

## Teacher's Sample *Writing in the Works* Homework

### Homework One

Name nonfiction book. Name topic of interest. Write in phrases, sentences, paragraphs. Draft research questions.

I am reading four-time mayor of Detroit Coleman Young. His memoir, *Hard Stuff*, co-written by Lonnie Wheeler, was published in 1994, three years before the controversial leader's death. I am interested in race relations in the greater metro area. Why did the white adults in my life dislike him? What can be done now to improve all our lives and end discrimination?

Note: Submit optional entrance essay by Week Four. For students who want feedback about their essay writing early in the semester.

### Homework Two

Get your writing muscles pumped. This work will not pertain to topic but aim to warm you up.

#### Practice 4.3 Using Examples

Small classes allow for more student participation . . . as long as everyone recognizes the need to build a learning community by joining equally in the conversation. If one or two people seek to hog the air time, other students often let them and keep quiet, which is regrettable. But if the burden and joy of discussion is shared more widely, among a cross section of students, the experience can be very worthwhile. Where else can you mix wise and curious senior citizens, fearful moms freed from the nest, concerned fathers, unaware and self-obsessed teenagers, carefree twenty-somethings, serious sorts in their thirties, forceful forty years olds, serene fifty somethings, deer hunters, men, women, bar mavens, religious people, pagans, sports freaks, computer nerds, foreigners from every land, yoopers, rich, poor, middle class of every stripe, every known and as yet unknown form of humanity, but in a community college classroom? I look forward to the new television show, *Community*, to see what kind it reflects.

#### Practice 4.4 Using Description

A room in my home (sort of)

Our shed needs replacing as it tilts to one side and has no firm floor. The wood base gave out years ago, and now Morning Glories in purple and magenta grow inside, despite the lack of light, which is kind of cool. The spiders skirting around the mess of lawn equipment and grilling supplies are less inviting. The touch of their web raises alarm and makes one move

quickly to retrieve the clippers and get the hell out of there. Chris likes the smell of gasoline. I don't know what he thinks about the smell of fertilizer, but I prefer the lavender growing not far away outside of the shed. Smell too many industrial solvents and you start to taste 'em. Too small for comfort, inside the shed we squeeze two lawn mowers, his and hers, one for the front and back lawns, each set at different heights, longer for the front, shorter for the back. The front, which Chris does, is a more suburban style patch with its plain unadulterated rectangles. The blades of grass out front are long and lean like tennis sister Venus Williams. The entire effect evokes fine long grain shag carpeting. The backyard lawn is hardier due to all the flower gardens interrupting everywhere, in circles, squares and half moon shapes. The entire effect says, "Walk on me barefoot and garden!" The blades of grass back here around the shed are sturdy-looking and stockier, more tennis sister Serena Williams. Both are nice; the combo is really grand. A few years back, to give the shed a face lift and prolong its life, I painted it mellow yellow and white. It was May, the anniversary of Chris' mom's death. He was very sick with flu while I worked. Chris' dad got the shed for free from the neighbor back probably in the seventies or eighties when it was already quite used, so together across the years we've done our best not to consume wastefully. Now, in the new millennium, the shed is chipping and revealing its metal skin. It no longer functions well and we're sick of looking at it, sick of ducking and running for cover, so a new one will be built, bigger and more formidable, hopefully before the smell of grass completely fades into the wet death of winter.

#### *Practice 4.5 Using Narration*

The *music* of Elton John has stayed with me since our babysitter Barb introduced me to him back when I was ten, in 1973, year of Watergate and President Nixon's impeachment and resignation. There were only three national television channels and all covered events in Washington. Completely unconcerned with politics and current events, I can remember being very attracted to the sound of wistful and rocking piano mixed with the country roots of *Tumbleweed Connection* album, the endearing quality of "Friends." I hear since, thanks to the Sundance television show *Spectacle* (produced by Elton John and hosted by Elvis Costello), that singer song writer Laura Nyro lurks beneath the early Elton John *Madman Across the Water* sound, as well as other musicians and styles, layer by layer, the magic of new music remixing old chords to create something new. "With a friend at hand, you can see the light. If you're friends are there, everything is alright." Granny dresses cut from calico bought at K-Mart, Harvey S. Ball original yellow smiley faces, dangling real feather earrings, big American cars with interior couches, and Michigan sweet summers

