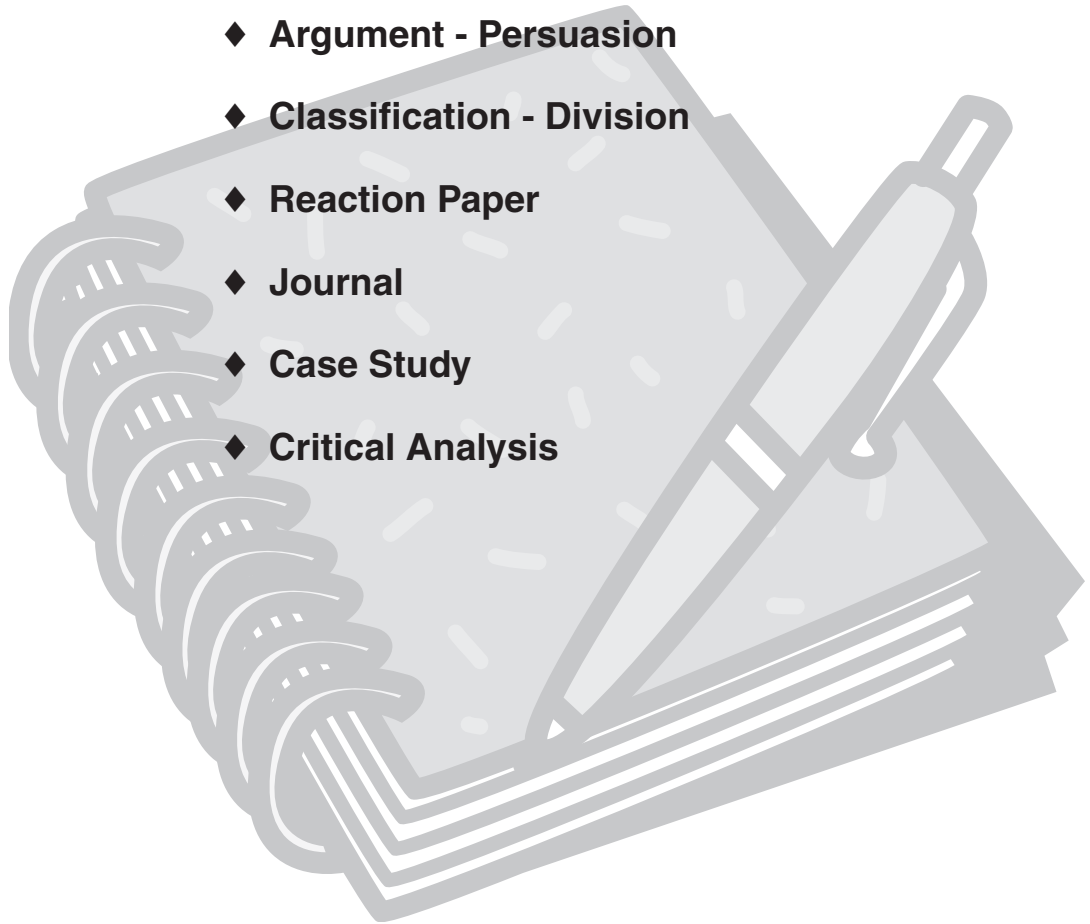


Alternative Writing Assignments

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Alternative Writing Assignments

There are a variety of short, **special purpose** writing assignments that instructors can assign to students in lieu of traditional term papers. Even though these assignments are shorter in length than the traditional term paper, they still require students to use the same elements of correct writing that they would use in a traditional term paper. These shorter papers, just like their longer cousins, must have organization, unity, coherence, conciseness, and clarity. They require students to use a variety of supportive devices to “back up” their ideas. They must also be correct in terms of grammar, punctuation, mechanics, spelling, and usage. In essence, the only differences between these **special purpose** papers and the traditional term paper is length and purpose. The following is a partial list of **special purpose** writing assignments and a brief description of each type:

Summary

A summary is a brief description of the main idea and key supporting points of something students have read, heard, experienced, or had as an assignment.

Position Paper

A position paper is a short paper in which students take a for or against position about an issue, theory, or event. Students must justify their positions by using supporting evidence. (Supporting evidence is discussed on page 11 of this booklet.) An American government and politics instructor may, as an example, ask students to write a position paper on term limits in Congress.

