



Entering a New Discourse Community: A Writing Sequence Assignment

Author: L. Fiona Glade, English
Date: July 18, 2008

COMPLETE COURSE DESCRIPTION: English 21: Freshman Seminar

Course Description: English 21 is a collaborative course that provides first-year students an introduction to the nature and possible meanings of higher education and to the functions and resources of the University. This course is designed to help students develop and exercise fundamental academic success strategies and to improve their learning skills. The seminar will also provide students with the opportunity to interact with fellow students and the seminar leader and to build a community of academic and personal support. Members of the English Department Freshman Seminar will read, think, talk, and write about texts.

Presentation: *Seminar Discussion*

Requirements: *Papers, Oral Presentations*

Texts: Foundations: a Reader for New College Students (*Wadsworth*)
Firoozeh Dumas' Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

Freshman Seminar (soon to be changed to *First-Year Seminar*) consists of first-year college students from a wide variety of backgrounds who are part of the campus-wide First-Year Experience (FYE) program.

DESCRIPTION OF HOW ACTIVITIES/ASSIGNMENTS CONNECT THE ONE BOOK'S THEMES, ISSUES, AND IDEAS TO SPECIFIC DISCIPLINARY CONTENT, PROCESSES, AND COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As newcomers to the college campus, English 21 students will be able to use the activities and assignments in the course's One Book unit to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which newcomers to any community learn strategies for surviving, and, subsequently, for thriving. For many college students, the discourse of the university is not unlike a foreign language; they are, as Compositionist Lucille McCarthy points out, "Strangers in a Strange Land." As such, Dumas' experiences as a new immigrant reflect, to a certain extent, a new college student's experiences during that first semester on campus. Reading, discussing, and writing about Dumas' book will help first-year students to understand that learning to participate in the conversations of a new discourse community is a process, but that there are strategies available to assist with that process.

Dumas' narrative covers a broad range of topics, including her descriptions of her family members' language acquisition, of their adventures in learning about U.S. traditions, and of their frequent difficulties in exploring the values and assumptions which exist as part of US cultures.

Each of these topics holds high relevance in English Studies, concerned as we are with the study of texts, of the ways in which the language of any given text reveals the values, assumptions, and expectations of its context. Therefore, the goals for the One Book unit work well not only with the goals of the FYE program, but also with the goals of an introductory college English class.

COMPLETE DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY/LESSON PLAN/ASSIGNMENT:

Learning Outcomes: By completing this One Book assignment unit, students will be able to:

1. Understand that all discourse communities—including academic discourse communities—operate via specific sets of rules and values
2. Discover the rules of discourse communities in various contexts—disciplinary, personal, and professional
3. Understand that writing is a process involving drafting and revising based on feedback from peers and instructors
4. Discuss their own writing and the writing of others
5. Practice ongoing critical self-reflection about their own experiences.

These goals for the unit support the FYE Program course goals, which are (from Sacramento State's FYE webpage):

1. The student will have an enlarged understanding of the ideas and values related to education which will include:
 - The philosophy and history of higher education and the CSUS mission
 - The relationship of education to personal development
 - The significance of the teaching and learning process
2. Demonstration of active learning and improvement of intellectual skills:
 - Academic skills (speaking, writing, note-taking, study skills, time management)
 - Evidence that student is taking responsibility for his/her own education and development
 - Academic dishonesty
3. The student will begin to develop information competence and computer literacy
4. Demonstrate an understanding of "self" as an integrated biological, psychological, and social being:
 - Students will gain an understanding and appreciation of the multicultural nature of society and this University
5. Acquisition of organized knowledge:
 - Reading about, writing on, and discussion of course topics.

Due Dates: See Overview of Writing Sequence Assignment, below

Tasks Assigned: (Process and Product)

Assessment Criteria: See Appendix B Essay Assignment

Overview of Writing Sequence assignment: In this four-week unit, after reading [Funny in Farsi](#) and reading an article on discourse communities¹, writing some informal homework responses, and participating in small-group and whole-class discussions on various themes and

¹ Schmidt, Gary D., and William J. Vande Kopple. "Introduction." [Communities of Discourse: The Rhetoric of Disciplines](#). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993. i-iv.

topics generated by the readings, students will write a Literacy Narrative. This formal essay assignment will involve several stages, including invention, drafting, peer response workshoping, and revision.

Week 1: This unit begins with the readings:

- homework: read and write a formal summary of the Schmidt & Vande Kopple article²
- in class: read and respond to one another's summary drafts; discuss citation and plagiarism
- homework: revise summary
- in class: discuss various examples of discourse communities; freewrite--Select a time when you realized you were in a new-to-you discourse community.

Week 2:

- homework: read Dumas, write two Dialectical Journal entries
- in class: freewrite and small-group discussions: Describe what happened to make you realize that you were not yet fluent in the discourse of that community; watch ten-minute film clip—Jamaica Kincaid in Life and Debt. Hand out and discuss essay assignment: For an audience of First-Year Experience students, peer mentors, and faculty, discuss your experiences in becoming a member of a new discourse community and analyze the activities, assumptions, and values that hold together that discourse community.³ Collaborative brainstorming in small groups.
- homework: attend One Book author lecture.

Week 3:

- homework: write rough draft of essay:
- in class: participate in guided peer response workshop to give and get feedback for revision.⁴
- in class: continue small group discussions of discourse community definitions
- homework: begin essay revisions.

Week 4:

- homework: continue essay revision
- in class: informal presentation for class colleagues: Discuss three actions you took in order to become more fluent in the discourses of that new community (will form the basis of a group presentation later in the semester: with the guidance of the English 21 Peer Mentor, students will collaborate in small groups to present their thoughts on the One Book and their new discourse community experiences to other FYE students.
- homework: continue essay revision for inclusion in Course Portfolio.