when you're a kid and basically carefree. Right in time, Elton stepped directly into my personal life and helped me deal with mom, dad, the nuns, though I didn't follow much of the lyrics. I found his very voice comforting. I trusted that I would one day fall in sync with the words and all the stories they had to tell. *Don't Shoot Me I'm Only the Piano Player*. "Sweet Painted Lady, guess it always stays the same, getting paid, for being . . . late." Make that "laid." Oh! I get it! I'm sure neither my mom nor the nuns would approve if they knew *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* just a little better. No wonder mom didn't let me go to my first rock n roll concert in sixth grade, but she couldn't keep me away from Elton forever. In my memory, the babysitter years fade and Elton and Bernie Taupin, his song writer, remain, forever, through high school, college and still. Long ago, I decided "Tiny Dancer" would be my favorite song never to be replaced. Though favorites are childish, I'm so glad I picked well. "Blue jean baby, L.A. lady, you'll marry a music man . . ." It took me many attempts before I finally saw Elton John sing that song live. The moment was too surreal, after so much waiting. After all these years, I've mellowed. I prefer the simple pleasure of catching my favorite song on the radio, familiar chords stirring my blood and bones at any time unexpectedly. Life is better with happy little surprises interrupting our days.

#### *Practice 4.6 Using Definition*

*Techno music* is sometimes just the thing to take you out of your blah-blah-blah every day head and transport you to a better place, and sometimes it's the most annoying noise on the planet, depending on one's mood. Techno music is far more original than top forty or elevator muzak, but its creativity can sometimes be what's so off-putting. When the beat infects your pulse, your mind disappears and you can feel techno music as much as hear it, and the overall effect is sublime. When the beat doesn't infect your pulse and your mind says "Turn off that noise! I can hear that shit and I don't like it!" techno music is the worst kind of pretentious art crap you can imagine. You want to turn into Dennis Leary and start swearing in anger. Most music doesn't move people so much, in either direction, ecstasy or anguish. Top forty and elevator muzak lobotomized the brain. At least techno music reminds the listens that she is alive, at least for right now. Techno music helps listeners live more fully in the moment.

#### *Practice 4.7 Using Process Analysis*

*Catch a cold* by never washing your hands. When you go to Kroger, wait until a nose picking child first graces his grimy little fingers on the door handle, then follow him inside and begin shopping with little regard for polite distances. Do not use the sanitizer wipes

sometimes available. If people are sneezing, move in their direction. Remember, never wash your hands. When your hands are good and filthy with germs from far and wide, touch your face as much as possible. Rub your eyes, pick your own nose, lick your fingers as you read the sales paper. Mix germs and your own private mucous membranes as much as possible. Also visit hospital waiting rooms, doctor's offices, kindergarten classrooms and just about any aisle at Target. Hear a guy hacking in aisle seven next to the cat food? Rush over and breathe deeply! *Bonne Chance!*

#### *Practice 4.8 Using Compare and Contrast*

*High school students and college students* differ in terms of maturity. In high school, students spend more time worrying about what their peers think than they do taking care of themselves. In college, students begin to look within to see what building materials they can find: *Do I want to be a lawyer, a doctor, a chimney sweep or accountant? Am I good with numbers, with people, with computers, with anything?* In high school, students are more concerned with relationships: *Will she go out with me, does he hate, what are my friends doing, who am I seen with?* It's a very self-conscious time followed ideally by a time of inner exploration, when young adults begin to focus and not care about unimportant things, like a certain pair of Michael Jordan tennis shoes or a designer pair of jeans worth a month's salary. Priorities are established. In high school, many students blow off their studies and instead spend time socializing and playing sports. In college, students must get serious and often balance work and studies. As they grow older, students realize that they must take action to create the kind of life they want. High school is often seen as fun and games, but in college adulthood begins, especially for serious community college students, who don't enjoy the luxury of living on campus and sharing down time with peers.