Description

A description paper paints a verbal picture of a person, place, or thing. The details used in this type of writing usually appeal to the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. This type of writing has many uses. It can be used, for example, to write news reports for a class in journalism, to describe an experiment for a class in science, or to paint a vivid picture of conditions in a ghetto for a class in sociology.

Narration

Narrative writing is telling a story to make a point. In this type of writing, students usually answer the journalist's questions: Who? What? When? Where? and How? Answering these questions simply tells what happened at a particular event. Most narratives, however, also answer the question Why? In these narratives, students go beyond merely reciting events. They also discuss the motives that underlie the events. Students may answer the journalist's questions about a failed referendum in a school district, but they may also go beyond simply stating the facts and explore why the referendum failed.

Compare-Contrast

Comparison examines the similarities among things; contrast examines the differences; comparison-contrast examines both similarities and differences. The purpose of compare-contrast writing is to have students understand things more clearly, and at times, to make judgments about them. Students, for example, may be asked to analyze two scientific theories for a science class or to compare and contrast two different types of personality disorders and their effects on long term relationships for a psychology class.

Process Analysis

Process analysis writing explains how something is made or done. To analyze a process effectively, students must know it thoroughly and be able to divide it into steps. A criminal justice instructor, as an example, may ask students to explain the process of taking fingerprints, or a political science instructor may ask students to explain the way the House Judiciary Committee works.

Cause and Effect

Cause examines the reasons why actions, attitudes, events and conditions exist. Effect examines their consequences. Instructors may assign cause essays, effect essays, or cause-and-effect essays. For example, an economics instructor may ask students to write about the causes of inflation; a criminal justice instructor may ask students to write about the consequences of white collar crime; or a nursing instructor may ask students to write about the causes and effects of smoking.

**Argument-
Persuasion**

Argument-persuasion is writing that has students take a position on an issue and then requires them to defend that position with supporting evidence with the purpose of persuading someone to accept the position. Argument relies on logic and reasoning to convince the reader, while persuasion appeals to the reader's emotions, values, and beliefs. Although argument and persuasion are slightly different, writers usually combine the two to produce an essay that has both reason and emotional appeal. For this type of essay, instructors usually make statements and have students take a position for or against the contents of the statements. Business management instructors, for example, may have students react to the statement, "Unions have ruined the free enterprise system in America." Education instructors, on the other hand, may ask students to react to the statement, "Peer tutoring is not an effective method of instruction for low-achieving students."

**Classification-
Division**

Both classification and division are writing that sorts things by placing them into categories or groups. Classification takes a number of items and groups them into various categories. Division takes one item and breaks it down into its parts. A college catalog lists courses according to the departments that offer those courses (English, art, business, etc.). This is classification. In addition, a college is organized into various divisions (the Division of General Studies, the Division of Education, the Division of Nursing, etc.). This is division. A computer instructor may, for example, ask students to classify computer language and determine appropriate applications for each group. A banking and finance instructor, as another example, may ask students to categorize different investments according to risk.

Definition

Definition writing goes beyond the dictionary definition of a term. In this type of writing, students are asked to write an entire paper to explain a term. This type of writing is called, "extended definition." Students must present a clear, basic definition of a term and support it with facts and examples. A human resource management instructor may, for example, ask students to define collective bargaining, or a math instructor may ask students to define the Cartesian Coordinate System.

Reaction Paper

In a reaction paper, students are asked to offer personal insights about the meaning and significance of an issue that may have many different perspectives. A business instructor may, for example, ask students to react to the policy of eliminating affirmative action as an issue in hiring practices.

Journal

A journal is a written account or record of some occurrence or event. This record includes students' personal analyses of the event. An education major, as an example, may keep a journal of student teaching experiences. An aviation management major, on the other hand, may keep a journal of flying experiences.

Case Study

Students who do case studies perform an analytical study of a particular event, situation, or process. They must perform an in-depth analysis of the topic they have chosen. An education major, for example, may do a case study of the effects of teacher expectations on student learning. A criminal justice major may do a case study on the impact of a curfew on juvenile crime.

Critical Analysis

A critical analysis is a paper in which students examine, critique, and evaluate an event, situation, or issue. Students must support their analyses with evidence from outside sources. A criminal justice major may critically analyze the gun control issue in our country. A nursing student may critically analyze the issue of euthanasia within the medical profession.