

Assignment #1: Literacy Narrative

Perfecting Eloquence: Jesuit Pedagogy in the First-Year Writing Classroom

DUE DATE

Assignment Background:

In this assignment, you will write what many teachers call a “**literacy narrative.**” Literacy narratives are stories about how someone acquired a specific skill. This skill could be one that we normally associate with literacy, like reading and writing, but it can also be a skill that’s more distinct and meaningful to the author: for example, dancing, drawing, swimming, video games, or making a certain meal with family.

By transforming their journey with this skill into a story, writers are invited to **1.)** Better understand how they learn and where they find passion in learning, **2.)** Reflect on and explore an important aspect of their identity, and **3.)** Develop their ability as a storyteller.

Jesuit Inspiration:

Between 1553 and 1555 CE, St. Ignatius of Loyola dictated a “spiritual autobiography” to his friend and fellow Jesuit, Louis Gonzalez, S.J. This text, now known as *The Spiritual Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, describes historical events in his life—his experience as a soldier, his near-fatal injury in the Battle of Pamplona, his subsequent physical recovery and spiritual re-conversion to Catholicism. However, the *Spiritual Autobiography* also describes Ignatius’s formation as an individual by detailing the steps he took to deepen his understanding of and relationship with God. Moreover, through his famous *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius encouraged

others to reflect on their lives in a similar manner to find patterns and themes that would give them a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship with God and others.

Prompt: Using the Ignatian practice of reflection modeled in *The Spiritual Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, reflect on a literacy that you've acquired at some point in your life. Then, write a story about how you acquired that literacy and why it's meaningful to you.

Assignment Goals:

After completing this assignment, students should be able to...

- Understand the meaning of “literacy” and how it impacts their life
- Identify the patterns and themes of a narrative in their own life and the lives of others
- Communicate why something is meaningful to them through the medium of a story
- Compose vivid descriptions in order to captivate a reader

Assignment #2: Encomium (“Essay in Praise of...”)

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DUE DATE

Assignment Background:

In this assignment, you will experiment with the ancient genre of the **encomium** by composing an **essay in praise of some person, place, or thing**. Encomia, while ancient in origin, are used quite frequently in everyday life: funeral eulogies, wedding speeches, birthday texts, Mother’s Day Cards, and more. While these contemporary variations show the possibilities of the genre, traditionally, encomia would’ve been speeches or written works composed in seven parts:

- I. Prologue introducing the setting and purpose of the speech
- II. Announcement of the class of person, place, or thing to be praised
- III. Consideration of the person’s origins (nationality, native city, ancestors, parents)
- IV. Education and interests
- V. Achievements (virtue, beauty, athleticism, power, wealth, popularity, etc.)
- VI. Comparison (or the inability to draw a comparison)
- VII. Epilogue concluding the piece

By extolling the goodness of a chosen subject, writers are invited to **1.)** Analyze a person, place, or thing that interests them **2.)** Provide written context about that person, place, or thing, and **3.)**

Develop their comfort and familiarity with the creative essay form.

Jesuit Inspiration:

In the Jesuit tradition, *gratitude* is everything. Indeed, in *The Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius goes so far as to say that all joy comes from gratitude and that all sin is, in essence, a lack of gratitude. That's why, every single day, twice a day, Jesuits are asked to reflect on and offer praise for the good that God has placed in their lives through a prayer called *the Examen*. By centering their lives around gratitude, Jesuits strive to forge a deeper relationship with God, gain a better understanding of creation, and build the foundations of a moral life. Simply put: Jesuits profess that we find fulfillment by offering praise for the good things in life and that we make our lives darker and more difficult by failing to acknowledge these good things at all.

Prompt: Taking into consideration the traditional structure of the encomium, compose an essay that praises some person, place, or thing with the goal of inspiring gratitude within your audience toward that particular subject.

Assignment Goals:

After completing this assignment, students should be able to...

