

**Freshman English 101**

**Handout Packet 2**

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Instructions for **Unit 1**

**Analyzing Effective Writing**

In this unit, you will first work in a group to analyze an editorial with fellow students before doing the same task in your first individual paper. Know these key points before you begin: your primary task is to determine how effective or ineffective the piece of writing seems to you or your group. Your agreement or disagreement with the author has nothing to do with this assignment. While you may want to comment on the issue discussed in the editorial, this is a matter to explore after you've examined the writer's effectiveness. Outside resources should be used only to support your points as to how well the writer did in his or her work.

**Choosing an Editorial**

Your first task will be to find three opinion pieces to bring to class for your group to look over. Your group will choose one editorial for your first group project, and then you'll do the same with another piece of writing for your individual paper.

What you're looking for are short articles that are obviously expressing an opinion and are not informative news items. You can find them in local newspapers on pages called "Editorials," "Opinion," or sometimes "Commentary." News magazines like *Time* or *Newsweek* often have a page set aside for such commentary on their back pages. Of course, you can look for opinion pieces on the internet, but you might need help from a librarian to know where to look. As you'll be looking for these articles over the weekend, one very good source would be your Sunday paper. Articles should have at least four or five paragraphs to work with. If the item is too short, you won't have enough material to analyze. If it's several pages or longer, you may have too much to read and critique.

At first, you'll merely need to collect three items to bring to class so that your group will have at least 9 to 12 items to choose from. So if you're uncertain about your articles, don't worry. Someone else might have just the article you'll need. It's worth noting that articles you think are ineffective are often the easiest to analyze. When a piece of writing is lacking in content, balance, objectivity, or reasoning, you have much you can criticize. This doesn't mean a very effective article can't be worked with--see sample student essays below for examples of how to do this.

### **Helpful Questions**

After deciding which piece you wish to examine, discuss the following questions with your group:

1. What is the author's purpose? Is the thesis clearly stated or are you unsure what the writer is trying to say and do? Is the writer trying to inform, persuade, or simply express an opinion?
2. Who is the writer's audience? Does the writer effectively communicate with the audience with well-chosen words, images, and information? Does the writer assume his (or her) readers know about the issue or does the author prepare the reader with background details and the contexts of the issue? Can you distinguish between facts and opinions--do facts support the author's opinions?
3. How does the writer try to get his/her point across? Is the content an appeal to emotion or does the writer use reason and logic? Is his or her approach objective or is it clearly biased? Is the author credible? Why or why not? Does the information seem to come from reliable sources or merely expressions of personal opinion?
4. Does the writer present varying points of view or does he/she simply state what they think? Does the writer address what other opinions might be and respond to various perspectives other than his or her own? In other words, is the editorial balanced?
5. Was the editorial persuasive? What could have made it more effective? This will be the core of your papers.

### Ideas to Consider

1. It's possible some aspects of the piece are effective and others less so. You can address what you think works well in one part of your paper and point to weaknesses in another.
2. To develop your points, quote or paraphrase phrases or sentences from the editorial so your reader knows what you're referring to. Do not assume your reader has read this editorial.
3. If you feel the writer is lacking in supporting detail, what sort of information would have strengthened the points? This is where outside sources might help you.
4. If the author does not adequately discuss opposing views, you might point out what arguments others can raise that are as effective or perhaps more important than what you read. Again, outside sources may help.
5. You should not use phrases like "Our group thinks Morgan made many good points" or "I think Morgan is on target when he claims . . ." Make your writing more effective by stating your opinions as "Clearly, Morgan makes many solid points" or "Most readers will find Morgan's ideas right on target because . . ."
6. Many students ask what to do if group members disagree on points. That's a good thing--see point 1 above. It's fair to divide your essay into aspects some see as strong and others might see as weak. Or you could determine the piece is effective for certain audiences but not others. Remember: agreeing or disagreeing has nothing to do with evaluating a piece of writing. You may disagree strongly with the editorial but find it effective. You can agree with it but find it rather thin or underdeveloped.

