

Writing Prompts for RWS 100/Cultural Geography LINC
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I created and/or adapted the following prompts for essays I assign in a course entitled Rhetoric and Writing Studies 100: The Rhetoric of Written Argument. What makes these different than my regular prompts for RWS 100 is that I connect them with a Geography 102: Principles of Cultural Geography course taught by Dr. Alan Rice Osborn. Together these classes make up a package in our LINC (Learning in Communities) program, in which students enroll in several courses and professors/lecturers work together to connect their classes thematically in order to enable students to see the crossover possibilities and intertextuality in these disciplines, to write with confidence about the subject matters they are studying, to develop a community of scholars, and "begin to identify with the campus community as the primary site for their intellectual, social, and psychological growth."

My first project, "Prompt #1: Argument Analysis on Barbara Ehrenreich's Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America and Migration" "emphasizes selecting information from a course text, making connections between selected pieces of information and explaining the relationships, and constructing an understanding of the argument," as my colleagues Melody Kilcrease and Ellen Quandahl said when describing the assignment types for RWS 100. Ehrenreich's Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America was my "core text" for my course this semester, one that provided vocabulary that my students were able to use again as they discussed other readings.

RWS 100 and Geography 102 LINC

Jennifer Sager

Fall 2005

Prompt #1: Argument Analysis

Barbara Ehrenreich's Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America and Migration

In our RWS 100 course we have read Barbara Ehrenreich's journalistic exposé, Nicked and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, in which Ehrenreich recounts her attempt to survive in the world of the working poor. The book not only offers an intriguing example of investigative reporting, but also makes a compelling argument.

In the first three sections of the book, "Serving in Florida," "Scrubbing in Maine," and "Selling in Minnesota," Ehrenreich travels to three different locations and describes for readers her experiences working undercover in mostly minimum-wage jobs, often working more than one job at a time. The final section, "Evaluation," presents an argument based on those experiences.

In your Geography 102: Principles of Cultural Geography course you have learned about migration—why people migrate; what push and pull factors affect their decision to move, such as economic, cultural, and environmental concerns; and what obstacles people face when they migrate.

For this assignment, construct an account of the argument that Ehrenreich makes in the final "Evaluation" section of the book, and discuss how migrating to three different locations and using various rhetorical strategies help to serve her argument and to target her intended audience.

To prepare for the paper:

- Consider how you might describe Ehrenreich's audience and her project in regard to this audience.
- What is the argument about and what are Ehrenreich's central claims?
- What assumptions or beliefs about work and success in America might Ehrenreich be seeking to complicate?
- How does Ehrenreich use her rich body of evidence, particularly her experience migrating to several locations, and various rhetorical strategies (ethos, pathos, logos) in order to get the audience to accept her claims?

Criteria for Evaluation

Successful papers will

1. describe Ehrenreich's project and articulate the argument she is making, showing what her central claims are and explaining what accepted notions about work and success in America she is challenging;
2. explain how Ehrenreich uses various kinds of evidence and rhetorical strategies to substantiate her claims and engage readers in thinking about them;
3. use an effective structure that carefully guides the reader from one idea to the next;
4. be thoroughly edited so that sentences are readable and appropriate for an academic paper.

Remember to give your paper a title. Your paper must be at least three *full* pages, but you may write up to five (the Works Cited page does not count toward your paper's length). Essays that do not answer the prompt, are highly disorganized, do not meet the minimum length requirement, and/or contain excessive amounts of sentence-level errors which interfere with logic, such as comma splices, run-ons, and fragments, may receive lower than a C grade.

