

ELOQUENT LETTER

DESCRIPTION

Students will write an eloquent letter in the spirit of Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." This assignment will require students to first consider different "tensions" or controversies that arise in American culture, law, and politics. Students will identify a controversy about which they feel strongly or are very curious. They will identify an audience (addressee) to whom they might address the letter in order to persuade the audience to alter their stance or take a specific action.

Students will write a first draft based on their current knowledge and opinions, after which they will be tasked with seeking out a variety of perspectives on the issue. In the process of seeking out perspectives, students will write an annotated bibliography; identify stakeholders; as well as examine and compare the positions, values, knowledge, and assumptions of each, including their own.

Students will rewrite the letter (revised and final drafts) to integrate multiple points of view and to *persuade* their intended audience. Additionally, students will use rhetorical devices of sound and appeals to ethos, logos, and pathos to enhance their arguments.

At the end of the term, students will send their letters to the addressed party and submit proof of delivery.

An articulation essay, describing the thinking, writing, and revision process will accompany the final draft.

For specific due dates, see the course syllabus.

GOALS

- Develop questions in order to explore a controversial topic.
- Research and compare a variety of sources related to the topic.

- Identify stakeholders and examine and compare their positions, values, knowledge, and assumptions.
- Understand the system within which the topic exists.
- Defend and support a persuasive argument about the topic.
- Revise argument to specifically address and persuade the intended audience, integrate multiple perspectives, acknowledge and address counterarguments, and identify common ground between perspectives in order to defend stance.
- Examine personal beliefs.
- Examine personal learning process, articulate important learning experiences, and apply learning from course to previous educational experiences and future goals.

STEPS/SUBASSIGNMENTS:

Topic and Audience: **Choose a topic/issue** (suggestions are made below) about which you are curious or feel strongly and which meets the criteria of an “American Argument” (see Class discussion Week 3).

Choose a recipient to whom you will address your letter. Choose an individual or group who is undecided about or opposed to your claim and who has a stake in it or ability to make a difference. This must be an actual person or group, one for which you must include contact information (a mailing address or web address).

PROPOSAL

Due Tuesday, week 4. Worth 50 points. Answer the following questions. Submit as a document (Word doc, docx, rtf, or pdf) to the Proposal dropbox folder.

- What is your topic and claim about it (what do you want to convince your audience of)?
- Who is the recipient of your letter? Why did you choose this person/group?
- What makes this an “American Argument”? (see week 3 large group discussion).
- Why did you choose this topic? What is your personal stake in this topic, in other words, why does it matter to you? What has happened in your life that has made you care about this topic?

FIRST DRAFT

Due Tuesday, week 5. Worth 100 points. Write a letter (approximately 700 words) convincing your audience of your claim. Tell your audience why you feel the way you do. Tell them what experiences, knowledge, or value systems influenced your point of view on the issue.

This assignment **must be written in the form of a letter**. Include a mailing or web address for your audience at the top, a salutation, and a closing.

Note: Aim for 1000 words or fewer for your first draft.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Due Tuesday, week 7. Worth 100 points. Research different perspectives on your topic using library databases and the Internet. Choose the **six most credible and relevant sources** from your search and write an annotated bibliography citing and analyzing each source. At least two of your sources must be accessed using the PSU Library. Choose at least one source that reflects the perspective of your letter's intended audience. Choose at least one source that explores the topic in its current context. Choose at least one source that explores the topic from a historical perspective. Choose sources from at least three different perspectives and/or disciplines. For each source include:

- Bibliographic information (author, title, place and date of publication, page numbers)
- A paragraph identifying the form, audience, and purpose of the source.
- A paragraph summarizing the source's main arguments and identifying the types of evidence used.
- A paragraph analyzing (this includes identifying and explaining how you can tell) the biases, assumptions, experience, and values implicit in the source. Include an exploration of possible areas of common ground between sources and your own perspectives.
- At least one question in response to the source.