For other ideas, see the model student papers posted at my website.

### Sample Editorial for Class Discussion

Read the following editorial and make notes as to what you find effective, what you don't. To get things going, the use of "lowlifes" in the first sentence is not the best word choice.

Op-Ed Columnist: An Absence of Class  
By BOB HERBERT. NYTimes.com

A group of lowlifes at a Tea Party rally in Columbus, Ohio, last week taunted and humiliated a man who was sitting on the ground with a sign that said he had Parkinson's disease. The disgusting behavior was captured on a widely circulated videotape. One of the Tea Party protesters leaned over the man and sneered: "If you're looking for a handout, you're in the wrong end of town."

Another threw money at the man, first one bill and then another, and said contemptuously, "I'll pay for this guy. Here you go. Start a pot."

In Washington on Saturday, opponents of the health care legislation spit on a black congressman and shouted racial slurs at two others, including John Lewis, one of the great heroes of the civil rights movement. Barney Frank, a Massachusetts Democrat who is chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, was taunted because he is gay.

At some point, we have to decide as a country that we just can't have this: We can't allow ourselves to remain silent as foaming-at-the-mouth protesters scream the vilest of epithets at members of Congress — epithets that The Times will not allow me to repeat here.

It is 2010, which means it is way past time for decent Americans to rise up against this kind of garbage, to fight it aggressively wherever it appears. And it is time for every American of good will to hold the Republican Party accountable for its role in tolerating, shielding and encouraging foul, mean-spirited and bigoted behavior in its ranks and among its strongest supporters.

For decades the G.O.P. has been the party of fear, ignorance and divisiveness. All you have to do is look around to see what it has done to the country.

The greatest economic inequality since the Gilded Age was followed by a near-total collapse of the overall economy. As a country, we have a monumental mess on our hands and still the Republicans have nothing to offer in the way of a remedy except more tax cuts for the rich.

This is the party of trickle down and weapons of mass destruction, the party of birthers and death-panel lunatics. This is the party that genuflects at the altar of right-wing talk radio, with its insane, nauseating, nonstop commitment to hatred and bigotry.

Glenn Beck of Fox News has called President Obama a “racist” and asserted that he “has exposed himself as a guy, over and over and over again, who has a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture.”

Mike Huckabee, a former Republican presidential candidate, has said of Mr. Obama's economic policies: “Lenin and Stalin would love this stuff.”

The G.O.P. poisons the political atmosphere and then has the gall to complain about an absence of bipartisanship.

The toxic clouds that are the inevitable result of the fear and the bitter conflicts so relentlessly stoked by the Republican Party — think blacks against whites, gays versus straights, and a whole range of folks against immigrants — tend to obscure the tremendous damage that the party's policies have inflicted on the country. If people are arguing over immigrants or abortion or whether gays should be allowed to marry, they're not calling the G.O.P. to account for (to take just one example) the horribly destructive policy of cutting taxes while the nation was fighting two wars.

If you're all fired up about Republican-inspired tales of Democrats planning to send grandma to some death chamber, you'll never get to the G.O.P.'s war against the right of ordinary workers to organize and negotiate in their own best interests — a war that has diminished living standards for working people for decades.

With a freer hand, the Republicans would have done more damage. George W. Bush tried to undermine Social Security. John McCain was willing to put Sarah Palin a heartbeat away from the Oval Office and thought Phil Gramm would have made a crackerjack Treasury secretary. (For those who may not remember, Mr. Gramm was a deregulation zealot who told us during the presidential campaign that we were suffering from a “mental recession.”)

A party that promotes ignorance (“Just say no to global warming”) and provides a safe house for bigotry cannot serve the best interests of our country. Back in the 1960s, John Lewis risked his life and endured savage beatings to secure fundamental rights for black Americans while right-wing Republicans like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan were lining up with segregationist Democrats to oppose landmark civil rights legislation.

Since then, the right-wingers have taken over the G.O.P. and Mr. Lewis, now a congressman, must still endure the garbage they have wrought.

