

4.0 Example

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ENG 101-XX

Short Essay

Dear Reader,

My name is XXXXXX, and I am a college freshman here at Prairie State College. I am 19 years old and a recent graduate of [a local] High School, where I was an honor student. I took several Advanced Placement classes while enrolled there, most notably AP language and composition and AP literature and composition. I believe that the language and composition class prepared me for English 101 at the collegiate level the most, and I feel that this is where I honed my writing craft. Although I feel that creative classes such as English are not my forte (I'm a very technical and scientific kind of person), I still feel that my writing skills are above average.

Writing the short essay was not a problem for me. Since the essay was a critical response, I felt right at home, because I like to argue. For my draft, I wrote a lengthy paragraph with all the points that I wanted to make, just without the details. Converting the draft into the final paper was a breeze. Since I basically had a skeleton of my final draft already completed, all I really needed to do was put details such as quotes, segues, and topic sentences in their place.

Timed writing has always been a strong point of mine, so I did not feel that the in-class essay was too much of a burden. The only negative feeling I carried toward timed writing was due to the hand cramps that would accompany an essay written by hand, a feeling I was accustomed to in high school. Those feelings were done away with in English 101, since the timed writing was done on computers. The only feelings that accompanied me during the timed writing portions of the class were positive, and I believe this fact helped me concentrate more and focus on writing a well thought out, detailed piece of scholarly work. The one thing I could revise about my in-class essay would be the minor grammatical foibles that sometimes snuck their way into my work.

I have enjoyed writing every single essay in this course except for the long essay, though it is completely my fault that I did not enjoy writing this essay. I'll admit that I hardly prepared to write this essay, and that set my mood for the rest of the assignment. I believe that my initial draft showed that lack of preparation, for example, I had a few citations that I just threw into the essay simply to meet the five source minimum. However, during the revision process, I altered what I originally had to make the paper more academic. I cited better sources and fixed the argumentative problems I had, as well as the few problems with grammar and spelling that managed to sneak into my work once again.

I have enjoyed my run in English 101, and I feel that the class as well as the professor has prepared me for future ventures into the realm of academic writing. I feel that organization is the one area that I will continue to work on in the future. Most of my initial drafts either had MLA formatting errors, a works cited page that was not up to par, mistakes with in-text citations, or any combination of these faults. However, I feel like this course has really helped me sharpen other aspects of my writing, most notably my style. I feel that my style defines me and sets me apart from other writers, and for helping me improve on my style, as well as other aspects of my writing, I thank you.

Sincerely,

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Former Speaker Speaking For More Injustice

America, according to our Christian founding fathers, is known as “the land of the free.” These same founding fathers also set forth a system of government that is still being used today. Newt Gingrich served in this government, as the Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999. Gingrich has weighed in on the conflict over Park51, the proposed Islamic cultural center near the site of ground zero. Gingrich, in a statement he made, opposes setting up an Islamic symbol near the World Trade Center site, “where a group of jihadists killed over 3000 Americans and destroyed one of[America’s] most famous landmarks” (par. 1).

Gingrich appears to support the founding fathers’ choice in government, but he does not seem to buy in to the notion that America really is the “land of the free.” In America, faith-based community centers are free to be established. Islamic community centers are included too. Gingrich doesn’t seem to agree with that statement though. Gingrich’s statement actually furthers the stereotype that Americans are the most arrogant people in the world. Also, his statement proves that even the highest members of society are misinformed, something that no so-called leader should ever be.

