

*Student Self-Assessment of Writing*  
*in a First-Year Writing Course*

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A Presentation for the LSA Assessment Symposium

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## First-Year Seminar:

### Writing Assignment No. 1

Due: Monday September 8



In a short paper (of approximately 2-3 **TYPED pages**), evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your own writing. I also want you to think about what excites you about writing (and what you dread). Please discuss the following in your essay:

- How did you learned to write? What have you been told about your writing? What activities did you find effective for improving your writing? What courses were particularly helpful?
- What kind of writing do you enjoy and do well; what kind of writing do you find particularly difficult?
- What do you consider to be the best thing you ever wrote? Why was this piece so successful?
- Finally, set some personal goals/objectives for improving your writing during the term. Try to be as specific as possible.

Sample student excerpts:

*Nothing in particular excites me about writing; in fact I do not enjoy it much. I would rather be in a discussion and present my ideas and evidence orally.*

*Now all of this leads me to what I believe are my greatest weaknesses in writing. The content of the paper has always been where I have focused my attention. I sometime become so involve in the content, that I ignore the technical aspects of my papers. While I understand that these are just as important as the content itself, I have less enjoyment in this part of paper writing so I begin to let easy mistakes happen. The most common error I make is to not capitalize the letter I when referring to myself for instance. My greatest weakness truly is my lack of ability to self edit my papers. Once I feel satisfied that my ideas and content are in the paper, I lose interest and do not want to go back and improve the flow, the feel, and basically the grammar of my essay.*

*Since I tend to do things very last minute, the method of writing multiple drafts of a paper over a long period of time does not come easily to me. I've often found myself spitting ideas onto the paper with no time left to organize them. Consequently, though I am able think of good idea on a subject, my writing can end up wordy and scattered.*

*Another thing I would like to work on more during this class is improving the quality of my introductions and conclusions. It generally takes me a very long time to get started writing a paper and often it is because I can't make a good enough introduction to go with the rest of my paper. This is also the case when it comes to writing conclusions. I feel there is some magical way to wrap up what I've been saying, and I just fail to ever find it.*

*Specifically, I believe the areas in which I need the most help are in word choice, organization of thoughts, and editing. Although many tell me I am a great writer and possess great ideas, the same goes for nearly any student that attends the University of Michigan. In order to truly attain my potential, I must understand how to truly pick the perfect word for a situation, instead of merely picking one out of the mass of them floating around inside my brain. Through truly analyzing what it is I am trying to say and by spending more time on my writing, I feel I will improve in this aspect. Also, I tend to be slightly repetitive in my writing as well as overcomplicated.*

## First-Year Seminar:

### Writing Assignment No. 2

Due: Monday, September 15

One common form of college-level writing is the *comparison/contrast essay*, in which the task is to discuss the similarities and differences between two or more texts. When constructing such an essay, one can draw upon a large number of potential subjects for comparison, including thesis, theme, writing style, point of view, imagery, mood, and characterizations. The choice of which specific comparison(s) to make is often the most difficult task in organizing the essay.

**What *is* love?** Is love an idea, a feeling, a behavior, a habit, a joy, a curse? Select two or three pieces from the six first-day poems and the five short stories that we've read and write a brief essay (around three pages) that compares/contrasts what the texts seem to be saying about the nature of love. [You should begin by carefully re-reading the texts you choose to write about.] Whenever appropriate, use specific examples or quotes from the texts to support your statements. Try to carefully distinguish your *description* of the texts (the texts *say* this...) from your *interpretation* of the texts (the texts *mean* this...). Make sure you defend any interpretations by referring to actual text!

Furthermore, you might want to begin (or end) your essay by considering why anyone would be interested in defining love? What are the challenges involved in this effort? Is it possible to think about *love* as an idea separate from specific people one has loved or been loved by? In other words, love is certainly personal (and so different for different people), but it is *merely* personal?

**Remember you just wrote a short piece evaluating your own writing in which you set some writing goals for the semester. Select a single, specific goal from that list and keep it in mind while writing. On a separate page attached to this essay, write a paragraph or two that indicates the goal that you worked on with this essay, and evaluate your success.**

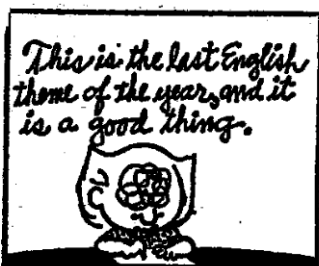
Also, don't forget the "eleven simple writing tips"!

## First-Year Seminar:

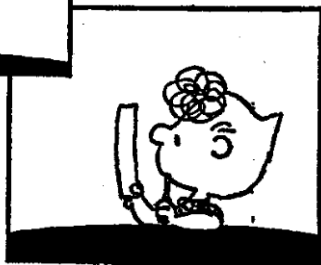
### Final Writing Assignment !!!

Due: Monday, December 8 (the last day of class)

I promised you a whirlwind tour of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, all in the name of Love (romantic, sacred, or profane). I hope you are able to look back over the semester and re-trace all the connected highways and byways that our love tour traversed. This course was never about acquiring specific knowledge (or solving anyone's personal problems!), but I did want to create lasting impressions, explore new perspectives, and challenge past notions. *"The journey itself is the answer, and the best answer we have."*



You began the semester with a *personal essay*—your writing history and writing goals—and I'd like to return to the same genre as we conclude the semester....



What have you learned this semester? What have you learned about love, about different perspectives across the disciplines, about your own academic interests?

Did you meet your writing goals for the term? You've probably written between 32 and 40 pages of text over the semester, with at least one revised essay. Not bad for one semester. A good start to what will await you in your future courses here at UM. In what ways has your writing—or your beliefs and behaviors surrounding your writing—changed? What new writing goals do you wish to pursue after this semester?

Sample student excerpts:

*After this semester, I hope to refine my writing skills even further. Specifically, I believe that I need to proofread better, I just miss so many things sometimes! And that is inexcusable! So I'll work on that I swear! Also, I aspire to articulate exactly what I mean in a more precise and less wordy manner—this is something I have always had a problem with. But practice makes (almost) perfect!*

*In terms of my writing in this class, I think my organizational skills have improved over the course of the semester. A very useful tip from my Professor, which has helped to refine the organization of my papers, is that the order in which I set up my ideas in my thesis is how I should proceed in writing the rest of the paper. In following this advice, my transitions have become more explicit, and therefore my writing is clearer and has more fluidity. I have also strayed away from the traditional “five-paragraph essay.” My introductions are always longer than a paragraph in order to lure in the reader and set up the topic of my paper adequately.*

*My behavior regarding editing and proofreading also changed significantly over the semester. I have begun to proofread at least two to three times before I submit my work. As a part of this proofreading I now look for and correct grammatical problems that before I may have missed out of either laziness or ignorance. I have become a much better editor of my own work.... Another difference in my writing behavior is that I no longer wait until the night before a paper is due to begin editing my writing as I often did in high school. I now give myself at least a day or two after the rough draft is done to proofread, edit, expand, and craft my papers in the most finished form I possibly can.*

*As far as my writing goals are concerned, I feel that the writing prompts guided me to take a deep look into the texts in which we read and write in a way which I never have before. This class has allowed me to expand my writing skills, although there is always room for growth and improvement. A major problem I had with my writing was having too many ideas for a paper and trying to include all of those. By limiting myself to one or two topics, I have been able to explore my ideas in a much deeper fashion, rather than just skimming over all the topics I wanted to include. I would still like to continue to work on this so that my writing may have a richer meaning to it.*