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### Writing Clearer, Concise Sentences

Rewrite the following sentences. You may add subjects, the new version in the space below the original.

1. It is an evident indication of ineffective management when inventory estimates are incorrect.
2. It should be noted that the final report is the most important.
3. It is Janet's proposal that the division adopt the ChoozRite scientific test which is an aide in the selection of new employees for the firm.
4. in efficient organizations, usage of personnel to attain maximum production time occurs.
5. at an earlier meeting, a new organization plan was selected and a new budget was adopted.
6. It is important that the intern can be relied on at all times.

7. Employee termination in companies should be avoided not only because it is expensive, but also because the loss of an honest, responsible, and industrious person could account for the reduction in productivity.
8. Attempts were made on the part of the engineering staff in regard to an assessment of the project.
9. Those students who are engaged in studies at HACC must make a search for time in which to unwind.
10. The technical writing student made a distinction between active and passive verb forms while making revisions in ten different sentences.

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Two Papers for Discussion (Unit 3)

Below are two persuasive papers written by freshman English students. In groups, evaluate each paper and assign them a grade based on how persuasive you think they are. Assign one member to take notes describing your reasons for the grade you give each paper.

#### Legalized Gambling - The Best Way for Pennsylvania

Many opponents of casino and slot machine gambling in Pennsylvania believe these potential sources of revenue lead to bankruptcy, suicide, and criminal activity. Politicians, governors, and church leaders are divided over the benefits and the drawbacks of using gambling to increase state revenues to subsidize public education. Looking at the issue objectively, the advantages of using gambling to reduce property taxes and fund schools would clearly outweigh the drawbacks if these forms of gambling are properly managed.

Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell believes that legalized casino and slot gambling is a must for the state. After his bill passed through Pennsylvania's Legislature successfully on July 4, 2004, he stated, "Starting now, we begin the long overdue process of recapturing billions of dollars in lost revenue, creating thousands of jobs, dramatically contributing to the future of the horse racing industry and finally returning millions of dollars in the form of lower property and wage taxes for the citizens of Pennsylvania." (Passage para 4) When this bill became law, it guaranteed seven race track casinos, five stand-alone casinos, and two hotel casinos (Garcia). Governor Rendell said \$1 billion in property tax and wage relief will be granted by the new law. In his view, the average homeowner will save about \$333 per year (Garcia).

However, those opposed to the legalization of gambling say that Act 72, the Governor's plan to divide the projected \$1 billion, requires the participating school districts to increase the local income taxes by one-tenth of a percent (Miller). Some of the districts said no to the plan because of the requirement of voter approval to raise property taxes above the rate of inflation. Almost 80 percent of Pennsylvania school districts rejected the plan because of these reasons (Miller). Others had different qualms. A few rejected the plan based on their moral convictions, saying they thought it was sending children a bad message to be paying for their education with gambling revenue (Miller).

To support such worries, opponents of legalized gambling state that gambling causes bankruptcy and cite a report published in *Contemporary Economic Policy* in October 2002 (Greene). The report demonstrated that counties with one to four gambling facilities had a bankruptcy filing rate 14 percent higher than counties without casinos (Greene). According to this report, counties with five or more casinos had a rate 35 percent higher than counties with no gambling outlets (Greene). However, two other reports, one published in 2000 and one in 1998, come to different conclusions. For example, in 2000, Representative Frank Wolf from Virginia spent \$250,000 of public money on a U.S. Treasury Department Study to find a link between gambling and bankruptcy (Smith). The U.S. Treasury Department studied existing literature and conducted their own research. Their conclusion stated there is "no connection between state bankruptcy rates and the existence of or introduction of casino gambling" (Smith). In addition to this report, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission gave the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago data to analyze. They also wanted to find out if there was a connection between gambling and bankruptcy (Smith). Their conclusion was, "The casino effect is not statistically significant for bankruptcy." They instead attributed the increase in bankruptcies over the last 20 years to the changes

in the 1978 federal bankruptcy law, which made the declaration easier for individuals, as well as easier access to credit for most Americans (Smith).