- Identify people, places, and things in their life for which they are grateful
- Conduct research on a topic that interests them
- Articulate their gratitude for these things in the form of an essay
- Write persuasively to inspire emotion and goodwill towards a particular subject

Assignment #3: Public Service Announcement (PSA)

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DUE DATE

Assignment Background:

In this assignment, you will create what is commonly known as a “**Public Service Announcement**” or a “**PSA.**” PSAs can come in many forms, including radio advertisements, TV commercials, billboards, social media posts, and more. Whichever form they take, they are designed to deliver messages regarding important civic issues to a mass audience. Some examples could be: raising awareness of Black History Month, encouraging teenagers to quit vaping, advocating for people to get screened for various forms of cancer, or reminding citizens to vote on Election Day. By researching a civic issue and composing a PSA, students are invited to **1.)** deepen their understanding of pressing civic and social issues, **2.)** develop skills of persuasion and writing for an audience, and **3.)** practice composing in a popular non-academic medium.

Jesuit Inspiration:

In the past century, Jesuit leaders have emphasized the centrality of social justice in their mission to educate young people across the world. The emphasis on speaking well—which, for the Jesuits, has always been viewed as crucial for converting people to the Christian faith—has been extended into an emphasis on using technology to craft communication that inspires others to act with justice and mercy. As Pedro Arrupe, former General Superior of the Society of Jesus, concluded in a speech on the progress of Jesuit education:

“We must go to a map of the world and point out the critical points—geographical, sociological, cultural—where sin and injustice find their lodgment... To do this, technologies are needed to program analysis and action so that they will actually dislodge and dismantle injustice.”

This aligns with a principle that Jesuits have held since their early work as missionaries in Asia: the need for *adaptability* in their work. Jesuits believe that while the *purpose* of their mission shouldn't change, the way they go about it should adapt to the culture around them. Therefore, it is not enough for a Jesuit class to only teach forms of writing that wider society doesn't typically read (e.g. MLA-format five-page persuasive essays). To be truly “Jesuit,” students and teachers must also adapt to the ways in which citizens of today's world are making themselves heard.

Prompt: Select a non-partisan social or civic issue that interests you. Do some research on the issue (causes, stakeholders, who it affects, who supports/is against it, etc.). Then, compose one of the following:

- A 60-second radio advertisement
- A 30-second television commercial
- A cohesive social media campaign of at least 6 posts

that raises awareness of the issue with a clear and persuasive message.

Assignment Goals:

After completing this assignment, students should be able to...

- Compose to persuade a specific audience (e.g. teenagers, sports fans, smokers, etc.)
- Use techniques of sonic/cinematic/visual composition to create engaging and clear content

- Deliver a clear message with concision
- Craft a clear message that's persuasive and memorable to its audience through humor, fear, pity etc.

Assignment #4: Speech

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DUE DATE

Assignment Background:

In this assignment, you will compose and deliver a **three- to five-minute speech** to your classmates. Speeches are an ancient form of composition and were often used to inform one's community about a pressing issue and inspire action toward the common good.

Composing and delivering a speech will require different but related skills to your previous assignments. For instance, you will now have to make your message clear and understandable to an audience that *can't read* what you're telling them. On the other hand, you'll have previously-unavailable techniques of composition and persuasion (vocal tone, body language, volume, silence, etc.) to make your message understood.

By offering their writing and their voice to this assignment, writers are invited to **1.)** Better understand an issue in their local community, **2.)** Develop their public speaking skills, and **3.)** Practice open-minded listening while hearing their classmates' speeches.

Jesuit Inspiration:

The *Ratio Studiorum*—the official plan of studies followed by the Jesuits for most of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries—emphasized eloquence. Classes would focus not only on the written aspects of composition, but on the memorization and delivery of written works. Moreover, students were frequently expected to speak in front of their class, and even in front of a public audience on special occasions.

This was because, for the early Jesuits, eloquence was not a mental exercise: it did not simply mean that one was articulate or creative. Eloquence was something that required a healthy body, with proper attention to personal appearance; it was something that required a strong moral character, with time to pray and discern the best “way of proceeding.” Every aspect of the human person played a role in achieving *eloquentia perfecta*”; writing was just one of many tools for persuading an audience.

