English 2140  Sample Assignment 1

English 2140
Writing to Learn
Double-entry Notebook Assignment
(Based on John C. Bean, Engaging Ideas [Jossey-Bass, 2001: 108])

Purpose/Goals:
A species of journal, the double-entry notebook adds a interactive and meta-reflective element to the typical journal, encouraging not only initial reflection but reinforcing the value of re-thinking. This assignment, in general, has enough flexibility to meet a number of learning goals and, as it requires regular entries, it has the virtue of repetition for reinforcing particular skills and habits of thinking. In the iteration offered here, the learning outcomes that inform the assignment are principally:

- recognize, compare, and evaluate major critical theories and apply them to works of literature
- critique literature using both primary and secondary sources
- describe, examine, and evaluate [students’] own reading practices and oral/written critical analyses
- apply writing and revision as tools for understanding literature and its interpretation

The assignment may serve well as a “pump-primer” for in-class discussions, for helping students to come to an understanding of difficult course material in their own words, for helping students develop ideas for use in their papers, and, very importantly, for giving the instructor a way to check up on the development of students’ critical thinking skills, a periodic snapshot from which to judge whether or not the pedagogical approach needs to be modified.

Assignment:
Using a typical spiral-bound notebook, the student keeps copious notes and observations on class lectures and discussions, literary works read for class, chapters from a theory/criticism text, etc. (Teachers may specify explicitly what they wish students to take such notes on.) Then, a few days after writing an entry (but probably no more than a week later), the student re-reads her entry, and on the adjacent left-hand page(s), writes an interactive commentary on the original entry. In this commentary, she might do any of the following (the list is not exhaustive, of course):

- pose questions that arise in relation to her previous entry
- raise doubts
- make connections (to other texts, ideas, philosophy, etc.)
- deepen an analysis or interpretation she offered earlier
- see or construct opposing views
- link course material to her personal experiences
- express confusion and try to write her way out of it
- revise original observations or opinions, change her mind, etc.
The recursive element of the double-entry notebook helps to inculcate the value of returning to initial observations in order to cast a critical eye not only on the subject matter of the original entry but also on the thinking patterns that informed the first entry.

Requirements:
A spiral notebook is the typical medium for this assignment, although one might also develop an electronic version of the notebook (one may already be available out there). There are typically very few requirements as to style, format, etc., as these “final product” conventions may constrain students unduly and undermine the power of the assignment. Dates and descriptive titles for each entry, however, may be very useful to both instructor and student.

Assessment:
As this is a writing to learn assignment, it is essential that the scoring method one applies emphasizes that fact. In other words, one should not grade for style, grammar/syntax, etc., but rather for the depth of thinking and engagement that the entries reveal. Also, as this assignment is most effective for students when they get feedback regularly (say, at least three times over the course of the semester, with the first of these evaluations occurring quite early in the semester), you should develop a means of evaluation that will not be time-intensive for you. Most people use some variety of a scale by which to measure individual entries, such as the one offered below. The particular scale should reflect the emphasis you are trying to achieve as a teacher.

10 = consistently shows strong engagement and insight
8 = often shows strong engagement and insight
6 = shows effort but does not venture far from the obvious
4 = shows superficial thinking, minimal effort
0 = does not complete the assignment

Using the scale above, the course final grade for the double entry notebook can be calculated fairly easily on the 100-point scale.

English 2140  Sample Assignment 2

English 2140
Collaborative/Group Activity
Group literary analysis exercise

Purpose/Goals:
This exercise focuses on the skill of gathering textual evidence to support a general thesis and articulating the evidence’s relationship to that thesis, which the instructor supplies to the group in advance. As such, it principally advances the first part of the following objective:

• critique literature using both primary and secondary sources
The assignment offers a good deal of flexibility in terms of the angle that the teacher may ask students to take on the literary text through explicit instruction. It works well for inculcating close-reading ala New Criticism, but it might be used equally as well to develop a New Historicist, Marxist, queer, or other reading capacity.

