



Week One: Vocabulary

Lesson & Assignments: Introduce New List

Assignment 1: Read the list of vocabulary words below. Then, using a dictionary as needed, match the vocabulary words with their definitions listed in the definition bank on the next page. Write each vocabulary word, follow it with a punctuation mark such as a hyphen or colon, and then write the definition.

e.g.

1. *to eat* – to put (food) into the mouth and chew and swallow it

Vocabulary Words –

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. accretion | 10. meritorious |
| 2. ambiguity | 11. obdurate |
| 3. cogent | 12. palisade |
| 4. desultory | 13. partisan |
| 5. discursive | 14. pompous |
| 6. ebb | 15. residual |
| 7. fallacious | 16. sardonic |
| 8. harbinger | 17. turgid |
| 9. lassitude | |

Definition Bank	
a fence of wooden stakes or iron railings fixed in the ground, forming an enclosure or defense	remaining after the greater part or quantity has gone
deserving reward or praise	prejudiced in favor of a particular cause
the process of growth or increase, typically by the gradual accumulation of additional layers or matter	a person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another
(of an argument or case) clear, logical, and convincing	stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion or course of action
based on a mistaken belief	digressing from subject to subject
to move away from the land, to recede; to gradually lessen or reduce	the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; inexactness
a state of physical or mental weariness; lack of energy	affectedly and irritatingly grand, solemn, or self-important
swollen and distended or congested; or pompous or bombastic language/style	lacking a plan, purpose, or enthusiasm; unfocused; occurring randomly or occasionally
grimly mocking or cynical	



Week One: Grammar

Lesson & Assignments: Nouns & Pronouns

Your grammar material at this level, especially the early lessons, will focus much on review. By now, we expect that you have already had exposure to grammar lessons and have a solid understanding of the basic parts of speech. If you need further clarity on anything presented in the lessons, please contact your instructor for review material.

REVIEW –

Our English language has ***eight*** parts of speech. Here are the names and some examples of each:

Noun	Names a person, place, thing, or idea	Examples: mom, Mr. Grape, Seattle, NYC, apple, guitar, happiness, joy
Pronoun	Replaces a noun	Examples: he, she, it, I, you, some
Verb	States an action, helps another verb, or links another word to the subject	Examples: be, have, do, like, work, sing, can, must
Adjective	Describes a noun	Examples: a/an, the, sixty-nine (69), blue, some, good, big, red, interesting
Adverb	Describes an adjective, verb, or another adverb	Examples: quickly, silently, well, badly, very, really
Conjunction	Joins clauses or sentences or words	Examples: and, but, when
Preposition	Links a noun to another word	Examples: under, above, over, in, on, after, to, at
Interjection	Short exclamation, sometimes inserted into a sentence	Examples: My! Oh! Ouch! Hi!

THE NOUN –

A **noun names a person, place, thing, or idea**. We can separate nouns into two main groups: **concrete nouns** and **abstract nouns**.

Concrete nouns are nouns that we can touch with our hands, see with our eyes, smell with our nose, hear with our ears, or taste with our tongue. In other words, we use one or more of our five senses to experience the concrete noun. Concrete nouns name people, places, and things.

The other type of noun is an abstract noun. This is a noun that we cannot see, hear, feel, touch, or taste.

Happiness is an example of this. We cannot see, hear, smell, touch, or taste happiness. It is an idea or a concept. You cannot say what color happiness is or what it tastes like. If you tried to touch happiness, you would have a very hard time doing so because there is nothing to touch. Does happiness have a smell? No. *Happiness* is an abstract noun. *Freedom* and *liberty* are two other examples of abstract nouns. Abstract nouns do not have color, sound, taste, etc. Abstract nouns name ideas.

We can also categorize nouns in another way: **common nouns** and **proper nouns**.

COMMON NOUNS –

Person	Place	Thing	Idea
• mother	• home	• cup	• love
• brother	• store	• bananas	• hope
• clerk	• street	• table	• happiness
• policeman	• bedroom	• book	• fear
• athlete	• warehouse	• computer	• anger

Notice that the nouns in the table above do not start with a capital letter. That is because they are not naming a specific person, place, thing, or idea. We call these types of nouns common nouns or improper nouns. We use common nouns when we are not referring to someone, someplace, or something by a specific name.

Assignment 1A: Write five common nouns for each:

Person	Place	Thing	Ideas
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.

