Sample Assignment: Comparison Paper

Does language unify or divide us? Consider how two authors in this section might answer this question, given the views they’ve expressed in the essays included here. Explain how their views coincide with or differ from your own answer to this question. In this comparison, you have two pairs to work with: your two authors and the potential of language to unify or divide. You also have your own views on how language unifies or divides to consider. We will talk in class about how to organize the comparison—it will have to be more than a laundry list of similarities and differences. You will have to pick the comparative points that seem most important to you, the ones that help you answer the question.

Grades: Comparison Assignment

A-range The comparison offered insight into the way language can unify or divide us. The writer clearly explained the views of her authors and related them effectively to her own. The writer chose apt quotations from the texts and incorporated them smoothly into her own discussion. There were no technical errors.

B-range The comparison offered some good observations on language, although some of its points may have been underdeveloped. The views of the authors were presented accurately. The writer may not have related them to her own views on language. The quotations were relevant. In some cases, they may have been offered awkwardly or without enough context. There were only minor technical errors.

C-range The comparison failed to focus specifically on the way language unifies or divides. It may have offered very general observations, merely summarized the texts, or veered entirely into personal experience. The writer might have had problems understanding some of her authors’ points. Quotations may have been irrelevant or dropped into the paper without signal phrases. Technical errors were either frequent or distracting.

D-range This essay lacked any comparative points. And the writer had significant difficulty with reading comprehension. Quotations were irrelevant, misunderstood, or not used. There were probably serious technical problems—for example, basic grammatical errors.

* From UCLA Teach 2 Write guide, http://write.oid.ucla.edu/5-grade/rubrics
The following rubric describes levels of competence in completing an essay on a history exam or homework assignment other than a research paper. Levels correspond roughly to letter grades (4 = A, 1 = F), although criteria will vary somewhat depending upon the nature and level of the class.

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<th>Level</th>
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| 4     | • Well-developed thesis directly addressing the topic.  
       | • Persuasive analysis of the topic, addressing all parts of the topic; analysis demonstrates thorough understanding of all sides of a question (as appropriate).  
       | • Outstanding grasp of general historical issues raised by topic.  
       | • Numerous specific examples demonstrate detailed knowledge of relevant history.  
       | • Extremely well organized, with a clear introduction, argument, and conclusion.  
       | • Well written in appropriate standard English; few, if any, grammatical errors or colloquialisms. |
| 3     | • Clear thesis addressing the topic.  
       | • Good analysis of the topic, addressing most parts of the topic; analysis demonstrates understanding of all sides of a question (as appropriate), though may be unevenly developed.  
       | • Good grasp of general historical issues raised by topic.  
       | • Several specific examples demonstrate good knowledge of relevant history.  
       | • Well organized, with an introduction, argument, and conclusion.  
       | • Clearly written in appropriate standard English; some grammatical errors or colloquialisms. |
| 2     | • Thesis indicates some aspect of the topic; more a restatement of than a point about the topic.  
       | • Analysis of the topic, addressing most parts of the topic; analysis adequate but unevenly developed.  
       | • Some grasp of general historical issues raised by topic, though some significant issues may be omitted.  
       | • Some specific examples demonstrate knowledge of relevant history; some clearly relevant examples omitted.  
       | • Contains at least two of the following: introduction, argument, and conclusion; organization may be somewhat unclear.  
       | • Understandable, but contains several grammatical errors or colloquialisms. |
| 1     | • No discernible thesis and/or serious misunderstanding of the topic.  
       | • Descriptive rather than analytical; marginally related to the topic; significant logical gaps.  
       | • Little grasp of general historical issues raised by topic. |
INSTRUCTION

HOW DO I SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE WRITING PROCESS?

Ultimately, you want to help your students:

* Make compelling arguments
* Follow the writing process
* Become independent writers

A Few Argument Basics

While the structure of arguments or expected evidence may differ from discipline to discipline, there are a few basic elements that cut across most subject areas. Authors of compelling arguments:

*Pose claims vs. discuss topics*
- An example of a topic (a subject area, no clear argument): “caffeine and its relationship to academic performance”
- Meanwhile, “caffeine enhances students’ academic performance” is a claim that takes a debatable stance

*Include a cohesive primary claim (often referred to as a thesis) that is supported by multiple sub-claims*
- A primary claim should be a larger, debatable statement that takes a stance on a topic, such as “universities should invest in coffee shops.”
- Sub-claims, or arguments that would help support the overarching (thesis) statement might include: “coffee shops (and the caffeine within them) benefit
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students academically,” “coffee shops boost student morale, creating a healthier and happier school climate,” “there is a shortage of coffee shop facilities on university campuses”

*Reinforce all sub-claims with relevant, trustworthy evidence
- Sample sub-claim: “coffee shops (and the caffeine within them) can benefit students academically”
- Related evidence: stats about caffeine and alertness, information suggesting a high percentage of students use coffee shops as study space

*Explain the relevance of their evidence. Expert writers avoid “dropping” quotes or statistics into a paper. Instead they explain how any evidence contributes to their claims.
- Sample statistic: 87% of students at UCLA prefer to study in coffee shops rather than their dorm rooms (remember the context: within a paragraph that argues that coffee shops create academic benefits)
- Sample integration: A recent study of undergraduates at UCLA found that 87% of them preferred studying in coffee shops to working in dorm rooms (Starbucks, 2015). Considering that students at UCLA are academically advanced, one might assume that such students’ study habits reflect positive learning behaviors. Accordingly, UCLA students’ preferences for coffee shops suggest that these spaces support academic achievement.