**Assignment:**
This assignment is best used in relation to a required literary text has been previously discussed only minimally in class. Depending on the text, however, the instructor may want to give a bit of introductory material in advance. The key consideration is that you do not want students to end up merely aping information from an earlier discussion but to have to dig for evidence (knowledge is constructed, not given). Here’s a general outline of how the exercise might proceed, followed by a sample group assignment sheet:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 persons. (More than 5 in a group may result in too much division of responsibility.)
2. Hand each group an assignment sheet that provides:
   a. A clear indication of which text they should be considering, which may be a complete object, such as a short lyric poem, or a subsection of a larger work, such as a chapter of a novel or a scene of a play.
   b. A thesis that the group is charged with backing by means of textual evidence.
   c. Instructions for precisely how to proceed and precisely what “product” will be required of the group as a result of the exercise.
   d. Time restrictions.
3. Run the exercise, keeping time, and checking on groups’ progress, reserving time at the end of the class for groups to report their results to the class as a whole.
4. Moderate a discussion, calling on other groups for comments as necessary and guiding the discussion to the appropriate emphasis.

**Sample assignment sheet:**

Using the poem itself—its diction, metaphors, and other poetic devices and techniques—support the following thesis: In Phillis Wheatley’s “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” the strident advocating of Christianity washes out positive racial consciousness.

1. Before you begin working decide on a volunteer to record the results of the exercise and a volunteer to serve a spokesperson for the group at the end of class.
2. Work individually for ten minutes, each of you re-reading the poem carefully one or two more times with the thesis in mind. Mark passages, words, etc., that you believe support the thesis, and scribble down a few words on scrap paper about how the evidence supports it.
3. After the ten minutes has expired (I will give you the signal), reconvene as a group and discuss your individual findings and the logic that ties each piece of evidence to the thesis. Do not shy away from argument. After hearing each piece of evidence, decide as a group on the three most persuasive pieces. This should take 10-15 minutes altogether.
4. As a group, craft a single statement (one or two sentences) for each piece of evidence, stating clearly what the evidence is and the reasons it supports the thesis. The volunteer scribe should write these statements down on a sheet of paper, along with the group members’ last names, to turn in at the end of the class. This should take 5-10 minutes.
5. When called upon, the group spokesperson will present your evidence and argument to the class, and as a class, we’ll discuss the merits of your case.

Notes on this particular assignment:
1. This assignment uses a somewhat controversial thesis, which is a good practice for this class, 2140, since the discipline of literary studies is characterized by disagreement and argument for the plausibility of certain viewpoints. 2140 students should come to understand that, so if you can use theses with some degree of critical/theoretical controversy, so much the better.
2. You can have all the groups in the class work on the same thesis or perhaps split the class into groups that work on one thesis and groups that work on a counter-thesis. This can lead to a very good discussion. The assignment has quite a bit of flexibility.
3. In the class discussion portion of the exercise, it is a good idea to focus not just on evidence selection, but on the reasoning that supports the evidence. In Wheatley poem, locating evidence will not be that hard. Instead, where students will tend to skimp is in building the case for how the evidence works to support the thesis, and it is important to emphasize the necessity of making a logical and clear case.

Requirements:
The group should produce a product as the result of their work, such as the set of statements required in the sample assignment sheet above. In the absence of some document (or performance, or both) which the group is on the hook for, they may not stay on task.

Assessment:
It is difficult to say how one might assess performance on this assignment. There is a strong argument for not assessing it at all, in an “official” sense at least. So long as the groups enjoy the work and their work results in good fodder for a class discussion that gets at the issues at hand, then the task has done its job. But if the group-work in your particular class historically appears to be an opportunity to socialize more than to work toward a goal, then you may want to institute a grade of some sort. One possible means of doing so is to holistically score a required written end product on the appropriateness of the evidence to the thesis and the depth of reasoning linking evidence to thesis. One can also augment/modify that score, as it pertains to individual grades for the assignment, by reference to a group self-evaluation in which each group member confidentially rates her cohorts.

English 2140 Sample Assignment 3

English 2140
Oral Presentation
Poetic Metaphor Presentation (5 minutes)
Purpose/Goals:
This assignment tries to prepare students to meet the “implementation” portion of the following course outcome:

· define key literary terms/concepts and implement these in oral/written discussion as well as in literary interpretation

The assignment should help to inculcate a habit of careful scrutiny of figurative language that will serve indispensably in formal writing and class discussions.