REVISED DRAFT

Due Tuesday, Week 8. Revise your letter. In your letter, tell your audience why you feel the way you do. Explain what experiences, knowledge, or value systems influenced your point of view on the issue. Explain the arguments, assumptions, values, and biases of one or more stakeholders. Identify and explain at least one other viewpoint related to your topic. Identify an area of common ground with your audience and use it as a way to focus your argument and convince your audience. Use at least one metaphor or simile (see class discussion week 7) to create emphasis and grace to your arguments.

Include a short note for your reviewers with your draft: Describe and give some background on the intended audience for your letter (who are they; what do they know, assume, or care about in reference to your topic; why did you choose this audience). Include a list of questions you have for reviewers or specific suggestions you would like about your draft.

*** Note: Aim for between 350 - 750 words in your revised draft.**

PEER REVIEW LETTERS

Due Tuesday, Week 9. 100 points. Write a letter (at least 400 words) to two of your writing group members critiquing their letters and offering suggestions. In your letter address **at least four** of the following prompts: Summarize the main claim of the letter.

- **Put yourself in the intended audience's shoes.** What about the letter is convincing? What about it is not and why?
- Does the writer use ethos, logos, and pathos? Identify an example of each (if you are able). Does the letter rely more heavily on one type of appeal?
- Identify the rhetorical devices of sound the writer has used. Are they in the best place in terms of emphasis? Where or how might they be better used?
- Describe the structure of the letter. Were there places where you became confused? Explain where these were and why they were confusing.
- Describe the overall tone of the letter. Is it consistent? How is it appropriate or inappropriate given the relationship between the writer and the intended audience?
- Identify and explain any potential fallacies in logic or loaded language.

- Identify whether the writer has established common ground with his/her audience. Is it convincing?
- What is missing?
- Where is information unnecessarily repeated or awkwardly stated? Is the writer telling the intended audience something they already know? If so, do they make clear why they are doing this?
- If you noticed any grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors, what were they?
- What are the main strengths of the draft?

PORTFOLIO, FINAL DRAFT, AND ARTICULATION ESSAY

Due Tuesday, week 10. Worth 200 points. Turn in a Portfolio consisting of (Please clearly identify each document!!):

- Final draft of your Eloquent Letter, **including a works cited page**
- Proof of delivery (screen shot of email receipt or photo of mailing)
- Articulation Essay (see instructions below).

Read through your Eloquent Letter drafts. Also take some time to review class and workshop discussions. Keep the following questions in mind as you review and take notes. These are to help guide your Articulation Essay:

- Elaborate on what makes the topic you chose an "American argument." How has this project influenced your identity?
- What were the important milestones in your process of writing the Eloquent Letter? For instance, how did you choose your topic and the audience, what research was important to how you wrote and rewrote your letter?
- What were (at least two) challenges or discoveries you made during your process of writing your Eloquent Letter?
- What were the most significant changes you made between each draft? What feedback from your writing group did you use?
- Choose a role in which you improved or gained a new understanding: reviewer, researcher, writer, citizen, team member, teacher, persuader, student, listener, advocate, netizen, or other. Elaborate.
- How/what knowledge or skills obtained during this course/process will you apply in your future coursework/career/life?

Write a short **Articulation Essay** (around 500 words) about your writing and learning process for the course, addressing the questions and prompts posed above and using specific references to your drafts, discussions, and process to explain and illustrate your answers.

POTENTIAL TOPICS/ISSUES

Following is a list of issues to get you thinking about what you might choose. These are just examples. You DO NOT have to choose a topic on this list (for many more ideas, visit local news websites such as The Oregonian, The PSU Vanguard, and Oregon Public Broadcasting, and visit websites and databases CQ Researcher, Opposing Viewpoints in Context, and Roper Center Databases in our Library Guide)

- Rising tuition
- Oversight of police
- Deregulation of industry
- Government bailouts of private industry
- Health care issues
- Medical marijuana
- Transportation infrastructure
- Charter schools
- U.S. intervention in foreign conflicts
- Fracking for natural gas
- Standardized testing
- Students' rights
- Genetically modified food
- Farm policy
- Tax cuts
- Bike rider rights
- Lottery funding
- Reproductive rights
- Affirmative Action
- Voting rights
- School choice
- Immigration reform