This is an addition to your first Alpha handouts. Read this material carefully since there are some new instructions and hints relating to your graded assignments. Your paper should be a minimum of two typed pages (though in the past the best papers have generally been longer). Papers shorter than two complete pages will receive an N/C. (See guidelines.) Use the following organizational format for your essay.

**INTRODUCTION**

You must have a clear thesis statement at the beginning of your introduction. The thesis statement must address the question. You must present an outline of your arguments. The arguments must be such that they support your thesis. Therefore, they should not be too general. But at the same time, they should not be too specific either. Do not argue in your introduction.

**ARGUMENT 1:** Explain which of the two essays has the better organization.

Which has the better match between supporting arguments and thesis? If both organizational plans seem equally reasonable, which thesis is more complex?

<Remember, clarity is important but having something to say is also important. A complex thesis usually involves a more complex argument structure, so it may not be as easy to follow as an argument defending a simple thesis. However, a complex thesis may convey more information since it does not repeat what the average reader already knows. On the other hand, do not mistake confusion for great ideas. A complex thesis must also be do-able. The writer must accomplished what he/she sets out to do.>

**ARGUMENT 2:** Explain which of the two essays is better developed. Development deals with the quality of the examples as well as the quality of the background.

The more complex the thesis statement, the more complex the examples needed to prove it. Each individual argument (topic sentence of each argument paragraph) should be supported by a set of examples. The examples must not be too narrow or too broad. For example, the author cannot move from his or her personal feelings and opinions to making statements that are supposed to be true of everyone. Here the author’s background and position may be critical.

The complete essay should be a minimum of four paragraphs so this means at least one of your arguments will have two paragraphs. Alpha Papers do not have to have a separate background paragraph or formal conclusion. They also do not have to follow
strict rules for paragraph length. Use what you learned in English 1A. But they must adhere to the general rules outlined in your first Alpha paper handouts.

Evaluation: all papers will be scored based upon your performance in three areas: organization, development and sentence structure. You must use class discussion but also go beyond it in the details of your arguments. Remember that your own arguments will be judged in the same way that you are judging the arguments of your subjects.

Try to use specific examples whenever possible, but do not overuse the text <more than two or three lines per reference>. Remember that you need to demonstrate that you have read and analyzed the essays, but the most important point I will be looking for is whether or not you understand the models.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

• YOU ARE NOT BEING ASKED TO DEFEND YOUR SELECTION AS A “PERFECT ARGUMENT.” GIVEN THE TWO ESSAYS IN QUESTION, YOUR CHOICE ONLY NEEDS TO BE “BETTER THAN” THE OTHER. PERFECTION OR GREATNESS IS NEVER AN ISSUE.

• REMEMBER THIS POINT WHEN YOU ARE ARGUING. DO NOT MAKE SWEEPING CATEGORICAL STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW GREAT OR HOW POOR AN ESSAY IS SOLELY BASED UPON ITS SUPERIORITY TO ONLY ONE OR TWO OTHERS. THE STRONGER ESSAY IN ONE SET MAY TURN OUT TO BE THE WEAKER IN ANOTHER.

• GIVEN TWO ESSAYS THAT HAVE THE SAME LEVEL OF COMPETENCE IN ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THE BETTER ESSAY IS THE ONE THAT ADDRESSES THE MORE COMPLEX PROBLEM OR SUBJECT, BECAUSE IT CONVEYS MORE INFORMATION.

• OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, A “GOOD” ARGUMENT THAT TAKES ON AN EXTREMELY COMPLEX PROBLEM IS BETTER THAN A “GREAT” ARGUMENT THAT DEALS WITH A SIMPLE QUESTION. REMEMBER THAT ARGUMENTS THAT ARE “EASY TO UNDERSTAND” MAY SEEM CLEAR BECAUSE THEY OVER-SIMPLIFY COMPLEX ISSUES.

• GOOD ARGUMENTS WILL ALWAYS PRESENT EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THE THESIS AS IT IS STATED. THE EVIDENCE WILL NOT BE TOO BROAD OR TOO NARROW. AND IT WILL BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE. REMEMBER THAT HYPOTHETICAL OR MAKE-BELIEVE EXAMPLES ARE NOT FACTS. THEY ARE NOT SPECIFICS.

• ALTHOUGH GOOD ARGUMENTS CAN TAKE STRONG “EITHER/OR” STANDS ON COMPLEX ISSUES, GOOD ARGUMENTS CAN AND OFTEN DO END UP SUPPORTING COMPROMISE OR MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POSITIONS. YOU SHOULD BE WARY OF ANY AUTHOR WHO CLAIMS THAT A COMPLEX PROBLEM IS REALLY SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD AND THAT HE OR SHE HAS ALL THE ANSWERS.

• REMEMBER THAT ALL THE ESSAYS WE’LL BE READING ARE DIRECTED AT A GENERAL AS OPPOSED TO A SPECIALIZED OR PROFESSIONAL AUDIENCE, SO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO QUESTION THE AUTHORS.

• DEPENDING UPON THE CONTEXT, THE BEST WRITERS OFTEN HAVE A CERTAIN STYLE OR “VOICE.” THIS MAY INVOLVE HUMOR OR IRONY. SO YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE EVERY
SENTENCE LITERALLY. AND DO NOT CONFUSE SARCASM WITH IRONY. SARCASM IS SELDOM EFFECTIVE AND IS OFTEN NOTHING MORE THAN A “CHEAP TRICK.”