here are four typical pseudotheses:

1. Summary: avoids real argument, instead provides a summary.
In Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" the author argues that those most marginalized are incapable of gaining power in a hegemonic discourse.
2. Blueprint: treats the thesis as a roadmap for the essay, and while it may be slightly argumentative, it's too neat and leaves no room for nuance.
Kareiva and Marvier make a compelling case for conservation science as a discipline through their extensive use of evidence, their neutral and unbiased tone, and their analysis of prior approaches to conservation biology.
3. Okey-dokey: the thesis is reasonable, but it's *too* reasonable (and thus dull).
Elephant poaching, like many other lucrative black market industries, is rooted in greed and violence.

1. Thesis checklist adapted from The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill's "Thesis statements" handout, <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>.
2. Pseudothesis information adapted from Frank Cioffi's *The Imaginative Argument*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

4. Zany: mistakes 'outlandish' for 'argumentative,' is often ornately written to disguise the lack of argument, and is generally unsupportable.

In Orientalism, the groundbreaking and magnificent treatise on the ills of imperialism, Edward Said predicts unending cultural erasure and global societal annihilation at the behest of the European conqueror-colonist.

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