

The English Department Writing Plan

INTRODUCTION

The English Department at Badin High School recognizes that writing is a highly focused, creative, and personal activity. Overall, our curriculum is writing intensive. We are dedicated to fostering the creative expression of thought and meaning through the use of language. Just as the texts become more complex as students advance through the grade levels, so do the writing assignments. Writing includes planning and clear thinking, and so all aspects of the writing process are addressed in the curriculum: brainstorming, outlining/mapping, drafting, revision, and reflection.

In general, there are three types of essays in the English curriculum: the personal narrative or memoir essay, the informative or exposition essay, and the argumentative or persuasive essay. The narrative essay focuses on story craft. In the informative and argumentative essays, the emphasis for the student is placed on developing a strong, precise thesis; using textual evidence to defend thesis; and writing a compelling conclusion. The use of research is necessary, using MLA and APA citation styles. Rubrics are used as the primary means of assessment for writing assignments. These rubrics are consistent across the grade levels but become more complex as students advance. The goal of this curriculum is to allow our students practice, thus establishing confidence and a command of the language arts.

TYPES OF WRITING

The **personal narrative** or memoir essay deals with description of a subjective experience or an objective experience. The urge to hear a story is strong within all of us. Narrative writing includes description. Good descriptive writing begins with careful observation of specific details, uses all the senses, and extends to places, emotions, and experiences. Words must create the atmosphere or the impression of a scene on a reader. Narrative writing must *show* as well as *tell*. Narration is also concerned with sequence of events (plot), as well as setting, characterization, dialogue, and point of view.

The **exposition essay** takes many forms and varies in complexity, depending on course and grade level. Expository writing is chiefly concerned with explaining something and, if possible, entertaining. Expository prose might define a word or concept, report an incident, analyze an idea, evaluate or judge an experience. Expository essays can be formal or informal. Description and narration are used within expository writing when needed to make the explanation clearer or more interesting. Examples of methods of approach to the exposition or informative essay are listed below:

1. Summary essay (précis) – Most students are more comfortable writing a summary of a text rather than an analysis. Thus, if handled well, this assignment can be a transitional writing assignment that leads students to consider the crafting of a story. For example, students can be assigned to summarize a character trait of the protagonist or the pivotal moments in the plot.
2. The Definition essay – The definition essay deals with exactly what one suspects, the definition of a word or concept. Students must consider meaning that is literal, historical, and connotative.
3. The process essay – This type of paper explains a process in more detail, such as the process of plant growth or dog training, for example. This essay is a more complex form of the definition essay. The concise definition of a single term is not sufficient when defining a larger structure or process; we need illustrations given by example or even by anecdote and a step-by-step series of interrelated activities.
4. Comparison/Contrast essay – Students focus on the ways in which certain things or ideas are similar and/or different. In this essay, students gain a deeper understanding of the items they are comparing by making connections between texts and/or ideas and going beyond mere summary to engage in critical thinking and analysis.
5. Character Analysis essay – These types of essays illuminate and explore the importance and/or role of a character or characters in a piece of literature.
6. Setting Analysis essay – Setting is not an end in itself; it is a means. It helps us understand action, character, tone and theme. Students should be able to relate details about the setting to larger issues in the piece. Being aware of its importance helps students to become careful readers.
7. The Problem Essay – In this paper students must isolate a problem in the text. To isolate a problem, locate a central character and his actions. As in life, a character's actions produce consequences or an effect. The effect creates problems. Students must then devise a solution using textual evidence as support for the solution. For

example, students may consider Hamlet. They may isolate his problem to be that he delays vengeance. The question is, why? In an assignment of this sort, students must propose an answer and support it using evidence.

8. **Critical Analysis of a Major Idea/Theme** - The purpose of this paper is to understand how to discover ideas in literature, and then how to refine one's analysis of these ideas by looking at the means by which the author conveys these ideas. Students focus on being active readers who ask questions of the text as they read:
 - a. (what are the major ideas of this work?) Identify a major theme in the piece of literature.
 - b. (how does the author convey his ideas?) Identify the literary devices the writer used and discuss how those devices affect the overall meaning of the work (direct statements by the author, statements/dialogue by a character or persona, imagery, characterization, satire, irony, tone, etc.)
9. **Critical Analysis of Society** – These essays involve research and citing outside sources; possibilities abound:
 - a. Literary topics such as a brief biography of an author, major cultural features of an historical time period, or research of the famous contemporaries of a major writer.
 - b. Various subjects in Science and the Humanities

The **argumentative essay** aims to win assent to a belief or opinion and/or to accomplish some proposed action. The simplest form of an argumentative essay is the editorial. In the argumentative or persuasive essay, students must prove their propositions using appropriate evidence, be it textual or worldly. Essays of a persuasive nature can easily be adapted from the list above, as argumentative essays naturally include expository writing.

CONCLUSION

This writing plan will not delineate dates and assignments for each specific grade and course. That approach would be too rigid and not allow individual instructors the fluidity to tailor assignments to best fit the needs of his or her students' personal growth. The English Department does assert that every course at every grade level does include multiple writing assignments of the three major types of writing (narrative, expository, argumentative) throughout the year to enhance the writing skills of our students. Of course, any writing plan is not complete without a discussion of grammar and vocabulary. Language lessons in grammar and vocabulary are sequentially introduced and become more complex as students advance in grade level to support the growing complexity of writing assignments.

When students reach senior year, their experience in writing culminates in what are deemed the senior year exit papers. Brief parameters for these projects follow:

1. (narrative writing) **Personal Narrative** - crafted as a story using description and other elements of fiction. Related experiences can be subjective or objective. Lengths of these papers vary.
2. (expository and argumentative writing) **Formal Literary Analysis** – written in MLA format and citation style
 - a. Students select a novel of their own choice from an approved list and their own due date; the paper includes a reflection component on the students' writing process; this is an independent paper done outside of class.
 - b. 750-1000 word length (3-4 pages).
3. (expository and argumentative writing) **Formal Research Paper** – written in APA format and citation style
 - a. Cross-curricular with social studies department.
 - b. As part of the writing process, students create an annotated bibliography in which they evaluate and summarize resources.
 - c. Length requirements - CP level: 4-6 pages; ACP level: 6-8 pages; Honors level: 8-10 pages; AP level: 10-12 pages.