Assignment 1B: Underline the common nouns in the following sentences. (All of the sentences contain more than one.)

1. The mug broke when Ellie dropped it on the floor.
2. Your dog needs to learn how to fetch a ball.
3. The kids watched the truck out the window.
4. This machine needs a new filter.
5. How many shirts should the coach order?
6. Dad will go to the store later and speak to the manager.
7. The bakery sent us six cupcakes and ten cookies.
8. Grandpa used the chainsaw to cut down a small tree in the backyard.
9. What is the report regarding the incoming storm?
10. I need to replace the batteries in the camera before the party.

PROPER NOUNS –

Person	Place	Thing
• Mom	• Highland Park	• Empire Apples
• Aunt Susan	• Walgreens	• Bible
• Grandpa Chuck	• King's Dominion	• Android
• President Anderson	• France	• Nile River

Note that all of the nouns in this table begin with a capital letter. These nouns are naming a specific person, place, or thing (note that ideas – abstract nouns – can never be made proper.) ***We call these types of nouns specific or proper nouns. We use proper nouns when we are referring to something by a specific name.***

The following categories are always proper nouns.

1. Names of people and pets:

Mrs. Edwards

David

Snoopy

Garfield

2. Names of places and buildings:

Madrid, Spain

Main Street

Washington Monument

Lake Ontario

Alaska

Pacific Ocean

3. Names of books, movies, newspapers, and magazines:

Charlotte's Web

Toy Story

The Orlando Times

Highlights

Monsters, Inc.

4. Names of holidays, days of the week, and months:

Christmas

Sunday

April

Memorial Day

Thanksgiving

Friday

5. Names of languages:

Spanish

English

French

Italian

6. Names of companies and brand names:

Google

Pepsi

Nike

Apple

7. Titles of people when used in front of their names:

President Lincoln

King George

Captain Hook

Judge Peterson

Prince William

Doctor McNeish

But do not capitalize these titles when used alone. For example:

- “My uncle is a judge for the county.”

- “The doctor returned my phone call.”

8. Names of religions:

Baptist

Protestant

Jewish

Catholic

SOME CONFUSING NOUNS –

Two groups of nouns that can be confusing when it comes to capitalizing them are the seasons (spring, summer, fall, and winter) and directions (north, south, east, west).

- The general rule for seasons is that you do not capitalize them unless they start a sentence or are part of the name of an event such as the "Winter Olympics."
- The rule for directions is also easy. If you are referring to a specific part or location of the country (such as *the South*, *the Northwest*, *the East*), then you should capitalize the noun. But, if you are just referring to a general direction, then do not capitalize the noun (such as *north of town*, *southeast of my house*, *go west on Woolridge Rd.*).

Assignment 1C: Write five proper nouns for each. Remember to capitalize each proper noun:

Person	Place	Thing
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.

MAKING NOUNS PLURAL –

Making nouns plural is something you should already be familiar with as a growing writer. Most of the time, it is something you learn just by speaking. You know to turn *eyelash* into *eyelashes* or *chair* into *chairs*. You know that there are various plural forms such as *tomato* turned into *tomatoes* or *sheep* into *sheep*. For the sake of time, we will not review rules for making nouns plural here. If you feel you do not understand the rules, you can ask for review material from your instructor.

MAKING NOUNS POSSESSIVE –

Although this also should be something you are familiar with, making nouns possessive trips a lot of students up. Let us review the basic rules:

Rule #1 - If the noun ends in any letter other than S, we use an apostrophe and then the letter S to show possession.

- the dog - the dog's bone
- the men - the men's team
- the quiz - the quiz's answers

Rule #2 - If a singular noun ends in the letter S, we can use EITHER an apostrophe and the letter S or we can use ONLY an apostrophe to show possession.

- Charles - Charles's book OR Charles' book
- the boss – the boss' paperwork OR the boss's paperwork
- Jesus - Jesus's mother OR Jesus' mother

Rule #3 – If a plural noun ends in the letter S, we use only an apostrophe to show possession.

- guys – guys' night out
- dogs – the dogs' bones

Rule #4 - Acronyms form the possessive with an apostrophe and the letter S.

- NASA - NASA's spaceship
- USA - the USA's flag
- ABC - ABC's documentary

Rule #5 - If you have two nouns and two objects that are individually owned, then each noun is made possessive.