This resource was made possible by the 2008 State One Book Faculty Development Grant Program, with funding from Wells Fargo. While many of the assignments and activities were designed for a specific course and for the 2008-2009 One Book, Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America by Firoozeh Dumas, they may be adapted to other courses and future One Book selections. For additional One Book resources, please visit our website www.csus.edu/onebook.

² See Appendix A for Summary Tips handout.

³ See Appendix B for Essay Assignment sheet.

⁴ See Appendix C for Workshop guidelines.

APPENDIX A

Glade/English 21

Summary

Please write a summary of Schmidt & Vande Kopple's article on discourse communities. The purpose of a summary is to report to your readers the major points, or main ideas, of something you've read; as such, you should to identify the article's thesis—its main idea or point, using your own words. It's important to remember that a summary is, by definition, objective and neutral; your own readers should not be able to tell how *you* feel about the article's ideas.

In order to write an effective summary, consider using the following process steps as a guide:

Read, Re-Read, and Annotate—Using the strategies we've practiced in class for reading *with* the grain and then reading *against* the grain, note the authors' main ideas, primary assertions, and support. Make a note of any parts you don't understand. Look up any terms you don't know.

Write One-Sentence Summaries of Each Section of the Text--Identify the major sections of the article. Next, for each section you find, write a sentence in your own words that restates the main point and notes the primary supporting evidence used.

Write a draft--Introduce the article's title and author in your first paragraph. Provide a brief sentence describing the point of the article. Next, in the body of your summary, elaborate on your one sentence summaries, clearly relating the main ideas of the article.

Check your draft against the article—Review your summary using the following guidelines:
Have you included all of the authors' important ideas, assertions, or conclusions?
Have you represented the authors' position accurately and thoroughly?
Have you described the authors' argument without inserting your own opinion?
Will your summary sufficiently explain the article to someone who has not actually read the article?

Revise Your Summary—Based on your evaluation of your rough draft, make any needed changes in the content, organization, or language of your summary.

Draft 1 due for Writers' Workshop in Week 1. Revised, submission draft due for my responses in Week 2.

Appendix B

Glade/English 21

Essay Assignment

"[Texts] have many meanings because they touch us at points at which each of us is himself [*sic*] many-minded. Understanding them is very much more than picking a possible reasonable interpretation, clarifying that, and sticking to it. Understanding them is seeing how the varied possible meanings hang together, which of them depends on what else, how and why the meanings which matter most to us form part of our world—seeing thereby more clearly what our world is and what we are who are building it to live in."

From I. A. Richards: How to Read a Page.

We have spent some time now in reading, writing, and talking about the ways in which discourse communities operate; we've also had some opportunities to reflect on some of the ways our own lives have been affected by the differences among various discourse communities' rules, values, and expectations. While some of us may not have emigrated to a new country as Dumas did, each of us has surely experienced some feelings of unfamiliarity—as she did—upon arriving in a new community. How did you learn to participate—to become literate—in that community?

For an audience of First-Year Experience students, peer mentors, and faculty, please write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you use such an experience to offer a working definition of discourse communities and to provide analysis of the activities, assumptions, and values that hold together accepted members of that new-to-you discourse community.

As you begin drafting, consider problem-posing about some of the following questions to help you work towards an analytical focus for your essay: What are some of the language conventions and rules followed by community members?

What were your own first successful—or unsuccessful!—attempts at literacy in that discourse? What strategies did you use as you figured out the community's unwritten rules? What are some of the characteristics by which full participants in that community might be recognized by insiders? By outsiders? And as you provide your insights about a specific literacy for this audience, consider how you might make your essay not only interesting, but useful for them to read: how might your own experiences offer them insights in dealing with new-to-them discourse communities?

Draft 1 is due for a Writers' Workshop in Week 3. Draft 2 is due for my written responses in Week 5: see Course Syllabus for submission guidelines for manila folder with cover letter, previous drafts, and peer responses. Your final, polished draft is due for submission in your Course Portfolio at the end of the semester.

I will use the following **criteria** in responding to Draft 2 and in grading your final, polished draft:

- Has earlier drafts (with responses) attached
- Has incorporated feedback throughout revision
- Starts with an introduction relevant to audience's interests
- Has a clear and explicit focus in the introduction
- Provides an original, compelling angle on the topic
- Is clearly organized

Sustains clear focus and argument throughout

Uses well-developed paragraphs to advance the argument

Uses persuasive, relevant support throughout

Provides thorough analysis of the topic

Pays close attention to assumptions of the writer

Closes with a proactive conclusion

Is relatively free of spelling and grammar errors

Has an original title

Has page numbers

I look forward to reading your essay: please let me know if you have any questions.

Appendix C

Glade/English 21

Workshop guidelines

Essay's author: _____

Workshop responder: _____

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the essay's opening few lines? Do you want to read on? Do you want to know more about the topic? How does it pique your interest?
2. Where do you find the essay's main argument, or thesis? Restate it here in your own words:
3. Which discourse community is the essay describing? Where can you find specific details about the activities, assumptions, and values that hold together accepted members of that community?
4. What else do you want to know about that discourse community? Where would more specific details be useful to the essay's argument?
5. Has the author written some specific analysis in each paragraph, connecting personal experiences to that analysis? Where does the author need to add more analysis? Are there any paragraphs in which the analysis does not connect to the thesis?
6. Try to think of any larger issues represented by discourse community practices that the author has not mentioned; explain here what those are and how they could connect with the author's focus.
7. What is the main idea of the essay's conclusion? Does the conclusion do more than simply reiterate the previous main points?