Assignment:
Students select a single metaphor from a poem the class is reading for class and prepare an analysis of the metaphor to present to the class, specifically answering the following questions:
1. What is the metaphor and where is it located in the poem? (Not simply a line number, but provide other contextual information as well—in other words, does the metaphor appear at a particularly important juncture in the poem? Etc.) Is the metaphor direct or implied?
2. What is being compared to what in the metaphor? What, to be more specific, is the vehicle and what is the tenor?
3. What is the significance of the metaphor for the meaning of the poem? (Here the student should try to spin out the possible meanings implied by the comparison and relate them directly to a theme, sub-theme, or set of themes in the poem.)

Notes: The assignment assumes that students already have a good grip of what a metaphor is and could offer a sound definition if asked: this task asks for an extended example of the term. It would also be worth the effort to rehearse this exercise for the students by doing a presentation of your own or by having a few volunteers offer preliminary presentations and critiquing the presentations in front of the class.

Requirements:
A written set of replies to the questions (this need not be particularly formal).

Assessment:
A qualitative assessment can be made of either the presentation itself or the written product or both based on how well the student addresses each question. There are any number of assessment instruments you might use for the assignment depending on the relative weight of the assignment, and the purpose.

For instance, if you use the assignment early within a unit on figurative language and employ it primarily to develop competency and not to measure competency, then you might construct a scoring sheet such as the following:

Question 1: unsatisfactory | good | superior
Comments (if any):
Question 2: unsatisfactory | good | superior

And so on....
The instrument above can provide very good feedback for the student, who can use the information to improve performance on a second presentation or related assignment, and it also gives the instructor a good feel for how the student is doing on this fairly complex critical thinking task.

Or if you wish to develop the presentation assignment as an instrument for measuring competency, then you may want to develop a scoring device that yields a numerical grade, as in the following example:

Using this type of matrix, performance on each question can be scored as either poor, weak, good, or excellent with a check mark, and question value can be weighted so that the more complex the question, the more the value. Adding the point values under each check yields the point grade for the assignment. This instrument is not perfect, and it of course begs the question of what the instructor means by “good,” and so forth. So, it is necessary, as it is with any evaluative instrument, that the instructor try to clarify for the class what is meant by such terms.

English 2140 Sample Assignment 4

English 2140
Quiz/Examination
Midterm Examination

Purpose/Goals:
Examinations in 2140 can link to a number of the course goals, especially:
· define key literary terms/concepts and implement these in oral/written discussion as well as in literary interpretation
· recognize, compare, and evaluate major critical theories and apply them to works of literature

Assignment:

English 2140 Midterm Examination

Instructions: You will have one hour to complete the examination. You should write your answers (in a legible hand, please) on separate sheets of paper. Please write your name on each of these sheets as well.

Section I: Definition (20 points – approx 10 min.)
Define four of the following terms (five points for each definition) in no more than two sentences for each term, providing an example if possible.
Section II: Short Answer (30 points – approx 15-20 min.)
Answer three of the following questions in no more than four sentences each.
1. What is meant by “naturalization”?

2. What is the difference between denotation and connotation?

3. What elements of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* make it a realist drama?

4. What is meant by organic unity?

Section III: Short Essay (50 points — approx 30 min.)
*Choose one of the following prompts and write a short essay. Be sure to refer to the literary texts often to back up your argument, being specific as you can.*

1. Define what is meant by patriarchy and characterize the relationship between patriarchy and three of the literary texts (by three different authors) we have read.

2. Explain the New Critical understanding of a literary work of art and based on this, evaluate Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, and Rich’s “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” to see if they stand up to this definition.

Requirements:
The general requirements for the exam are spelled out at the top of the examination.

Assessment:
You should build an assessment instrument for each question that provides a point-scale against which you can judge the success of each reply in living up to whatever standard you set. For instance, for definition questions, you might consider an accurate definition and strong example as a “5,” accurate definitions with less strong examples as a “4,” and so on. How you assess short answer questions, such as the above, will depend on what you can reasonably expect the students to be able to say based on what you have discussed in class and what they have read. For the short essay question, you might consider breaking down the total possible points by the obvious “sections” implied by the question itself, assigning a relatively weighted value for each of these sections. For instance, essay number one calls for students to do four things (define patriarchy, apply the concept to one text, apply it to another, apply it to a third), so one way of scoring the entire essay is to score each of its sections as worth approximately 12.5 points each, and then judge how well each section of the essay accomplishes its goal.