- John and Mary - John's and Mary's hats (they each have their OWN hat)
- James and Ann - James' and Ann's dinners (they each have their OWN dinner)

Rule #6 - If you have two or more nouns and all nouns own the same object, then just the last noun is made possessive.

- John and Mary - John and Mary's children (they have the same children)
- James and Ann - James and Ann's car (they own the same car)
- Kara, Dave, and Julie – Kara, Dave, and Julie's father (they all have the same father)

Assignment 1D: Turn each of the following words into its possessive form.

- | | |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. towns | 6. UGA |
| 2. house | 7. Jackson and Hayley bikes |
| 3. Isaac | 8. girl |
| 4. leaders | 9. Grandma and Grandpa car |
| 5. Melissa | 10. Jess |

NOMINATIVE PRONOUNS –

Next up is the pronoun. We can study the pronoun immediately following the noun because it performs the same job as the noun. ***A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.*** Pronouns are very useful because otherwise we would be repeating the same noun over and over again. There are several kinds of pronouns in English. Each type of pronoun is used in a specific way. This lesson will teach you how to use **nominative** and **possessive pronouns** (You will learn about the other kinds of pronouns in the next class).

Nominative pronouns are sometimes called *subject pronouns*, because they usually take the place of a noun that is functioning as the subject in a sentence (more about that in Lesson 4).

Here are the **nominative** or **subject pronouns**. The singular is given with its plural in the next column.

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I	we
you	you
he	they
she	they
it	they

Remember, these pronouns are used as the subjects of a sentence. Below are some examples using each of

these pronouns.

Singular

I drive a car.

You eat ice cream.

He speaks Russian.

She swims every day.

It keeps food cold.

Plural

We drive a car.

You (all) eat ice cream.

They speak Russian.

They swim every day.

They keep the food cold.

Imagine that two friends, Hannah and Ashley, are having a conversation about a field trip. The subjects are placed in parentheses to make it easier for you to see them.

(Hannah, speaking) went on a field trip.

(Ashley, being spoken to) went on a field trip.

(Caleb) enjoyed the field trip.

(Jane) arrived too late for the field trip.

(The car) was full.

(Jane and Caleb) bought some souvenirs.

Below are the same sentences with nominative pronouns in place of the nouns used above.

I went on a field trip.

You went on a field trip.

He enjoyed the field trip.

She arrived too late for the field trip.

It was full.

They bought some souvenirs.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS –

Lastly, we will move on to **possessive pronouns**. As you learned above, we can make nouns possessive to show that someone or something owns something. Possessive pronouns show ownership as well but are used at the end of a sentence. Here are the **possessive pronouns**. The singular is given with its plural in the next column.

Singular

Plural

mine
yours
his
hers
its

ours
yours
theirs
theirs
theirs

We use possessive pronouns as substitutes for possessive forms of nouns, when these nouns are used at the end of a sentence.

For example –

- “This dog is Andrew's.” (possessive form of noun)
- “This dog is his.” (replaced with possessive pronoun)

Remember, these pronouns are only used to show possession. Look at some examples using each of these possessive pronouns.

Singular

The car was *mine*.
The ice cream is *yours*.
The book will be *his*.
The swimming pool is *hers*.
The tires were *its*.

Plural

The car was *ours*.
The ice cream is (all of) *yours*.
The book will be *theirs*.
The swimming pool is *theirs*.
The tires were *theirs*.

Assignment 1E: Underline all of the nominative or possessive pronouns in the following sentences.

1. Where are you going with her bag?
2. That dog is hers.
3. You will give the boys a ride to our place.
4. They are neighbors of ours.
5. The tablet is yours.
6. You will be surprised by its color.
7. It will never happen!
8. The train tracks are his.
9. Where will we be going for dinner?
10. She loves taking care of him.
11. The shoes on the sidewalk are theirs.
12. They will sit with us.
13. Which one is mine?
14. This is his.



Week One: Writing

Lesson & Assignments: The Persuasive Thesis

As we discussed in *English Level V*, we will begin this class by discussing the thesis statement. In much of the writing world and even the academic sphere, there is discrepancy between what a thesis is and is not. Many experts or professors suggest that every essay must contain a thesis, whether that thesis is expository or persuasive. On the other hand, many different experts or professors suggest that all thesis statements are persuasive because thesis statements must be debatable. In this case, they suggest that expository essays use topic sentences, not thesis statements.