Is America so arrogant as to say something along the lines of “Muslims cannot build a mosque in the United States until we can build a church or synagogue in Saudi Arabia?” Well, if America is judged on the basis of their leaders, then yes, the United States is furthering that stereotype, due in part to what Gingrich has stated. In regards to the Muslims trying to build Park5 1 , he states “There should be no mosque near Ground Zero so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia” (jar. 1). Additionally, he says that “[Muslims] ignore the fact that more than 100 mosques already exist in New York City. Meanwhile, there are no churches or synagogues in all of Saudi Arabia” (par. 4). In this section of his statement, Gingrich is implying that Muslims cannot build another mosque in New York City until a church or synagogue is established in the Muslim’s holy land. As a nation, we have come a long way in

the tolerance department. From the influx of Eastern Europeans during the industrial revolution, to the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, to the civil rights movement of the sixties, the United States has overcome its fair share of tolerance issues. Newt Gingrich, in making such a bold and egotistical statement, is turning the melting pot into a food strainer. By a leader making a very ill-conceived and conceited statement such as this, America is showing a rather ugly face to outsiders. According to the CIA world fact book, the Muslim population of the world is an estimated 1.42 Billion, with only 1.86 Million living in the United States. America is rearing its ugly head to an immense population of outsiders, due to one man who was once in a position of power in the country (CIA world fact book).

Arrogance can come at a cost, as people who exhibit arrogance usually feel like they know it all. Many leaders and politicians suffer from this disorder, and their attitude shines through because *of it*. For example, the talking head Bill O'Reilly recently went on a daytime talk show and stated "Muslims killed us on 9/11." That couldn't be further from the truth (a radical sect of Islamist extremist planned and carried out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), but it is a belief that many people carry, even Mr. Gingrich. In his statement regarding the proposed Islamic Community Center, he takes a very frightening tone that suggests that he feels the same way. He does state that "a group of jihadists" hurt America on 9/11 (par. 2). While this is true, and he is more accurate in his assessment of who damaged America on 9/11 than many leading figures, statements like "No mosque. No self deception. No surrender" implies an attitude of superiority. This superiority carries with it false knowledge, as many egotistical leaders often think they know more than is actually true. If these leaders did actually know everything, and they did possess true knowledge, then there would be no wars, revolutions, coups, or any other conflict within a nation.

When a nation's leaders are misinformed and arrogant, the people within the nation are misinformed and arrogant. Or, at least, the people are viewed as misinformed and arrogant by others outside of that particular nation. If we want to further the United States of America as a nation, we need

to promote tolerance and respect for your fellow man. If men and women like Newt Gingrich get their way, the tolerance movement is only being hindered. This is very detrimental to American society as we boast (again, with the arrogance) that we are one of the most tolerant countries in the world, because we are known as a melting pot. However, it is not the nation that determines its own renown, but rather the onlookers. If America claims to be tolerant, but others do not view them as such, then they will gain a reputation of intolerance.

Newt Gingrich says that the “Islamic cultural-political offensive [is] designed to.. .destroy our civilization” (par. 9). Well, because of Gingrich and others like him, this offensive seems to work, just not in the ways that the extremists planned.

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Peter Singer, in his essay “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” is advocating the use of money that would normally be spent on luxuries to instead, be spent on improving the condition of the world. Singer provides examples of two similar, but different scenarios, where one scenario includes being face to face with the symbol of poverty, and one scenario where the subject does not come into contact with the symbol of poverty. He states that all American households only need around \$30,000 a year for necessities, and that all the rest of the money should be spent on helping the poor around the world. Singer does not realize that in American society, an inherently capitalistic society, that this would be near impossible to do. The survival of the fittest mentality is so deeply embedded within the average American’s psyche that any thought or idea resembling communism is frowned upon. Singer is asking every single person in America to rely on the same amount of money. The result of this would inevitably be near-equality throughout all facets of life. Every American would live in a similar size and quality house, driving similar cars, have a similar standard of living, etc. In American society, where capitalism and social Darwinism reign supreme, attempting to persuade the people to donate a large portion of their income to help improve conditions overseas is a futile effort.

In Singer’s essay, he provides a scenario including the character Bob, Bob’s prized Bugatti luxury car, a child in distress, and a runaway train. Bob’s car is parked on one track, while the child is trapped on the other track, with the train headed for one or the other. Bob can control which one the train will hit, because he can flip a switch that forces the train to switch tracks. He can either have his car, which is the stock that all his life savings are in, get demolished to rescue the child, or, he can save his finances and have the train kill the child instead. Bob’s dilemma is the scenario that Singer uses to characterize the “typical American.” Bob eventually ends up saving his car, which is Singer’s analogy to Americans spending money on luxuries rather than spending money to improve the lives of children overseas.

