ENG 122 - Module 2 Lecture Notes

Welcome to Module 2 of Academic Writing II. In this module, you will be writing your first essay. Writing About Literature Writing an argumentative essay about literature follows the general essay structure, but you are using different terminology and a different purpose as it applies to the genre you are discussing. In this module, you will be writing an essay that develops a claim, using specific examples from both literature and your own experience. There are a few steps to follow to complete this first assignment.

Exploration I and II In order to produce a solid first essay, you’re being asked to work through several prewriting steps in Exploration I and II. The steps in Exploration I lead you to do some brainstorming and free associating about knowledge and individual power. The next step in Exploration II, after you’ve loosened up some ideas on the topic through prewriting, is to read several pieces that address these same ideas. For this essay, you’re to select three pieces of literature from the list and, using that literature, respond to questions a-d. You’ll develop those responses into a 750-word essay.

Creating And now we arrive at the assignment that you’ve been working up to. You may have noticed that while the basic topic, knowledge and power, is provided, the exact angle, or argument, for this first essay is entirely up to you. Take some time to review your responses to questions a-d generated in Exploration I and II. Is there a general trend, or common opinion, that you can develop? If a specific claim doesn’t jump out at you, take a minute to examine Exploration 3. These exercises may generate a strong specific claim on which to base this first essay.

Now that you have some thoughts on paper to work with and a general idea of your claim or argument that you’re going to focus on, let’s consider the format for your essay.

Introduction – In an introduction, you are introducing your main idea to your audience. In order to do this, you need to provide some kind of lead-in that will create interest for the reader and will transition to or naturally lead into your thesis so that you can state your thesis idea.

Body – The body of your essay discusses and provides proof of what you say in your thesis. You may use examples, facts, descriptions, etc. for your support. Remember that in the body of your essay to begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that refers back to your thesis idea. Usually, this is the first sentence of your paragraph, but sometimes you need a transitional sentence from one paragraph to another before stating your topic sentence.

Conclusion – The conclusion brings all you have said in the essay to a logical end, still focusing on the main idea of your thesis. In a short essay, just summing up and restating your thesis might be a little redundant, so think of other ways to draw it to an end and still maintain your focus.

Once you’ve created a rough draft, don’t forget the revision process! Revision is an often overlooked step in the writing process. This is possibly the most important step in the writing process, because at this stage you can evaluate the effectiveness of your writing. I like to refer to three stages of revision, and think of the essay as a body. The first stage of revision is the bones of the body. This stage deals with the overall shape of your essay. This is when you’ll look at the big picture, and ask yourself questions like

- Is my claim, or main argument, made clear in the introduction?
- Does each paragraph support my claim?
- Do the paragraphs build on each other, or would another order of paragraphs be more effective?
- Do I make my claim satisfactorily by the conclusion?
Once you’ve revised your work so that the answer to each question is ‘yes’ move on to the muscles. The muscles help you make your writing more fluid and efficient. Some questions to ask at this point are

- Does each sentence build sequentially on the preceding one? Is there a clear relationship between each sentence?
- Does the sentence order in each paragraph make sense?
- Do I provide clear transitions to help my readers move from idea to idea?

Finally, the last stage is the skin, or the superficial stage. Think of this type of revision as cosmetic. This stage is very important, because simple mistakes can often lead a reader to question the credibility of the writer. To avoid these errors, as questions like

- Is my grammar correct?
- Do I use punctuation correctly?
- Is everything spelled correctly?

Once you’ve revised your essay carefully, you can rest assured that you’re making your argument through effective and efficient writing.