

Sample Essay Assignment from a First Year Seminar

Reading and Writing Youth Culture : Critical Analysis (Salibrici)

For the last month you have been reading and writing about various issues related to the topic of American youth culture. The readings have been varied, covering issues from drug and alcohol abuse, to outsiders and fitting in, to relationships with parents, and a lot more in between. You've read texts that are considered classic in the field (excerpts from Goodman's Growing Up Absurd), to current journalistic investigations into youth culture (articles from the New York Times), to journal entries from young people who may be similar or different from you.

This essay assignment asks that you begin with a particular question raised from our reading and discussions (for example, questions on body image, substance abuse, or peer pressure) and analyze that issue in terms of at least two of the readings we've covered. So, first you need a question, an issue related to youth culture that interests you and that you feel you can analyze. Then you need to find at least two readings that relate to that question in a way you can use in your own analysis of the issue.

First, though, let's define analysis, a fundamental characteristic of critical thinking. Analysis as applied to writing means that you separate something into its parts so that you can better understand it. You can begin with a question that grabs your attention, and then use that question as a lens for looking into the various parts of the issue raised by the question. Your question will concentrate your attention on relevant features of the issue you're interested in and help you eliminate irrelevant features. Once you've identified the relevant features of the issue to be examined, you then look at their significance or meaning.

This essay asks for a two-part structure common to language: ask a question and then try to answer it by analyzing its parts (again, using at least two readings we've covered). In a way this is like mini-research in that we've researched through our readings together and

now you are ready to write about a primary characteristic of a specific issue. For this essay, you are analyzing an issue, not developing an argument.

For example: What are the problems faced by parents and their teen-age children?

Possible relevant features: communication issues, goal setting issues, importance of social issues

Possible readings: Rubin's Ask Me If I Care excerpts, AAUW report on teen-age girls

How long? 4-5 pages, double-spaced

Can I use personal experience? Perhaps as a supplement to what your texts have taught you, perhaps as part of an introduction or conclusion, but this is not a personal essay.

Your content development for this essay arises from what you've read and how you analyze it. You will be quoting from and paraphrasing ideas from others' texts.

Documentation? YES. Use MLA style.