However, a perusal of websites for various university writing centers, essay-writing handouts, and even writing handbooks will demonstrate that the opinions on defining thesis statements are inconsistent. We think it is important that you are aware of this as we move forward, because an understanding of thesis development is crucial to be successful in writing.

For the purpose of our classes, we stand on the side that teaches two different thesis structures: **expository** and **persuasive**. *Although both can make a claim, these two types of thesis statements make different kinds of claims.*

This distinction feels easy when you are writing about simple topics, such as “There are four seasons each year” or “Although cats and dogs are both common household pets, they are very different in personality and needs.” Obviously, these topics are expository because they are factual and would not produce much or any argument.

On the other hand, saying something like, “Summer is much better than winter,” or “Everyone should have a cat,” is much more clearly persuasive. These statements are not factual, but based on opinion and the idea that everyone else should come to the same conclusion as you have.

However, when you get into more complex subjects, such as what we learned about in *English Level V* and what we will use in this class, the distinction between the two types of thesis statements blurs.

In the future, you may be called upon to write essays with thesis statements such as you have learned about in *English Level V*. However, the assignments may not be worded in a way that suggests that these essays are expository. The assignment may say something such as, “Choose a complex topic, develop a debatable thesis and write . . .”; if you read this, you might be tempted to think that you are about to write a persuasive essay, but that may not be the case. The essay may be about a complex topic which others might disagree with, but the structure of the essay may not actually be persuasive in style. Again, this is where the lines get blurred.

In all writing situations, it is really important to understand the assignment(s) and what the instructor is asking or looking for. If you are at all unsure, it is wise to contact the instructor and even submit a thesis statement ahead of your writing to make sure it is along the lines of what is acceptable.

Whether or not an assignment is clearly expository or persuasive or somewhere blurred in the middle, you can use the skills you learn in this course to help you construct strong thesis statements and strong essays in any situation. The concepts for both types of theses are really the same, across the board; the confusion lies more or less in the definitions.

Let's consider an example. Here is the thesis for the example essay in Lesson 13 of *English Level V*.

“While many people find cooking to be a stressful and challenging task, the art of preparation, or *mise en place* as the French refer to it, can lead nearly any struggling cook to success.”

We consider this to be **expository**, because it sets up an essay which will *explain* what *mise en place* (pronounce: me-zon-plos) is and how it aids the cooking process. It certainly makes a claim, that *mise en place* “can lead nearly any struggling cook to success.” However, the essay focuses on explaining *mise en place* and how it can help cooks achieve success.

On the other hand, consider if we rewrite the thesis.

“Because of its ability to transform and bring success to the cooking process, the concept of *mise en place* should be the first taught in any culinary setting, whether classes are for children, adults, or students pursuing a degree.”

This essay might also explain the concept of *mise en place*, but focuses instead on proving why *mise en place* should or must be taught to all culinary learners at the start, not as an elusive concept for culinary students or French people.

So, although both statements make a claim, and for many experts or professors, both statements *could* be considered persuasive, the two statements are still different. One statement focuses on explaining the facts, while the other statement focuses on arguing the case that this idea should be mandatory lesson material.

Persuasive statements take a stand formulated out of belief or opinion, and often make claims about something being better or best. Persuasive statements might also use words like *should*, *ought*, *must*, & *need to*. Consider again the list of example thesis statements we provided in *English Level V*.

Expository Thesis Statements:

- Students can become more effective writers by employing three strategies.
- Wolves are often pictured in fairy tales as ferocious animals, but they are very social and unique animals who do not deserve their scary reputation.
- George Washington was an excellent leader-- a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.
- The rewarding process of photographing a lunar eclipse requires careful preparation and sound equipment.

Persuasive Thesis Statements:

- Grover is the most important character on *Sesame Street*.
- A longer school day does not guarantee that students will be productive in classes, reminding us that young people must find learning meaningful.
- Free public transportation should be implemented as a key step in reducing unemployment rates.
- Our family should get a dog because of the opportunity it will provide us children for learning responsibility.

Again, both sets of statements make claims. People could disagree with both sets of statements. But, from our perspective, the statements are not the same, and they are not all persuasive by nature. The top four focus on using facts to explain the theses. The bottom four statements make opinion-based claims that will need to be proven and discussed against counter claims. Notice also how the first persuasive thesis statement suggests that one character is the most important, and how the other three use the terms *must* &

should.

