

UMass Lowell Campus Essay

(20% of course grade)

Dear students: You are getting this assignment sheet earlier than usual to allow time for you to complete campus visits. We will discuss this assignment sheet briefly now, and then go over it in depth as you get closer to starting the actual essay.

Purpose: As we've discussed, when we become acclimated to an environment, we can stop seeing that place with fresh eyes (and often, as a result, stop wondering about that place). At this point in the semester, most of you are settling down at UML. By asking you to explore, think, and write about the UML campus, this assignment gives you a chance to see your environment with fresh eyes.

In addition, this assignment allows you to step out of your writing comfort zone by asking you to determine your own audience, topic, and purpose, a level of critical thinking you might not be used to. But to write well, you need to be able to make such determinations, and doing produces writing that is more complex, substantial, and mature. I think you will also find that thinking critically about your audience and purpose makes the writing process easier, and even more fun.

Learning outcomes: As a result of this assignment, you will be able to: determine the audience and purpose for your own writing; discover the intellectual moves or rhetorical strategies that best fulfill your purpose; tailor your tone, diction, and style to best suit your audience and purpose; test out and determine which organizational scheme works best, given your purpose; and demonstrate control in grammar and mechanics. You will also pursue a complex thesis, but your purpose might dictate writing that looks different from your first two essays, and that thesis might take a form different from what we've been practicing. We will discuss this at length.

The task: The end product for this assignment is a 3-4 page paper that grows out your visit to a UML place or event. The place or event will be determined by you, as will the purpose, specific topic, and audience for your essay; your peers and I will help you determine these things through our workshops.

The steps:

1. Help the class generate a brainstorming list of places/events to visit on campus, and possible audience and purposes for each. I will bring a list of upcoming events, but will not hand it out until our brainstorming is well underway. This workshop will take place on Wednesday October 2.
2. Choose your site/event and complete your visit. Going to a campus space might be easier than going to a specific event, like a play, game, or meeting, but you might find an event more interesting to write about. Plan accordingly, leaving yourself enough time, and be sure to take detailed notes. A good approach would be to write up your notes as one of your required journal entries! Keep the "Learning to Observe" handout and activities in mind as you do this. I will expect everyone to have chosen a place/event and to have some ideas about your purpose and audience by Wednesday October 16. You need to have completed the visit and taken notes by Wednesday November 6.
3. Complete the workshop on November 6 to help clarify your specific topic, audience, and purpose, and to discover the intellectual or rhetorical strategies to best fulfill your purpose. It is during this workshop that you'll decide what your paper needs to do, if you haven't determined this already.
4. Compose a first draft of your essay to be workshopped on Wednesday November 13. During this workshop, peers will try to identify your purpose and audience, and explain how they came to their conclusions. You will also think critically about your organizational scheme, assess your paper overall, and create a concrete plan for revision.
5. Revise your essay and hand in your final draft (with first draft, notes, and all workshops). Be sure to submit final draft to turnitin as well. This is due Wednesday November 20.

Evaluation criteria: The rubric at the end of the syllabus explains how your writing is graded, and discusses the following criteria in more depth. For this particular assignment, I will focus on how well your essay fulfills the purpose you intended and how thoughtfully it addresses the audience you were writing for. For this reason, I will ask you to complete a writing assessment that specifies the purpose and audience for your finished essay, and I will review the workshops you completed on November 6th and 13th. Specifically, I will address the following in my comments and in calculating your grade:

- How effective is your thesis, given your purpose and audience?
- How well does the paper make the intellectual or rhetorical moves that best fulfill your purpose? (For example, if you need to explain to make your point, is your explanation fully thought out and articulated, or has some of your thinking been left unstated? If you need to define a term or idea, have you done so, and is your definition precise?).
- How well does your organizational scheme work, given your purpose? (For instance, if you're trying to persuade your audience, have you organized in such a way as to emphasize your most important point or idea?)
- Is your evidence relevant, specific or concrete, and thoughtfully explored throughout your essay?
- Are your paragraphs unified, coherent, and focused around a main idea? Remember that a topic sentence must be an idea.
- How appropriate are your tone, diction, and style, given your audience and purpose?
- Does the essay show clear control over grammar and mechanics? (Remember, regardless of your purpose and audience, your writing needs to be grammatically and mechanically correct. Tone, diction, and style shift, depending on the rhetorical situation, but grammar and mechanics don't shift.)

Paper length: The first draft should be at least 2 ½ pages; the final should be closer to 4 pages. Follow the formal essay format for both first and final drafts.

Due dates:

- Wednesday Oct 16: A typed paragraph, detailing the place/event you plan to visit and your possible purpose and audience.
- Wednesday Nov 6: Thorough notes from your visit (may be handwritten).
- Wednesday Nov 13: First draft of essay—bring notes back to class as well.
- Wednesday Nov 20: Final draft of essay—include first draft, notes from visit, and all workshops. Submit paper to turnitin.