Those opposed to legalized gambling also claim that gambling causes losses incurred by individuals, gambling addiction, crime, corruption, and the cannibalization of local businesses (Jones). They also believe state governments look at gaming revenues as free money, and the governments are becoming too reliant on revenues generated by gambling (Miller). George Knudson, a South Dakota state senator, said, “the biggest addict of gambling turns out to be the state government that becomes dependent on it” (Miller).

However, in a survey conducted in seven communities with casinos, 77 percent of the people believed the casinos have had a positive effect on their economy (Smith). And 65 percent believed the casinos improved their quality of life. Also, the Arthur Frobe study established that retail sales have increased every year in many of the communities since their casinos were built (Smith). For example, Las Vegas, which has more casinos than any other city in the nation, has a booming economy. Nevada has led the nation in job growth for six out of the past seven years (Smith).

Although opponents of legalized gambling and casinos have offered some strong arguments, they have been unsuccessful in proving gaming fails to boost economic growth not only for the state in which the casinos are located but also for the surrounding states. Communities have experienced an enhanced quality of life. Jobs have been created, tax revenues have increased, and public services have grown. Therefore, while some may worry that gambling revenues are no answer to our budgetary problems, their fears are more based on myths and not reason.

Where are the Young Voters?

Voting within a representative democracy like that of the United States is held to be one of the more cherished privileges provided to citizens. When the United States took its first steps as a young nation, the only individuals allowed to vote were 21 years of age or older, white, and owned land. It was not until the passage of the several amendments to the Constitution that the institution of voting changed within the United States. The fifteenth amendment gave the right to vote to those who were previously slaves, and the creation of the nineteenth amendment produced women's suffrage ("Early").

Many other obstacles like poll taxes and literacy tests were created to reduce the ability for African Americans to vote, but with legislation of Congress and after many Supreme Court decisions, the right to vote was finally provided to all citizens equally ("Early"). In 1971, Congress lowered the age to vote from 21 to 18-years-old. The general idea was that by lowering the age to vote, younger people would become more active in all levels of government. Has this been an effective procedure or has this done nothing for the country? There may be many reasons for low voter turnout among young people, but what are the ways to solve the problem?

Writer Mary Meyers offers interesting ideas about lowering the voting age to 16-years-old by providing very interesting information about the direction in which voting has been traveling since 1971. The fact that the rate of participation in voting among people 25 and under has declined 15% compared to the 4% of the general public becomes a focal point for her opinion. She presents two distinct ideas that many states' legislative bodies have

pondered. Would the lowering of the voting age from 18 to 17 or 16-years-old solve the poor turn out? And would an increase in education assist in solve the problems at the ballot box? (Meyers)

It is these questions that many state legislatures are answering. Education is thought to be one of the best methods for increasing the number of young people on Election Day. The use of civics classes within the education system would build informed citizens who were then be able to voice their opinion through their vote. A Michigan congressman felt that 17-year-olds are smart, capable citizens and democracy would be better served if they had the ability to vote. Also, since the average 17-year-old would be in school, it presents the school with an excellent opportunity to educate and prepare them to competently use their new right to vote in state and local elections. Meyers has found that many states have already proposed the legislation to lower the voting age. Meyers found that Pennsylvanian legislators have passed a resolution urging Congress to allow 17-year-old citizens the right to vote. Their stance was that 17-year-olds were allowed to join the military with parental consent and that the political process could benefit from the energy of young people (Meyers).

As many states begin to take the initiative for lowering the voting age and increasing education, it is believed that an amendment to the U.S. Constitution would take a great deal of work and motivation which may never happen. Meyers feels the local level of government would be the most logical area to insert the changes in the voting process. She feels that local issues have more of a tendency to affect the young voters. Starting young voters on local elections will also help in educating them for future national elections. Her opinion and others like her have made an attempt at rectifying the problems with young voters (Meyers).

