

Skill Builder Writing Seminar Outline

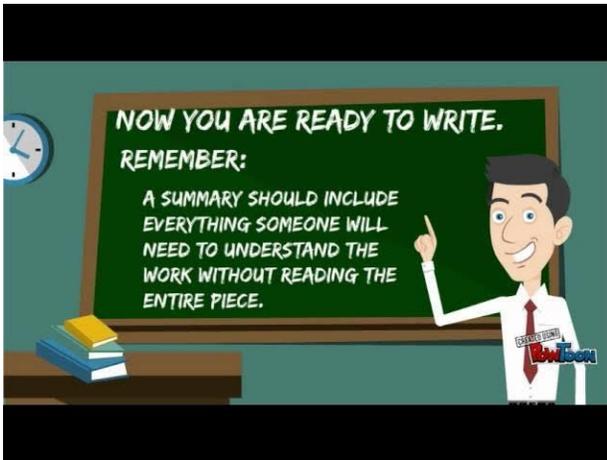
Lesson One: *How to do a summary*

Taking a long complex description and making it short and simple is a task which you can use in short-answer essays and later in job place presentations. (Capturing all the important facts in a few sentences will make you wonder what the longer description was for.)

1. Think about the most important details.
2. Sticking to the facts, describe them in a way which captures the “essence” of the topic (remember the “W’s” - who, what, when, where, why)

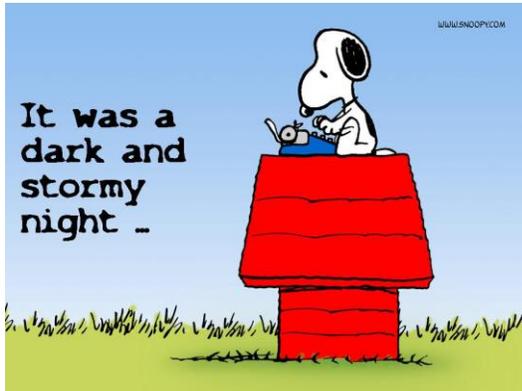
Imagine the descriptions on Netflix for shows; on Amazon for books; the details in countdown videos for the things described – use those for examples.

Assignment: Make your own Top 5 list. Choose from TV shows, movies, books, games, or any topic you can make into a list. Summarize in no more than 3 sentences for each entry the basics of the items in a manner that would allow a reader who is not familiar with what you are describing to make a decision on whether to be interested in learning more.



Lesson Two: *Creative writing:* This exercise is about setting the tone for the rest of the story.

The writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) is most famous for two things: he is remembered for his quote “the pen is mightier than the sword” and once starting a novel with “it was a dark and stormy night,”



Professor Scott Rice was a college professor who discovered the works of B-L in 1982. He and his daughter EJ started a contest for the best opening sentence of a novel; the contest expanded to 11 categories of novels, and ran for 42 years. You can see past winners at www.bulwer-lytton.com.

Setting the mood for a story is important. Think about a favorite book or movie or video game that builds an entire world or place in time and you'll know what I mean.

Assignment: write your best opening sentence for a novel or short story – here is the famous opening to B-L's novel *Paul Clifford*:

It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents – except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.

Remember that you must write a single sentence – look at the examples on the Bulwer-Lytton contest for ideas on how to use punctuation.

Lesson Three: Creative writing essay from a POV

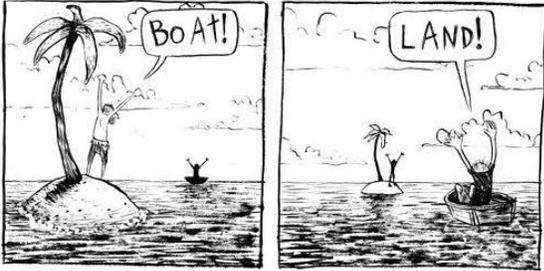
Point of View is a first-person writing technique in which the storyteller can be a character in the story or a narrator not part of the action. “First person” means the use of “I” or “we” when the character is speaking.