Prompt: With proper attention to the vocal elements of speech-making, compose and deliver a three- to five-minute speech to our class in which you inform them of an issue in our campus community and persuade them to act on a plausible solution.

Assignment Goals:

After completing the assignment, students should be able to...

- Investigate meaningful issues in their community
- Compose writing that’s clear and engaging when read aloud
- Recite a piece of writing in a persuasive and effective manner
- Actively listen to speeches and critically analyze their messages

A Writer's Examen

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In this exercise, you will reflect on your growth and potential as a writer by examining your thoughts and emotions throughout the writing process. This practice of reflecting on your own thinking is called “**metacognition**,” and education psychologists consider it to be a vital part of learning. Metacognition requires us to be the mechanics of our own brains, looking “under the hood” of our thought process and assessing how each part is working. When we do this well, we can “keep” what’s working, and “fix” or “replace” what isn’t.

St. Ignatius of Loyola never used the word “metacognition,” but he dedicated his life to the idea of learning and growing from deep personal reflection. At first, he did this for himself in solitude, while recovering from battle wounds in a cave. After recovering, however, he guided others through the same personal reflections that he had composed, revising and reimagining them over the course of his life. The simplest of these reflections is a famous meditative prayer known as “the Examen.”

What is “The Examen”?

“The Examen” is a daily reflective prayer that was first developed by St. Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It has two basic purposes. First, as with any personal prayer, the Examen is designed to place a person into intimate conversation with God. Beyond this, however, the Examen serves as a meditative process of recollection and reflection. Ignatius believed that God is present in all things, but just because God is present doesn’t mean God is easy to find. Rather, each person must carefully examine their memories to discern where, when, and how God has been speaking to

them that day. By practicing a daily Examen, one can find meaningful themes, patterns, and lessons from the rhythms of their everyday life.

The Examen is traditionally divided into five steps.

- I. Enter into God's presence.** Find a quiet place. Still your thoughts and your body, and invite God into your heart and mind. Allow yourself to feel your breath, your heartbeat, and the ambient noises around you. Realize that these all come from God, that God sustains you and all of creation. Imagine God seated beside you, or in front of you, looking at you as if you were going to have a conversation.

- II. Give thanks.** Call to mind the many gifts God has placed in your life (e.g. loved ones, good health, the natural world, etc.). For each gift, offer your gratitude to God.

- III. Reflect on the movements of your day.** Allow the memories from your day to play through your mind, almost like a movie. Recall the moments, emotions, desires, and repulsions (or, as Ignatius calls them, "interior movements") that you experienced. What sticks out to you? At this point, do not pass judgment on them, but simply take a moment to examine them for what they are.

Now, select one or two "movements" that you find most significant. Ask yourself: where did that movement *move* you? Did it move you toward God? Toward hope or interior peace? Toward mercy and care for others? When you experienced the movement, did you feel more full of life? Or, did that movement take you away from God? Toward anxiety or

despair? Toward self-centeredness, impatience, or hatred? When you experienced the movement, did you feel less full of life?

- IV. Rejoice and seek forgiveness.** Now that you have awareness of where your spirit has moved throughout the day, take this time to rejoice for the moments when you may have moved closer to God and hopeful peace. Or, take this time to ask for forgiveness and healing for the moments when you may have moved away from God and hopeful peace. Praise God for making these movements clear to you.
- V. Look to tomorrow.** Reflect on what your day will look like tomorrow. What challenges might you face? What gifts might you receive? Keeping all of this in mind, ask God for something practical and specific that will help you move closer to God and hopeful peace in the day to come (e.g. fortitude and patience while taking a Calculus quiz, mercy and understanding when interacting with a lab partner who you find frustrating, etc.). Finally, close with a moment of silence or a prayer that is close to your heart.

This process of reflection, discernment, and conversation is repeated daily, both in the late evenings and at midday.

In this exercise, you will undertake a “**Writer’s Examen**” to develop metacognitive writing practices. Unlike the Examen developed by St. Ignatius, this Examen will not be a conversation with God. Rather, it will be a conversation between you and yourself about your writing. You do

not need to be a Christian, or even religious to do this exercise: all you need is to be open-minded and willing to write.