Remember, the expository thesis presents the subject to the reader, without providing an argument or opinion. **Your expository thesis should focus on informing, explaining, describing, or defining. The expository essay should focus on laying out the facts, without telling the reader what he or she should do with those facts.**

On the other hand, the persuasive thesis **presents an opinion about the subject to the reader, contrasting it with other opinions, arguments, or viewpoints. The persuasive essay focuses on laying out facts and evidence to prove a point while telling the reader what he or she should do with those facts.** The main goal of a persuasive essay is to present enough logical evidence to help the reader come to the same conclusion as the writer.

For the purpose of this class, we will be looking for persuasive thesis statements that follow these examples. Your persuasive thesis statements should suggest that something is better/best/most important or use words like *should, ought, must, & need to*.

If you want to challenge yourself, you can also branch out from *should, ought, must, & need to* and use different words to create phrases in your thesis statement such as:

- “ . . . is a necessity.”
- “ . . . is imperative.”
- “ . . . is necessary.”
- “ . . . is an obligation.”
- “ . . . is required.”
- “ . . . is necessitated.”

HOW TO CREATE A PERSUASIVE THESIS –

1. **Identify the topic.**
2. **Make a statement of perspective.** Remember, a persuasive thesis is built upon your opinion or perspective about a subject. “Dogs are better pets than cats because they are more social, providing much needed emotional support to owners, and more useful, providing help for many life situations” = perspective. With this statement, I am claiming that dogs are better pets than cats, which is persuasive, not expository. With this statement, I am challenging the reader to see my

reasoning and evidence as proof to have a pet dog rather than a pet cat. Remember, the main goal of a persuasive thesis, and therefore the essay, is to present enough logical evidence to help the reader come to the same conclusion as the writer.

3. **If useful, qualify the topic.** For both expository and persuasive thesis statements, a common and simple qualifying word is *because*. “Dogs are better pets than cats *because* they are more loyal, more social, and more useful.”
4. **Write just a sentence, not a paragraph.** A lot of students get confused with this one. A thesis is not a group of sentences, not a paragraph, and not the complete introduction. A thesis should be one sentence, two ONLY if absolutely necessary.

STRONG VS. WEAK –

In *English Level V*, we covered a number of thesis errors, in order to understand what makes a strong thesis rather than a weak thesis. We are including those as an attachment with this lesson, if you would like to review them. But for this portion of the lesson, we want to discuss some additional, specific concepts which will help make your persuasive thesis statements stronger.

- **A persuasive thesis takes a perspective** – a strong persuasive thesis is not merely an observation, such as “There are advantages and disadvantages to using statistics.” Instead, the persuasive thesis statement takes a perspective on the subject, by saying something like, “In order to ensure accurate reporting, journalists must understand the real significance of the statistics they report.”
- **A persuasive thesis is assertive** – a strong persuasive thesis should demonstrate to the reader that you are, in fact, taking a perspective on an issue and arguing for something. Own your perspective. In addition, phrases such as “I think that” or “It’s my opinion that” should not be used. These are redundant and show your need to qualify or defend your position, which weakens the thesis. Let the evidence defend your perspective, but let the thesis be assertive.

WEAK: “Citizens should take more responsibility in solving the problems of their communities and the nation, but I could be wrong about this.”

STRONG: “Citizens should take more responsibility in solving the problems of their communities and the nation.”

WEAK: “It's my opinion that companies should use Facebook pages for both advertising and customer support.”

STRONG: “Because the Internet is filled with an abundance of marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Facebook pages that offer both advertising and customer support.”