Example: the scary stories told online by “*Mr. Nightmare*” – you can check them out on YouTube. [be aware of the language – no need to use all those words in your assignment]. The famous novel *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell is written from the perspective of the horse, who is the storyteller. The point of view narrator does not have to be a person – it can be an animal, a house, or an inanimate object. Choosing different narrators can completely change the story.

Assignment: choose an event and let your imagination go – tell the story in the first person using a non-human storyteller. You may choose from the list or use your own narrator. Your story should be at least one page – but there is no maximum limit; do whatever it takes to tell the story.

- A church as storyteller: think about the ceremonies held there and the years that go by

- A toy which passes from one family member to another for several generations
- A puppy in an animal shelter waiting for the perfect family



Lesson Four: Compare/contrast essay

This type of essay discusses similar elements while simultaneously contrasting what's different between two subjects. This is useful in college history classes or comparing two business plans when you land a job.

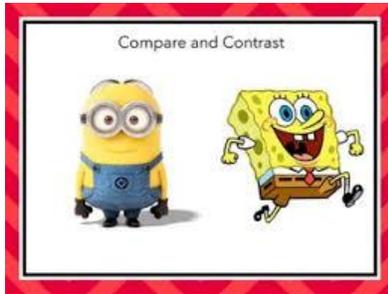
1. Pick two things you want to analyze
2. Talk about similarities
3. Talk about differences
4. Choose one if asked for an opinion - or not if you want to be neutral

Example:

1. You want to compare the Harry Potter books and movies and talk about which you prefer.
2. List similarities (students can submit these in a discussion post or in a live session):
 - a. Similarity #1
 - b. Similarity #2
 - c. Similarity #3
3. List differences (students can also submit these in a discussion post or in a live session):
 - a. Difference #1
 - b. Difference #2
 - c. Difference #3
4. If asked for an opinion, pick a side or not if you prefer (also say it in a discussion post or live session)

Assignment: select two subjects you want to compare and contrast (suggestions: tacos v. pizza as family dinners; an original TV series or film v. its sequel or spinoff; chain restaurants v. a local owned place). Show a comparison/contrast table which could be developed into an essay.

N.B. This exercise (and others in the seminar) can also be used in a public speaking class with one student defending the books and another defending the movies.



Lesson Five: Motivational/Persuasive Writing

You as the writer are attempting to convince the reader to adopt a particular point of view or take action through logical arguments and a cohesive summary. This is an opportunity to express strong feelings on a subject.

1. Pick a topic about which you feel strongly and prove your position with facts (example of this being done is posted below)
2. Talk about why you believe people should feel the same way you do
3. Suggest what they and you can do about it, like protesting, boycotting, writing to the source, etc.

Example: [Great Debaters Final Debate](#) scene

Assignment: pick a topic or select one of the following (why protecting our planet is important; why sodas and junk should be removed or limited in school food programs; why school curriculums should include fun subjects like art, music, and physical education); if you pick your own topic, let me approve it first before you start.

You may deliver this assignment as a speech or a written essay.



Lesson Six: Final assignment – short research paper

Sooner or later, you will need to write a paper which looks at a topic and the viewpoints supported by reliable sources. Your final paper should be 2.5-3 pages.

Assignment one: choose a topic and do some research on the topic. You will need at least two reliable research sources (Wikipedia is NOT a reliable source, but there are plenty of reliable articles and web sites you can use)

Assignment two: Outline your paper. You should have

- An introduction which shows your chosen topic and presents the question your research will help to answer.
- Three points to be made in the body of your paper about the topic.
- A conclusion which demonstrates you have answered the question you introduced.

Assignment three: Write the paper. Use proper grammar and punctuation. There is a guide in your seminar materials which shows you how to cite (that means give the details) your research sources.

Some suggested topics:

- Why a movie should be considered a “classic”
- Limits on screen time for middle schoolers and high schoolers
- The importance of subjects like music, art and physical education in schools
- What the voting age should be



Extra credit: *how to write a review*

Write a one paragraph review of this seminar. Please include positive and negative comments and suggestions on how to improve the seminar or to make it more useful and interesting.