However, it is not a good scenario for describing the situation that Americans are in. It is completely and entirely Bob's fault that the child got run over by the train. However, It is not America's fault that poverty exists throughout the world. Singer claims that Americans are responsible for improving the quality of life for children overseas. Therefore, Singer is implying that all of America's problems are unnecessary, and there are bigger problems to worry about in other countries. America still has their share of problems: people still live under the poverty line, people still cannot afford healthcare in American society, and children are still going hungry every day because their parents have to choose between putting food on the table or paying the bills for that month. Singer says that the average American makes \$50,000 a year, and while that may be true, statistics lie. A couple Americans with a net worth of over \$40 billion could easily skew that number. Rather than looking at the average, Singer should focus on persuading the Americans with ridiculous amounts of money saved up (such as \$40 billion) to give to overseas countries in the hopes of improving the situations of the children who cannot be held responsible for their financial problems.

The problems regarding money and poverty in American society can only be fixed by Americans too. As mentioned before, the concept of capitalism and the survival of the fittest is deeply rooted in the American psyche. So why would any American take part in improving other nations before improving their own? Don't get me wrong, I'm not attempting to promote anti-philanthropy ideologies, and if you participate in giving to charity then more power to you, but giving to charity is not right for everyone. Singer was not born in America, and so he has not been molded to think like an American capitalist. Therefore, he does not exactly know just to what extent or to what degree of social Darwinism Americans believe in. I agree that Singer is trying to do his share and promote goodness in America. But to attempt to persuade *everyone* in American society to give most of their paycheck to overseas nations is ludicrous, and will never work, given the capitalistic society a majority of Americans are born, raised, and currently live in.

Peter Singer essentially takes a wrong approach to a right idea. No one would argue that giving to the poor is a bad thing to do. But targeting the entire population of a single country (not to mention, targeting only a single country) is an ineffective way to get a point across. Instead, Singer should target Americans who can spend at least \$100,000 without spending more than ten percent of their total income.

4.0 Example
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ENG 101-XX
Long Essay

Melancholy America

Eric G. Wilson, in his book *Against Happiness*, argues that Americans are doing themselves a disservice when they try to rid themselves of a depression-like mood referred to as “melancholia.” Melancholia, as Wilson describes it, “generates a deep feeling in regard to the same anxiety [of depression]...that results in an active questioning of the status quo, a perpetual longing to create new ways of being and seeing” (8). He differentiates melancholia from depression by saying that depression is more severe and causes paralysis, that depression is more of a disorder while melancholy is more of a feeling (8). Wilson believes that Americans treat melancholia as an “aberrant state” because of confusions between the two, and that the optimism that is rooted in Americans could be another reason for the aberration. He then goes on to demonize the use of synthetic drugs in subduing any ailment that the user finds unfavorable (such as melancholia or insomnia), and claims that the reason for doing so lies in a longing to have complete control.

As I sit at my keyboard, struggling to find words to write, I do not feel like taking a dose of Adderall. However, if I did take Adderall, a drug that would help me concentrate more, I would be able to work more efficiently. Also, I do not feel like taking Prozac to deal with my loathing of assigned writing (and the stress that accompanies it). I agree with Wilson that mind altering drugs should not be used to get rid of unfavorable circumstances. However, Wilson is mistaken that optimism is bad for Americans. Although he has the right idea of melancholia, as melancholia is necessary for life to advance.