- **A persuasive thesis must be contestable** – You can develop an assertive perspective about an incontestable subject. For example, consider this statement: “Because of the many health benefits, everyone should exercise.” This is a perspective and it's fairly assertive, but most average people would agree with this statement. What is the point of writing a paper about something everyone already knows about or agrees with?
- **A persuasive thesis inspires rather than quiets** – Although a strong persuasive thesis should take a perspective and be assertive, it should not be rude. A thesis statement should never be emotionally-driven. In essence, a thesis statement should never give the impression that you are shouting at or dismissing all opposing views. i.e. “Dogs are better pets than cats, because I said so, and anyone who thinks otherwise is just dumb.” While your perspective should be clear and assertive, it should also inspire the audience to consider your view based on quality evidence and in fair comparison to other opinions. A strong persuasive thesis should inspire conversation or new ways of thinking about a topic, for which there are multiple views.
- **A persuasive thesis should be provable** – We certainly hold opinions on many subjects, but those opinions may not have enough evidence to support them. For example, while it may be someone's perspective that listening to rock music is bad, this perspective is too broad and based too much on personal opinion. There is absolutely no way to prove that music with a beat or a certain tempo is inherently “bad.” Besides, what does “bad” even mean? Strong support in the form of examples and evidence for these types of statement will not be easy to find. A strong persuasive thesis statement should neither be too personal in opinion nor too far-fetched that it is beyond the realm of proof.
- **A persuasive thesis should never be defended solely by one's religion or culture.** Certainly, our worldview and opinions are often largely formed or impacted by our upbringing, our culture, and/or our faith. Never would we suggest that you should neglect these very important aspects of your life, as they can play a very important role in your ability to construct thesis

statements and develop meaningful conversation with others. However, your upbringing, culture, or religious affiliation should never become the single support for your thesis. For example, you cannot construct an essay around the following perspective: “We should not lie, because the Bible tells us not to.” This may be true, but what about for readers who do not adhere to the Christian faith? If your perspective is that we should not lie, can you defend this with additional support that would engage even those who do not share the same upbringing, culture, or faith?

FINAL THOUGHTS –

As we did in *English Level V*, we want to step back from the realm of academic essay writing and have a conversation. With the mention of essay writing or thesis development, many students would rather run the other direction. The whole process seems too complicated and rather pointless sometimes. But, do you understand the power of words, the power of your ideas? When you write something, you have the potential to communicate important things and impact other people.

Although essays are a large part of education, our hope is that your main takeaway from this class would not be that you need to learn to write expository essays so that you can get good grades or go to college. Instead, we hope you can see the positive elements of being able to express yourself through writing in a way that communicates logically with others. The ability to communicate your thoughts clearly, logically, and respectfully is something that will help you in many areas of life, far beyond and outside of your education.

So, yes – we will be using stuffy academic words like *thesis*, *sources*, and *citations*. But, please try to see the big picture. If you can look at these concepts and assignments as an opportunity to expand your skill in meaningful communication about what matters to you, the work may come more easily.

Back to the thesis then – The thesis is not some lofty, elusive statement. Instead, it is a single sentence that provides your essay with a focused, central idea. While the thesis should be interesting, it does not need to be complicated. A thesis is made interesting when you have truly thought about a topic or already find the topic interesting. **The purpose of the thesis is to be able to articulate your thoughts in a single, controlling idea – the main idea upon which you develop your essay.**

Regardless of the topic for an assignment, ask yourself, “What do I want to say about this topic?” Don't think about what you *should* say about the topic or what everyone else is saying about the topic. Writing should never merely be about completing an assignment, getting a good grade, or impressing an instructor. Writing should be a form in which you can communicate your ideas about a topic in a logical, meaningful,

and respectful way – in a way that opens dialogue between you and your audience, in a way that adds to cultural conversation, rather than just becoming another bit of 'noise' among the noise of everyone else.

CLASS NOTES –

We will not be assigning topics for many of the essays you will write. Students naturally write better about topics that interest them. Of course, you will not always be able to write about topics of your choice, but for the purpose of *learning* how to craft meaningful and convincing essays, we find it can be helpful for students to demonstrate their own ideas and personalities rather than having to respond to assigned topics.

However, for the purpose of this program, there are some topics that are off limits. Please do not submit thesis statements or papers discussing the following topics:

- texting while driving
- obesity
- gun control
- overuse of technology
- current military conflicts
- issues of morality

There is certainly nothing wrong with discussing these topics. Yet, we find that these topics are overused (perhaps because they are such talking points in our culture!) and do not enable the student to easily express original ideas. There are better times and places to discuss these things, but in your writing for this year, we want to see your interests come alive.

Assignment 1: This week, submit a list of **ten** original topics and corresponding **persuasive** thesis statements. Remember that each thesis statement should present a clear, strong **central idea** that focuses on the foundations of persuasive writing: perspective-driven, assertive, contestable, and inspiring.