#### *Practice 4.9 Using Classification*

*Dear Mom letter/ list of categories about life at college:*

- food in the cafeteria
- cost of food in town
- roommates good and bad
- parties
- money
- classes
- new friends
- teachers

Dear Mom,

Life at college is everything I had always hoped it would be and more. It's everything you always hoped it would be too, don't worry. I am going to my classes and doing okay. The teachers are kind of remote and scary, but the other students are really friendly and help make everything better. One of my classes, A Survey of American History, is held in an auditorium with about two hundred people. But the prof is pretty interesting. I'm taking notes on my new laptop, thank you! I told you I would use it for something other than Facebook and War of the Worlds. Two of three dormmates are cool. Sherry is from Livonia and wants to be an oral surgeon, like her dad. Lorraine is funny and wants to own a French style café in downtown Detroit. She's black, Sherry's white, you know me (your best child), and the fourth suitemate is just plain weird. "Roommate from another planet" we call her, which kind helps the rest of bond together, without her. I know, that's mean. She's not like us, fun and outgoing. She's kind of remote, hopefully not suicidal. She spends a lot of time in the library. Don't know about that one, but I suppose we should try harder. Let's see. Yes, the parties are fun and there are many cute young men. No, I am not doing anything too stupid. Like you said, I'm trying to maintain "balance" and "common sense." The food in the cafeteria is okay, but it's not very healthy, at least not the stuff that tastes good, so I'm probably going to gain twenty pounds my first semester eating popcorn and nachos day after day. Money so far is not too tight, as long as I stay within my budget and avoid the lure of fast food, which can eat away my beer and concert money. I may think about getting a part-time job next semester on campus somewhere, but don't worry, I am taking college seriously. Thank you! I love you! Gotta go study for an exam!!!!

Your loving child

*Practice 4.10 Using Cause and Effect*

*Brainstorm the possible causes of the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family:*

-Mom doesn't stay home while dad runs the world, which means mom can run a corporation or drink herself into a corner at the race track. We can no longer rely on stereotypes for clues about how to live.

-Dad doesn't make a living so easily as a laborer and is scared to go to college at this point in his life. Dad is no longer the rock by definition, not through physical strength. Roles are changing.

-So many choices in entertainment and thought, as if the universe is expanding without borders, without a nucleus. What are people to think and do when so many options are available? Become confused.

-The decentralized role of religion definitely has its up sides. (Today, it's less likely Catholic priests can hide abuse, for example.)

-Kids are maturing at a younger age due to multi-media surround-sound mega world culture, 24 hour news, and the internet. Is it possible to encounter too much information?

-Our worn out environment may not be supporting us the way it used to. Hurricanes disrupt families. Corrupted food supplies and cancer disrupt families.

-Economic stress remains and intensifies reminding us that the pioneer days at least thematically will never go away. Life is tough no matter the pretty pictures that confuse us and dull us into thinking otherwise.

-Shifting attitudes toward marriage and the definition of the traditional nuclear family arrived thanks to gay rights, women's rights, civil rights, which are good things, and not to blame.

Sample nonfiction book response (build these in your composition notebook as you read):

Coleman Young, the first black mayor of Detroit, swears like a m=-;@#f%^?><r in his autobiography, *Hard Stuff*. I was a teenager at the time he was in office. I was living in lily-white Livonia far away in many ways, but only about twenty miles from downtown. In high school, I was more interested in ballet classes after school. I was disconnected from current events, but I remember adults in my life holding a negative attitude toward the mayor. Some a very colorful and profane negative attitude to match the mayor's. [possible main idea] Perhaps the only thing he needed to do in order to successfully compromise and win over the minds of white metro Detroiters was to clean up his profanity. President Obama, the first black president, not known for public profanity but instead a winning personality, has nevertheless learned about compromise and quickly. Just look at the national health care debate, where he is moving toward the center, away from universal coverage toward improvement of the existing system. In response to the vocal right wing, he is giving a little so that he can get a little.