Optimism can hurt the user in the long run, yes, but that is not to say that optimism is completely and totally liable for the damages that Wilson and other blame it for. Barbara Ehrenreich, in her book *“Bright Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America”* states that 9/11, the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, and America’s economic downfall were all products of

optimism failing. Ehrenreich states that 9/11 had many “disturbing clues” that were taken for granted because officials did not believe that such a thing could occur (19). Additionally, Ehrenreich writes about how, in her eyes, the attribution of the ignorance of the many signs that the levees in New Orleans could not withstand the power of a category 4 or 5 hurricane as “failures of imagination” by authorities was a cop-out (20). With that being said, could somebody, such as Eric G. Wilson, simply argue that optimism is to blame if anything goes wrong? For example, a child falls off his bike and skins his knee. Could one say that the optimism of the parent, that the child would not get hurt, caused this problem? Or that the optimism by the child, that he would ride the bike perfectly, caused him to skin his knee? Perpetually blaming optimism will not get anything solved, for people have to get over the tough times to experience the good times. Having optimism is far better than not experiencing optimism because you feel that it will only hurt you. New Orleans fixed their problems, and although it was tough, they are a stronger city because of it (hell, their football team just won the Super Bowl.) Likewise, after the attacks on 9/11, Americans banded together and started working toward unity more than they would have if nothing ever happened. Now that’s not to say that 9/11 was beneficial to the United States of America, but that optimism, and not melancholy, helped the nation rebound. In essence, falling off your bike, skinning your knee, and getting back on the bike, knowing that you did something wrong and correcting it is far better than never riding the bike at all because you saw your friend get hurt doing it once.

“You can’t escape this fatal case of melancholia” is a quote from the song “Love, Love, Kiss, Kiss” by the American band Alkaline Trio. It sums up the American view of melancholia. In this case, it is viewed as fatal (a very extreme view). Wilson would argue that it is in fact depression, and not melancholia, that could be fatal. I would agree with that statement, and furthermore, I would argue that melancholia is actually in opposition to fatality or any fatal disease stemming from depression, similar to what Wilson believes. Melancholia is necessary for advancement in life. As mentioned before, if one does not endure the rough times, he or she will never know the great times (the whole notion of “no

rain, no rainbows"). For example, African Americans, from the 17th century to the 20th century, were treated as second class citizens, as sub-humans. During these times, it is safe to say that many African Americans felt melancholy. However, it was because of these feelings that black people chose to stand up, band together, and change the status quo. That was no easy task either, but now all Americans, no matter what skin color they have, have an African American president. And, according to the Washington Post article, "Poll: Feelings of progress rises among African Americans," "thirty-nine percent of blacks...say that the 'situation of black people in [America]' is better than it was [in 2005]" and that it is "in large part by the election of President Obama" (K. Thompson, par. 2). This article shows that the most melancholy people in America's history can further their lives. If black people hadn't been oppressed in America for so long, the election of Barack Obama would not be so significant or life-altering, and thus, the happiness of black people would not be elevated. The common American isn't the only person that experiences feelings of melancholy either. There are a number of established Americans in the arts that deal with these feelings as well. For example, American poet Charles Bukowski dealt with his melancholy feelings by writing. In his poem entitled "Let It Enfold You," he writes about a man, presumably himself, who suffers from melancholia. Bukowski writes, "The knife got near my/throat again,/I almost/turned on the/gas/again/but when the good/moments arrived/again/I didn't fight/them off/like an alley/adversary./I let them take me,/i luxuriated in them,/t bade/them welcome/home./I even looked into/the mirror/once having thought/myself to/be/ugly,/I now liked what/I saw, almost/handsome, yes,/a bit ripped and/ragged,/scars, lumps,/odd turns,/but all in all,/not too bad." (26. 227-55)

The man in this excerpt describes the feeling of happiness after a streak of feeling melancholy. The man, after overcoming melancholia and its effects, feels happy in the way he looks and feels, and even embraces his life at the moment.

Melancholy and optimism are definitely feelings that any American will deal with in every day life. However, these feelings are treated differently by everyone. Eric G. Wilson believes that melancholy should be highly regarded, but optimism is essentially hurting America. Optimism hurts America no more than pessimism, complacency, Zen, or nihilism do. Wilson is accurate in his assessment of melancholia, but could further his argument by stating how it is essential to furthering life too.

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