Your persuasive thesis statements should suggest that something is better/best/most important or use words/phrases like *should*, *ought*, *must*, & *need to*.

One of these statements will be chosen for Assignments 2-4, based on initial instructor feedback. In addition, you can use the feedback from this first assignment to help you develop the thesis statements necessary for upcoming assignments.



Week One: Literature

Lesson & Assignments: Intro to Reading Experience & *Oliver Twist*

As we get started, let's answer an important question, which many of you may be asking: **Why does literature matter?** Most of us have asked ourselves this question, whether we have never understood the purpose of reading or we love picking up a book, but don't know why it's part of an educational curriculum.

There are many answers to that question, but I think it's summed up in one simple statement: **What we write reflects who we are.** Therefore, when we read, we connect with lives and experiences other than our own, finding similarities and grappling with differences. Reading teaches us to think critically, to care deeply, and to understand broadly.

Throughout this year, we will focus on these goals:

- We are going to read works from numerous authors across various time periods and cultures.
- We will dig into writings from people similar to us and people different from us, and strive to learn from and empathize with both.
- We will share our opinions, experiences, and personalities through writing and response.

But, before we turn the clock back to the 1800s, let's ground ourselves in some literary reading skills.

TIPS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND LITERATURE –

Whether this is your first or hundredth class, it's a good idea to think about *how* we read. Here's what we have found to be the most successful way to study literature—plus, it doesn't add much extra time to your reading, *and* prepares you for any analysis or writing you'll do afterwards.

- **Understand, and keep trying to understand, the context and the intention.** What kind of culture existed when this was written? What did the author hope to gain from this story? You may be able to learn some of these answers before you start reading, but keep your eyes open for more clues as you go. It's easy to "judge a book by its cover."

- **If possible, have a summary available for tough texts.** This way, we won't get lost in confusing words or long paragraphs. With tough texts, we would recommend reading the summary beforehand, using it to understand unclear segments, or reviewing it to make sure that you grasped the text properly.
- **Look up words you don't know and write down the definitions,** whether that's in the margins, above the word, or on a separate sheet of paper. Next week, we'll have an assignment digging into language, so this is good practice.
- **Write comments, questions, and summaries as you read, either in the margins or in a separate book.** When we read, it's easy to forget details, right? Keeping notes not only helps us remember, but it reinforces what we read in our memory and ensures that we're really comprehending what we read.
 - **One Example Process:** Write a short summary of each chapter, then each section or part, then the work as a whole. Also note keywords in the margins that might be useful to write about later (e.g. "family," "hope," "loss"). If you write keywords in the top-hand corners, it is easy to see as you skim back through the book!
- If possible, **read the piece a second time!** This helps a lot before writing on a piece of literature. It's important to make sure that the work is fresh in your mind, and you might catch things you missed!

THE IDEAL READING EXPERIENCE –

Before you start this week's reading, think about what would make an ideal environment for you to read and enjoy the text. You may want to consider these factors:

- **Current Issues:** What are my hang-ups with reading, if any? What might make it less fun or more stressful? If I already love reading, how could I make the ultimate reading environment?
- **Purpose:** This is another abstract one. If you have trouble finding the purpose in a class or an assignment, it can help to think of how it helps your overall purpose or goal. Here are a few outcomes for our class:
 - **I want to be more empathetic.** Reading different experiences can help you understand other people better.
 - **I want to be a good communicator.** Writing and reading skills help every facet of your communications life, from your career to your social media posts!
 - **I want to be well-rounded.** All of the things we read become touchstones that you can call back to in the future. You'll have informed opinions on each of these

texts!

- **I want to go to college/find a good job.** Every college application I've ever seen, and every job I know of, relies on strong communication skills! We're practicing the writing skills that will help your application essays, the critical thinking skills that will help you analyze situations in your career, etc.
- **Environment:** Where is most comfortable for you to sit and read? Would a cozy blanket or your favorite slippers set the tone? Does it help you focus if you jog on a treadmill while you flip pages? Do you enjoy sitting under your favorite tree in a picturesque orchard? How is the lighting? Does it strain your eyes to read when it's too dark or too bright?
- **Timing:** When are you at your reading best? Do you feel like you absorb information better in the morning or at night? Also, make sure that you start reading soon enough that you don't feel stressed or rushed close to the due date.
- **Additions:** Is there anything that you enjoy that could be brought into the reading environment? A cup of tea, a favorite soda, a delicious snack?