Since plagiarism is a serious offense with serious consequences (receiving an F for the course and being reported to both the dean and a judicial committee), please document any sources you paraphrase or quote from immediately after you use them within your paper in parenthetical citations. Whichever sources you use in your essay, ones you either quote directly, paraphrase, or borrow ideas from, you should also include in your Works Cited page (the Works Cited page should follow the last page of your paper). If you quote someone, you must put quotation marks around his/her words, in order to distinguish them from your own words and ideas. Refer to your *MLA Handbook* and my handouts for help with MLA format. Proper documentation is crucial so that you are not in danger of plagiarizing someone else's words or ideas. It is tempting to lift

entire papers or little passages from the Internet and book sources, but **do not plagiarize because you will get caught.**

Remember to make 5 copies of your essay for the peer workshop (one for me, one for you to read aloud, and 3 for the others in your group to share).

Submit your essay to www.turnitin.com.

Due Dates

Group A:

Group B:

Group C:

My next project, "Essay #2: Gathering Information and Managing Sources; Andrea R. Fishman, Marjory Reechan, and Janie Rees Miller; Literacy, Linguistics, and Language; Error and Its Social Consequences," "emphasizes the procedures of finding information, citing, and distinguishing between summarizing or reporting and interpreting. It asks students to research two or three specific sources that will illuminate or complicate the argument of a course text" (Kilcrease and Quandahl).

RWS 100 and Geography 102 LINC
Jennifer Sager **Fall 2005**
Essay #2: Gathering Information and Managing Sources
Andrea R. Fishman, Marjory Meechan, and Janie Rees-Miller
Literacy, Linguistics, and Language
Error and Its Social Consequences

Come up with a thesis, or central claim, to answer the following prompt based on one found in Literacies: Reading, Writing, Interpretation 2nd ed. and support it with a multitude of paragraphs. Remember to give your paper a title. Your paper must be at least three *full* pages, but you may write up to five (the Works Cited page does not count toward your paper's length). Essays that do not answer the prompt, fail to meet the minimum length requirement, are highly disorganized, and/or contain excessive amounts of sentence-level errors which interfere with logic, such as comma splices, run-ons, and fragments, may receive lower than a C grade.

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In our RWS 100 course we read about Andrea R. Fishman's social experiment on literacy, in which she compared and contrasted what literacy means to different societies, namely mainstream America and the Old Order Amish.

In your Geography 102 course you learned how languages vary from place to place, that there is a difference between language and dialect, that cultures use their language to express their identity, and that people alter their language based on social situations.

Using Fishman as your inspiration, conduct a social experiment of your own, this time on the fluctuating definition and social consequences of error. Interview at least two people of different occupations, college majors, backgrounds, and ages about their experiences with sentence-level errors (grammar, spelling, and punctuation). Applying the information you cull from these interviews, your own experience with patterns of error, the Fishman book chapter "Becoming Literate: A Lesson from the Amish" from Amish Literacy: What and How It Means, Marjory Meehan and Janie Rees-Miller's "Language in Social Contexts" chapter from O'Grady's Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction 5th edition, and any relevant concepts you learned in your Geography 102 course, come up with a working definition of "error" and discuss its social consequences (201).

When interviewing others and reflecting on your own experiences, ask the following questions:

Do you experience any feelings of alienation because of sentence-level errors? If so, describe what this is like.

How have your struggles with conventions of correctness affected your grades or job? For example, do you get passed over for promotions because you have not mastered punctuation, grammar, and spelling? Do the errors you make overshadow other positive qualities you bring to projects and cause professors or employers to see you as less capable than others who do not make these mistakes?

Do these errors keep you from assimilating into a society you wish to be a part of? Explain.

Do you experience conflicts of culture (school life versus home and/or street life) due to the fluctuating nature of your errors? Do you find that what constitutes an error in one social circle does not always mean an error in another? Elaborate.

Ultimately, do you think of your errors as obstacles to your success, indicators of areas where you need help, tools for learning, idiosyncrasies that make your writing unique, or something else?

Ask your interviewees to define error and discuss its social consequences.

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My third project, "Essay #3: Proposing an Explanation; Schlosser and Spurlock on Globalization," "emphasizes using details, facts, or data in order to propose an explanation of material in course texts." Students will "make an argument about some aspect of course texts or even about how those texts make their arguments" (Kilcrease and Quandahl).

