

Instructor Guide to the Diagnostic Essay

OVERVIEW

For instructors, the main purpose of the diagnostic essay is twofold:

- To ensure students are placed in the appropriate class
- To provide early formative feedback on their writing

For these reasons, the diagnostic should take place as early as possible in the semester, and it should be returned within a week of completion. Students should be advised on transferring to ENG 092 or adding ENG 0094 within two weeks of the start of the semester.

TIMING

The recommended structure of the Diagnostic Essay is as follows:

- Week 1 Day 1: Distribute *LA Times* op-ed as homework for Day 2. Let students know they will be writing about the piece the next class period. Email article to absent students (recommended)
- Week 1 Day 2: Administer diagnostic essay as in-class assignment for 45 mins of class time.
- Week 2 Day 1: Return diagnostics with comments; set up appointments with students to discuss adding ENG 0094.

The diagnostic could be administered as a take-home essay. The benefits of this approach are that it gives the instructor more class time during Week 1. The downsides are that students may spend too much time on the essay, receive outside help, or neglect to complete the assignment.

READING AND PROMPT

The reading was selected because it

- is a persuasive piece that can serve as a model for students' persuasive essays later in the term
- presents a complex and nuanced thesis
- requires a level of reading comprehension that mirrors other texts in ENG 1021
- is about an issue relevant to students (What is the purpose of college?)

The prompt is left deliberately vague, as one goal of the diagnostic is to assess students' familiarity with basic essay structure. If asked, instructors can advise students to use the structure and evidence that makes the most logical sense to them.

EVALUATION

Evaluation should be twofold:

1. Comments to students "diagnosing" strengths and weaknesses in their writing. Students should receive full points for completing the essay.

2. An evaluation of whether the student is correctly placed in ENG 1021. Below are areas of concern that should prompt the instructor to encourage the student to take ENG 0094:

- No annotations or notes on the original op-ed piece and problems with reading comprehension in the essay (summary fails to capture the main idea of the article)
- Excessive sentence-level errors (routine lack of clarity, mechanical errors that interfere with meaning, lack of capitalization, frequent problems with basic sentence structure)
- Lack of familiarity with essay structure (no paragraphs, large-scale disorganization)
- Failure to prove their central point/thesis (lack of evidence, straying off-topic, problems with logic)
- Producing less than a page of writing

TROUBLE-SHOOTING

Students will likely be nervous about this assignment, so it is important to communicate its purpose and how it will be graded (pass/fail). Instructors should also emphasize that there are different standards for correct sentence-mechanics, development, organization, etc. for essays composed in class.

The challenge for the instructor is communicating both that the assignment should be taken seriously, to provide an accurate diagnostic, but not so seriously that the student should be anxious about it.

Some students may have trouble writing 1 page in 45 mins. Emphasize that they should complete as much as they can, and that they will not lose points if they write for an hour but do not reach 1 page. If students are slow at typing, instructors can allow them to handwrite the essay.

STUDENT TRANSFERS/REGISTRATION

Send or walk the student to Advising in College Center to get them registered for the correct course, if there are openings in ENG 0094. This needs to occur in the first two weeks of the semester.

If students elect not to take ENG 0094 for the entire semester, keep in mind that there are late-start ENG 0094 classes. If students struggle in ENG 1021 for the first weeks of the term, consider approaching them again about the late-start ENG 0094.