Set up that ideal environment, or as close to it as you can manage, for your reading this week. Keep your purpose front and center in mind, if that helps you! After your reading, you'll write a short reflection on your experience.

OFF TO LONDON WE GO –

You might know of Charles Dickens for his infamous *A Christmas Carol*. (We cover this in Level VII!) Even if you have never read any of his works, you are likely familiar with the name. Dickens is widely considered a literary genius and the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. Essentially, Dickens was a Victorian pop-culture star, writing stories that could engage and entertain people from all classes and backgrounds. He was an excellent speaker, talented at anything he picked up, and an adorer of his adoring public.

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, England. In his youth, the family was decently well-off, although one of his grandfathers was an embezzler and his father wasn't a wise manager of funds. After a stilted school career, Dickens worked as a clerk and a shorthand reporter and almost became an actor in the early 1830s. Instead, he pursued writing, publishing stories and essays starting in 1833. Three years later, Dickens' fame appeared almost overnight with the serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837).

One of Charles Dickens' most well-known works is *Oliver Twist*, published in serial form between 1837 and

1839 and released as a novel in 1838. This work is an early example of a **social novel**, one that addresses societal issues of the time. Dickens used his novel to discuss current and local hypocrisies, such as the cruel treatment of London's orphans and domestic violence. Particularly, Dickens used *Oliver Twist* to criticize the New Poor Law, also known as the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834.

This law was passed after middle and upper-class citizens grew tired of paying the cost of looking after the poor. Essentially, the New Poor Law ensured that poor people were given housing, clothing, and food (and some education for poor children) in a workhouse in return for working several hours per day. Poor people could now only receive help if they were willing to stay at a workhouse.

Although the promises of this law seemed an ideal solution for the otherwise-rising cost of caring for poor people, the reality was that the “conditions inside the workhouse were deliberately harsh, so that only those who desperately needed help would ask for it.” (1) Uniforms were required; food was scarce and plain; strict rules must be followed; the jobs provided were often unpleasant or difficult; families were split up and housed separately; and in some cases, children were hired out to factories or mines.

These new regulations quickly led to leadership abuses—“inmates” being purposefully starved to death, for example—, which caused the government to step in and create additional regulations. In spite of the new timely inspections of workhouses, workhouse directors continued to abuse their authority while treating the poor people with contempt. Eventually, the New Poor Law became widely unpopular and even “the poor themselves hated and feared the threat of the workhouse so much that there were riots . . .” (1)

In the opening two chapters of *Oliver Twist*—which we will read this week—, we see the main character, Oliver, born into and eventually returning to a workhouse. When Oliver is nearly a year old, he is sent to Mrs. Mann's “baby farm.” A matron of a baby farm, such as Mrs. Mann, would receive a small payment in exchange for her care of children, many of whom were poor or orphaned. As you can imagine, however, the payment provided for each child was quite small, and those funds would not help in the long term costs of raising the child. Thus, for many baby farmers, the death of a child was more profitable. Similar to workhouses, baby farms were known for their harsh and unsatisfactory treatment of children in need.

Although Dickens did not use his writing to suggest overthrowing these establishments and does not present any solutions to the problems revealed, *Oliver Twist* succeeded in exposing injustices and evil in the current-day laws, educational system, government, police system, prison system, and church.

Assignment 1: This week's assignment has two steps.

1. **Read** Chapters 1-2 of *Oliver Twist*, attached with this week's lesson. Read in your ideal environment (or as close to it as possible).
2. **Complete and submit a short reflection** about your “enjoying-reading” experiment. It must meet these requirements:
 - 200 word minimum
 - Answers these questions:
 - What were your initial issues with reading in general or reading literature, specifically? If you didn’t have any issues, what did you think could make the ultimate reading experience? *Remember, I’m looking for your honesty! I will not be offended or mark you down if you don’t like to read. :) I’ll grade based on our usual rubric and editing checklist (below).*
 - How did you seek to resolve those issues or to make your best reading experience?
 - What were the results of your experiment?
 - What was your favorite and least favorite moment in the opening chapters of *Oliver Twist*?

Source –

1. “1834 Poor Law.” *The National Archives*, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/1834-poor-law/#:~:text=Conditions%20inside%20the%20workhouse%20were,rules%20and%20regulations%20to%20follow.>