Some will argue that lowering the voting age will not bring more young people to the polls. Bringing the youth to the polls is just like bringing them to a shopping mall. If their attention can be captured, then voter registration and attendance at the polls will increase overwhelmingly. Organizations like MTV have tried to gather up the young voters and try to persuade them to vote, but have not been able to affect the numbers at the polls. This would not be the case for elections in 2004.

According to James Birch, the new way of capturing the youth vote has been established by a nonpartisan organization created by Norman Lear. The campaign was called Declare Yourself which had the goal of providing an easy way for young voters to become registered and to finally vote (Birch). Birch pointed out the effective strategies used by the Declare Yourself campaign. The first step the campaign took was to research possible reasons why young voters did not participate in elections. The results showed that the voters, 18-29 years-of-age said that they did not vote for several reasons. They were never informed on how to become registered or were not aware that registration forms were available online (Birch). Others felt that they did not know enough about the candidates, politics, or the issues.

To solve this problem the Declare Yourself team created a website for young voters. It would allow potential voters to download and print out a voter registration. The website also provided common knowledge about the candidates and their stances on issues affecting the country. In an attempt to draw more attention, the campaign used many Hollywood

celebrities to push the issue of voting. Even some celebrities registered for the first time (Birch). The use of corporate sponsors like Yahoo! and Comedy Central provided the campaign with not only extra money but advertising for their cause. The end result was a dramatic increase in registrations, which helped increase the number of young people voting. It was the largest increase in youth votes in more than a decade (Birch).

Birch demonstrated what actions have produced positive results when dealing with a declining number of young voters. Aside from private organizations striving to convince the youth that voting will benefit them, there are some young people whom have had the sudden urge to voice their opinion and vote.

One example of this self-motivation is that of Randy Jackson. Jackson wrote an article for a Philadelphia periodical about his first voting experience. He found that producing a positive spin on voting could aid in adding more young voters. Once he had discovered what made him want to vote, he understood the power and the gift voting could be for the youth (Jackson). He then went on to use this motivation in the creation the voting bloc. It is a scoring system in which his organization would provide information about candidates. The voters would be able to view the score of each candidate on the issues of the community or even national issues. The scoring slates would then be used to provide poll numbers for voters and non-voters. The result would be an introduction to voting for non-voters and also a way of holding candidates accountable for their stance on certain issues. Jackson feels that this could even sway a presidential election in the future (Jackson).

Ideas such as the voting bloc can effectively assist in producing more voters, especially young voters that might not follow politics. Following politics and gaining an opinion has been the main goal of each of these organizations. Each organization or individual had developed its own distinct way for seizing the youth vote. It seems that within the next few election cycles that young people will contribute their votes as they become more involved with the issues of their country (Jackson).

From another angle, Franks and Hall are two political consultants who feel that low voter turnout among young people should be blamed on the candidates running for office and the political parties. They also feel that today's issues are not triggering the attention like the issue of the Vietnam War in 1972. Low interest could be due to the fact that the government issued a draft during the Vietnam War, and that the Iraq war is primarily fought by an entire volunteer force. But, although some voters might not see the war as the big issue, there are many other issues that may be important to their individual interests. Joblessness, high prices in healthcare, and the environment are just some of the issues that young voters should focus on during elections. Choosing the correct candidate to facilitate their opinions and needs is much more important than not participating from lack of interest (Franks & Hall).

Franks and Hall presented many good points about the importance of voting. They have strong opinions about the direction the youth should take when it is time to cast their ballot. As political consultants, they are able to see what areas need work on the part of the candidate and the voter.

Everyone has an opinion. Politics consists of many opinions and compromises. Voting is the main tool to be used in order to express one's personal opinion.

If a voter is unhappy with the policies of their elected official, they have the ability to vote them out of office. Voting has been shown to be important to the success of a free nation. The ability to vote gives power back to the people and has been the key to freedom and liberty in the United States. Wars have been fought so that people can choose their own paths in life, their freedoms, and have the ability to voice their opinions. So, if you're legally entitled to exercise your rights, become informed and vote.