RWS 100 and Geography 102 LINC
Jennifer Sager **Fall 2005**
Essay #3: Proposing an Explanation
Schlosser and Spurlock on Globalization

Come up with a thesis to answer the following and support it with a multitude of paragraphs. Remember to give your paper a title. Your paper must be at least three *full* pages, but you may write up to five.

In your Geography 102: Principles of Cultural Geography course you learned about globalization: "actions or processes that involve the entire world and result in making something worldwide in scope" (Rubenstein 496). An increasing trend is the globalization of economy and culture, in which companies such as McDonald's have become transnational corporations that not only sell their fast food but also spread American culture across the world.

In our RWS 100 course you have read excerpts by two authors who have addressed this issue of globalization: Eric Schlosser in "Global Realization" from his book Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal and Morgan Spurlock in "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad McWorld" from his book Don't Eat This Book: Fast Food and the Supersizing of America.

Propose an explanation about how the readings by these two authors resemble each other, how they differ from one another, and how effective their arguments and strategies are at reaching their intended audiences. You should point out similarities and differences in the authors' arguments, rhetorical strategies (ethos, pathos, logos), use of evidence (facts, statistics, authorities, personal anecdotes, etc.), points of view, writing style, tone, and word choice. Then consider how successful these authors are at conveying their arguments to their readers.

Begin with creating rhetorical précis statements for each author. You need not pit each author against the other, but focus instead on their similarities, differences, and effectiveness at targeting their audiences.

Remember to make 5 copies of your essay for the peer workshop (one for me, one for you to read aloud, and 3 for the others in your group to share).

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My fourth project “emphasizes using the methods or terminology of one writer as a lens through which to view, inquire into and write arguments about other material.” The course description for RWS 100 reads, “By the end of the semester, students should begin to understand—through practice—ways in which the work of one author may be used as a frame for interpreting and writing about the work of another author or about their own experiences and observations. Because this activity is fundamental to sustained inquiry or research, it forms a bridge between RWS 100 and 200.”

RWS 100 and Geography 102 LINC

Jennifer Sager Fall 2005

Essay #4: Reading in New Contexts

The Wizard of Oz, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, Wicked Folk Culture vs. Popular Culture

In our RWS 100 course we watched scenes from the Victor Fleming film The Wizard of Oz (1939), read selections from the books The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900) and Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (1995), and listened to the soundtrack and watched scenes from the musical Wicked (2003).

In your Geography 102 course you learned about folk culture and popular culture. According to James M. Rubenstein, in his textbook The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography, folk culture “is primarily practiced by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas,” while popular culture “is found in large, heterogeneous societies that share certain habits despite differences in other personal characteristics. In addition, as Rubenstein explains, “folk culture is more likely to vary from place to place at a given time, whereas popular culture is more likely to vary from time to time at a given place” (105).

Using one or more of the different types of literary theories listed below as your lens, analyze a particular moment in two stories—one that is more like a traditional folk tale and the other that is more like a popular culture version of that same tale. Be as specific in your critical thinking as possible. For example, instead of tracing a character’s arc throughout the course of the book, film, or musical, try to focus primarily on the certain chapter or moment you choose as being particularly significant.

Come up with a thesis, or central claim, that addresses the similarities and differences about the two stories, and support it with a multitude of paragraphs (avoid five-paragraph essays, please). Speculate about the factors to which you attribute the changes in the elements of the story. You

will have to do some research on each story and author in order to fully understand how they are alike and different. Please locate at least one outside source to bring into your discussion.

Make sure you both compare and contrast the stories, and choose just a few topics to discuss, instead of everything you can think of. Steer away from plot summary, since that requires little critical thinking, and focus instead on analyzing such elements as the pictures, settings, character development, moral of the story, qualities of folk versus popular culture, etc.