Having said all that, it is well to keep in mind, that there is no substitute for communicating as thoroughly as possible your expectations for student performance on
examinations as clearly as possible and far enough in advance for students to have enough time to prepare to meet your expectations.

English 2140 Sample Assignment 5

English 2140
Formal Writing
Theory Application Paper

Purpose/Goals:
This formal paper assignment supports the portions of the following course goals:

- define key literary, critical, and theoretical terms/concepts and implement these in oral/written discussion as well as in literary interpretation
- recognize, compare, and evaluate major critical theories and apply them to works of literature
- critique literature using both primary and secondary sources
- describe, examine, and evaluate [students’] own reading practices and oral/written critical analyses
- apply writing and revision as tools for understanding literature and its interpretation

Assignment:

Have students apply a theory/critical methodology to a piece of literature. The choice of theory/literature text can be their own, in some sense prescribed by the instructor, or chosen by the student from a limited set of approaches/texts supplied by the instructor.

In an assignment sheet, you may wish to prescribe a set of sections or general outline that the student must follow in order to successfully complete the assignment. This approach has the virtue of parsing out the tasks clearly for the students and of demonstrating to them a bit more clearly what “you’re looking for.” Here’s an example:

Your paper must be broken down into the following sections:

I. Introduction
   i. Build exigence for your interpretation: why does it seem valuable that we look at your chosen piece of literature (or section of this piece) through the theoretical lens you are adopting? Name your chosen theory explicitly.
   ii. Provide your argumentative thesis.

II. Theory Description/Definition
   i. In your own words, what are the central premises of the theory?
   ii. What practices/methods of interpretation are associated with the theory?
   iii. What practice/method are you adopting for your interpretation?

III. Theory Application (the largest part of the paper)
i. Develop an argument over several well-developed paragraphs supporting your thesis.

ii. Carefully choose literary evidence to back your point in each paragraph.

iii. Carefully introduce and intergrate literary evidence into your argument

iv. Make sure that the logic connecting the evidence to the point of the paragraph (and by extension, the point of the essay) comes out clearly in your discussion

IV. Conclusion

i. Reiterate, in compressed form, the central points of your analysis.

ii. Return to the question of exigence that began the piece—what has your interpretive approach brought to our understanding of the literary work? What’s the pay-off, in other words?

Requirements:
- Argumentative Proposal (in which the student articulates why the particular theory/methodology is an apt choice, and what conclusions she believes her paper will yield about the literary work she has chosen.)
- First draft (full length) to be commented upon by the instructor
- Second draft (for review by peers)
- Final draft
6-8 pages of formal writing
double-spaced, MLA format
no outside sources/research necessary (although the student may want to quote from the class theory text)

Assessment:
Assessment of performance on formal papers can be tricky, but if the paper is written within a prescribed format, such as the above, the instructor can develop an assessment rubric or set of scales that map onto the suggested outline. (It is well to note here that the mechanism used for commenting on the first draft of the paper should probably not be the same one used for the final paper. A full-blown, analytic rubric may stymie the writer early on.) Here’s an example of an analytic rubric for use in evaluating a final draft:

INTRODUCTION (16 points)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Score</th>
<th>Exigence none or unclear</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis none or unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear, complex,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>argumentative</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

THEORY DESCRIPTION/DEFINITION (24 points)

<table>
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<th>Score</th>
<th>Central Premises unclear or inaccurate</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices/methods associated w/ theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unclear or inaccurate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear, accurate, complete</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices/methods used in following analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear and accurate</td>
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### THEORY APPLICATION (36 points)

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<tr>
<td>Development of argument</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>uneven and/or disorganized, effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence selection</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>inappropriate, sophisticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence introduction and integration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>poor, especially apt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>unclear and/or faulty, clear, sophisticated</td>
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### CONCLUSION (10 points)

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<tr>
<td>Reiteration of central points in analysis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>none or unclear, compressed, effective</td>
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<td>Exigence</td>
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### GLOBAL CONSIDERATIONS (14 points)

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<td>Sentence Sophistication</td>
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<td>basic and/or ineffective, complex, effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLA format</td>
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<td>noncompliant, compliant</td>
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**GRADE**