A Writer's Examen

Begin by situating yourself in a quiet place, preferably a place with dim lighting where you will be undisturbed. You may also choose to close your eyes when not writing. This will allow you to withdraw your focus from your immediate surroundings, and instead devote it to this meditation. You should have a writing utensil and something to write on in front of you.

- I. Free write.** Using the paper in front of you, write whatever comes into your mind for at least ten minutes. Don't focus on the content of what you're writing: there's no need to think about an overall theme, organization, coherence, or even grammar and spelling. Your goal is just to practice what scholar Peter Elbow calls "shedding ink." Try to keep your writing utensil moving the whole time, and don't cross out or erase anything you write. When you feel like your focus has shifted from your everyday concerns and your environment to the process of writing, you may put down your writing utensil and close your eyes.

- II. Give thanks.** Call to mind different things in your life that you're grateful for (loved ones, good health, education, shelter, good food, etc.). Imagine each of these things in your mind's eye, in different contexts. For instance, if you're imagining your home, imagine it in both summer and winter. Then, when you have a good list of them, pick up your writing utensil, and begin to write them down by name (below your free write). Imagine that the

act of writing them is your way of giving thanks for their existence in your life; that your writing of their names is an embodiment of your gratitude.

III. Reflect on your experience of writing. Allow the memories from your free writing to play through your mind, almost like a movie. Try to trace the “interior movements” that occurred within your mind and heart as you undertook the process of writing. What feelings emerged? Did your focus remain in the present moment, or did you become immersed in your writing? Did you get bored? If yes, when? And did you become interested again at any point?

Were you able to write for the whole time without stopping? Did you feel tempted to go back and revise at any point? If yes, what kinds of revisions did you feel most tempted to make?

Which part(s) felt the easiest? Which part(s) felt most challenging? Which part(s) did you feel most excited about when writing? Which part(s) did you feel least excited about when writing?

Did you feel your mind making decisions about diction, syntax, or organization as you wrote? For example, did you almost write a certain word, but then changed it? Or did the words on the page reflect the thoughts you initially had in your mind?

How was your body positioned while you were writing? Did you shift throughout the process, or stay relatively still? Were you comfortable? Uncomfortable (hot, cold, sore, stiff, tired)? Were you conscious of your body throughout, or did your focus move away from it?

IV. Rejoice and acknowledge. Now, read back your writing on the page in front of you.

Compare it with your reflection on your “interior movements” and your embodied experience of writing. Do you notice any connection between your interior movements, your embodied experience, and the writing in front of you on the page?

Pick a paragraph, a sentence, or even a phrase that you are glad to have written. What do you like about it? How does it express something meaningful about yourself, other people, or the world around you? Consider the words you chose, the sentence structure you used, and the way it resonates with the writing around it. Now ask yourself: as a writer, what can you learn from this piece of writing? Do not move on until you have articulated something you can learn from this part of your free writing. When you have settled on something, write it out on your paper. Read it back to yourself, and *rejoice* that you have both produced some meaningful writing and have learned something from it.

Now, pick a paragraph, a sentence, or even a phrase that confuses you, frustrates you, or simply one that you find un compelling. What don't you like about it? Does it strike you as something meaningful? If it doesn't strike you as meaningful, did writing *that* part lead you to write *another* part that you find meaningful? If it did lead you to write something meaningful, rejoice, and understand that writing is a process of discovery. If you don't

think that the part you picked led you to write something meaningful, *acknowledge* this for a moment. Then, remind yourself that writing is difficult and that we, as writers, will often produce things that “go nowhere.” Understand that this is part of the writing process too and that—even if it doesn’t feel like it at this moment in time—it’s good that you wrote that part.

- V. Look to tomorrow.** Re-read the lesson you learned from the piece of writing that you found meaningful. Now, close your eyes and imagine yourself the next time you sit down to write. How will you apply this lesson in your writing then? Imagine yourself recalling this moment of reflection, and using it to produce another meaningful piece of writing. If you feel called, write down a practical step you can take to remember this lesson the next time you write. Finally, close with a moment of silence.