Choose one or more of the following theories, or select another (with my prior approval):

Formalist	Sociological	Queer
Biographical	Reader-response	Gender
Psychological	Deconstructionist	Cultural
Mythological	Historical	

Choose one of the following stories in both folk and popular culture form, or locate your own (with my prior approval):

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (book)

The Wizard of Oz (film)

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (book)

Wicked (musical)

Cinderella (Brothers Grimm)

Cinderella (Disney)

Cinderella Skeleton

The Slipper and the Rose

Cinderella (Mexican)

The Little Mermaid (Clark)

The Little Mermaid (David)

The Little Mermaid (Disney)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Disney)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Brothers Grimm)

Cymbeline

The Five Chinese Brothers

The Seven Chinese Brothers

Jane Eyre

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Little Red Riding Hood (American)

Little Red Riding Hood (Chinese)

The following are examples of specific ways to apply each theory to the stories:

Formalist: form, structure of the works themselves

Biographical: Baum and Maguire's lives and how their personal experiences impacted their writing

Psychological: psychoanalytical profiles of one of the characters or of Baum or Maguire himself

Mythological: comparing characters or situations in the story to mythological figures

Historical: what was going on at the time in history that may have inspired parts of the stories

Sociological: class struggles between characters at a certain point in the stories

Reader-response: how your first reading of a particular moment in the stories differed from your second reading and why

Deconstructionist: breaking down the meaning of the titles of the works as they pertain to the events within or outside of the stories

Queer: how Elfabia and Glinda in Maguire's book and musical have a more compelling love story with each other than either of them has with Fiyero, while the witches in Baum's book and the film version have more of a rivalry

Gender: the different expectations of men and women in the stories

Cultural: differences in cultural mores between one story and another

Remember to give your paper a title. Your paper must be at least four *full* pages, but you may write up to seven (the Works Cited page does not count toward your paper's length). Essays that do not answer the prompt, are highly disorganized, do not meet the minimum length requirement, and/or contain excessive amounts of sentence-level errors which interfere with logic, such as comma splices, run-ons, and fragments, may receive lower than a C grade.

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My final project, "Prompt for Essay #5: Final In-Class Semester Reflection," "emphasizes metadiscourse, especially language about one's own language and writing; it asks students to review their own papers as texts which they can now discuss" (Kilcrease and Quandahl).

RWS 100

Jennifer Sager

Fall 2005

Prompt for Essay #5: Final In-Class Semester Reflection

Select an essay you worked on early in the semester and an essay from late in the semester. Compare these two texts to determine your development as a writer. Give specific examples from the early and late writing samples to support your claims.

While reflecting on this central focus, also answer the following questions:

---What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

---What patterns of error and recurring writing problems do you notice in your essays? Do you know how to correct these errors? If so, explain. If not, why not?

---What comments did your peers make regarding your patterns of error and recurring writing problems? Did you incorporate these ideas into the revision process? Why or why not? If certain peers were particularly helpful, please mention their names.

---What comments did I make regarding your patterns of error and recurring writing problems? Did you incorporate these ideas into the revision process? Why or why not?

---What areas of your writing do you feel still need improvement (organization, development, use of evidence to support your claims, answering the prompt, transitions, sentence structure, word choice, style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.)?

---Has your ability increased in any area?

---What suggestions do you have for improving the course?

Come up with a thesis, or central claim, for this reflection and structure it as you would any essay for this class, with an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. **Make sure to answer every part of the prompt.** Give your essay a title, include a heading and header/page numbers, double space it, only write on one side of the page, and use MLA format. Writing a five-paragraph essay is acceptable, but simply reflecting aimlessly with no introduction, thesis, supporting paragraphs, or conclusion is not. You may use your essays (the ones your peers and I commented on and I graded), a dictionary, a thesaurus, and your RWS 100 Reader: The Rhetoric of Written Argument. You may write in first person point of view (I, me, my) and refer to me as "you." Please be specific and honest.

Thanks for a great semester and good luck!

---Jennifer Sager