

Writing on Contemporary Issues: Social and Ethical Issues: Essay #1 Sequence**Essay #1: Reasons To Believe: Reflections on Ethical Values and Social Awareness**

Due Dates: Exercise 1(see p.3)	SES #4
Peer Review	SES #2 (bring three copies to class)
First Version	2 days after SES #3 (with cover letter)
Workshop:	SES #4
Revision:	4 days after SES #10 (deliver with first version, comments, Ex.1 and revision cover letter)

ESSAY #1 (Suggested length: 5 pgs. typed, double-spaced)

This essay offers you the opportunity to reflect on the role of ethical and social values in your own life. As a writer, you have two choices in crafting this essay:

(a) You can narrate and reflect on the process of “coming to consciousness,” focusing on a personal experience(s) leading to a deeper awareness of a contemporary social or ethical issue or a more general commitment to social justice. For example, you might write about one or two key influences on the development of your moral and ethical values. The influence(s) may be person(s), experience(s), event(s), or text(s) (e.g., books, films). For Essay #1, some students write about the development of a generalized social consciousness (like Edelman in “A Family Legacy” and Shepherd in “Daughters Without Borders”); others focus on their experiences of becoming aware of specific social issues such as environmental pollution, hunger or unemployment.

(b) You can focus on “ethics in action,” reflecting on an experience or moral choice that affirmed a personal commitment to particular ethical or social values. Some writers may choose a pivotal life choice or moral decision, while others focus on “everyday ethics,” smaller expressions of ethical or social values in daily settings such as colleges, workplaces, homes, houses of worship or playing fields.

The challenge of this assignment is to work with the complex elements of personal narrative as evidence to support an argument in an essay written for a public readership. As you create your narrative, be richly descriptive in your prose. Take the reader inside the experience(s) to appreciate its power. When focusing on an individual or a setting, for example, use rich description; include dialogue, if appropriate. Alternately, if you are writing about a film, book or political speech, select visual images, scenes, quotations or excerpts to communicate the power of the text(s).

The first version should be at least four pages in length; the revised version should be about five pages. With the revised version, include two outside sources and a separate “Works Cited” page attached to the last page of the essay. In class, we will review the use of outside sources in personal narrative.

Writing Ideas

If you are (or have been) involved in community service, this assignment can enable you to draw upon that experience. If you have a strongly held position on a social issue (e.g. for or against capital punishment, human cloning, abortion rights or gay marriage), this essay offers you the opportunity to trace the roots of that stance or show how your position on this issue influences your daily life.

Writing Challenges for This Assignment

A. Crafting a Reflective Essay

The challenge in this essay is to move beyond purely personal narrative or unprocessed experience. When writers engage in experiential narrative for a public readership, they are reflecting upon, shaping, and framing their material so that the essay connects with a wider audience. As you craft your essay, think about motive. Why do you want to narrate this story – to inspire readers, to challenge their preconceptions, to motivate them to care about an issue or, more generally, social justice (however you define the term)? Successful experiential essays create a bridge between the personal and the public. Essays like this can inspire readers to ponder the sources of their own beliefs, recognize different pathways to social engagement and question their preconceptions about particular kinds of issues.

B. Questions of Argument and Structure

Although this essay deals with the realm of personal life, you are still making an argument, i.e., supporting a claim with evidence. For example, you may be supporting an assertion that a particular experience was “highly influential” by presenting examples of the power of that experience in a clear, reflective and well-structured format. Remember: “argument” can take many forms!

C. Voice and Style:

In essays like this, you can often be more conversational than in more formal academic prose. However, be sure that your language expresses the power of the experience(s) that you have chosen to narrate. Be clear and dynamic in your language. Consider your use of symbol and metaphor. Vary sentence length, structure and word usage.

Exercise 1: Due 2 days after SES #1 (One and one-half to two typed, double-spaced pages)

This exercise has TWO parts:

1) Write a vivid description (1- 1 1/2 pg., double spaced) of either (a) a central influence upon your own sense of ethics, morality or social consciousness OR (b) an important experience in which you made a decision or acted in a way that expressed your core moral values.

2) Write a separate paragraph (titled “Appeal for Readers”) describing why this experience could appeal to a readership. If you were to write essay #1 about this experience, what do you hope readers would take away from your piece? Are there particular kinds of readers you are trying to reach?

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