Writing Process 101

What is the writing process? The central idea behind the writing process is that successful writing is not a one-shot deal. We want to help students realize that the 2am throw all your ideas onto a page and hit submit approach rarely yields high quality work. The best writers go through an extended process for drafting and revising their work before it is suitable for submission. The typical steps involved:

1) **Prewriting:** Successful writers brainstorm their ideas before they start writing. There are many strategies different writers use. It may be helpful to guide your students through several prewriting exercises if time permits. A general Google search will yield dozens of potential activities you could try. You can also refer to the handout from the Undergraduate Writing Center, “Getting Started and Overcoming Writer’s Block” (found online at [http://wp.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UWC_handouts_writersblock.pdf](http://wp.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UWC_handouts_writersblock.pdf)).

2) **Planning:** Successful writing is intentional. Outlines or other organizational tools can help writers find the order and logic within their ideas. While students often perceive the outlining process as a waste of time, encourage them to do it. Solid
outlines make the drafting process more efficient and focused. Encourage writers to spend time sifting through their claims and evidence.

3) **Drafting:** First stabs at writing are often messy. That is fine. Drafting is about getting ideas onto paper. Encourage your students to write drafts early to save plenty of time for revising, redrafting, and eventually editing. Also, cheer them on along this process. Some students get “writers block” and freeze up during the drafting phase. Push them to keep getting their ideas down and stress about perfecting them later.

4) **Revising:** After a draft is written, it is time to look at it more critically. The revision stage is when writers reflect on their ideas and structure. It is important to get arguments and evidence sorted before dealing with any sentence-level issues. But what about grammar and word choice? It is better to focus on the big picture first. If arguments or evidence shifts, the perfectly constructed sentence in paragraph three is likely to disappear. Note: this is one of the most common stages in the process where students may come to you seeking help. (Note: successful writers often write several drafts and revise these drafts repeatedly before they move on to the editing phase.)

5) **Editing:** Once a paper’s argument is finalized, it is time for the last stage in the process: sentence level revisions (a.k.a. proofreading). At this stage, writers finally focus on grammar, word choice, and sentence variety. For some writers, editing is quick and relatively easy. For others, especially English language learners, the editing process may be a cumbersome task. It is difficult for most writers to recognize errors or ambiguities in their own writing; encourage students to solicit a critical friend to help check their fluency. Note: it is not your job to become your students’ personal editor. While you might help a writer identify key grammatical issues to focus on, it is best to point them towards other UCLA, online, or external resources for extensive editing support.

**TIP:** Remind students to save different drafts of their writing so that they can refer to earlier versions if they want them later. Delete nothing.

**GREAT RESOURCES:**
- The Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) at UCLA is a valuable resource both for you and your students. Students can make appointments with Peer Learning Facilitators (PLFs) or use walk-in appointments to receive one-on-one guidance on anything from brainstorming to proofreading. In addition, handouts related to all aspects of the writing process are available on the UWC website: [http://wp.ucla.edu/wc/resources/handouts-for-students/](http://wp.ucla.edu/wc/resources/handouts-for-students/) These handouts are designed to guide students but are great pedagogical tools for instructors as well.
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- Other university writing centers are also great resources, including: The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/) and the OWL website from Purdue University (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/689/01/) has a wealth of resources on working through different parts of the writing process, including: starting the writing process, prewriting, writer’s block, stasis theory, writing thesis statements, developing outlines, reverse outlining, and proofreading.

**Helping Students Become More Independent**
Ultimately, we want to support undergraduate writers in becoming more independent. There are many ways to do this. A few examples of the sorts of things you might try:

*Remind students of the resources available to them at UCLA and encourage them to use them (see the resource list included in this packet)*

*Pose questions about students’ arguments instead of offering solutions*

*Encourage students to deconstruct their own logic. Reverse outlines (described on the OWL and UWC sites linked above) are a great tool to help students do this*

*Ask students questions about their process to help them recognize their personal needs, strengths, and challenges and problem solve accordingly. For example, imagine a student realizes that they can readily talk about their argument but have trouble getting it onto paper. You might then encourage them to use their phone/computer to record themselves talking about their main claims. They could then listen back to the recording and capture their strongest points. Writing preferences and needs are highly individual.*