UNIV 101-201
Common Reading Experience

Designing & Evaluating Assignments

How can writing strategies help UNIV 101 and 201 students make a literature-life connection between their own experiences and Eboo Patel’s?

FYI. The 2008-09 National Survey of Student Engagement teamed up with the National Council of Writing Program Administrators and found that students from 157 universities and colleges said they learn most when writing assignments:

1. Encourage interaction (peer reviews, teacher feedback, writing center visits)
2. Require authentic meaning-making & communication (synthesis of information directed at a specific audience)
3. Provide clear expectations (content & scope, organization & development, engagement & choice)

TWO VERSIONS OF AN ASSIGNMENT: Look over the following two versions of an early, short assignment on Patel’s Acts of Faith. What differences do you see between the two?

Version A
Read Patel’s Acts of Faith, Ch. 2 (24-28). Summarize what happens in this part of the book. Compare or contrast Patel’s experience with one of your own. If you use any quotations, use MLA style. Reflect on how your experiences resemble or different from, Patel’s. Your paper should be about one page long. Be prepared to have a peer review it.

Version B
Making a Decision about Your Education
In Acts of Faith, Ch. 2 (24-28), Patel’s teacher makes him suddenly realize that he doesn’t want to be known as a goofball anymore. “By virtue of his insult, Schrage helped me discover an identity that was so deeply buried I didn’t even know it existed. I wanted to be a good student—no, an exceptional student” (26). Patel decides he is going to change his teacher’s mind by writing the best science research paper his teacher has ever seen.

Take a couple of minutes to jot down why you think Patel makes such a decision. Then find 3 brief quotations that show what impact this decision made on him. How do you think his decision affected the way his teacher, his classmates, and his parents saw him. We’ll have a brief discussion on these points.

You have also made decisions that have had a positive—or negative—impact on your own education. Take five minutes to write the story of one decision you made. When you have written it, you will tell your story to a partner. Here are some questions your story might answer:

- What was the decision, and how did you come to it?
- To what extent was your decision influenced by someone else?
- What actions did you take to follow through on that decision?
- How easy was it to stick by your decision?
- What was the result?
- How did others react?
- What insights did you gain from that result?

For the last part of this in-class draft, list some ways your decision and Patel’s are similar—and different. To what extent do you think those similarities and differences are due to cultural and/or religious values you each hold?

Next week, Sept. 9, you should turn in a 400-500 word revision of the written work you’ve done today. Double-space, with 1-inch margins, 12 pt. Times Roman or Calibri. You’ll be sharing your revision with at least two other classmates who will comment on what you’ve written. On that day, we will also discuss what kind of rubric I should use to evaluate your revision. Note: The University Writing Center has this assignment on file and can help you complete it successfully.
THREE OTHER ASSIGNMENTS: Which of the three assignments below would you consider having your students do? Why? Based on our discussion of the previous assignment, list 2 or 3 changes you might make to the assignment you choose. You’ll be sharing your comments with colleagues.

A Brochure or Flyer on Community Service
When Patel went to college, he volunteered at a local Catholic Worker house and learned about the national movement by the same name (Ch. 4, pp. 48-54). Studies such as the National Survey on Student Engagement have found that today’s college students are more involved in activism than any other generation. Consider the bigger question of why students like you should get involved in some form of activism.

Please visit the NIU Community Service website at:

See the list of engagement and outreach opportunities at:

Find an engagement activity that interests you. Ask yourself how such an activity might complement the major you’re studying and actually contribute to your getting a job later on.

Investigate the activity. What academic area is it associated with? What community service does the activity focus on? Has it got a website? What information does it give? Who is the contact person? What do students who participate in the activity say about it? What are the rewards of participating? What values does the activity build upon? Does it have any sponsors? What do faculty say about it? Is it part of a larger movement or organization?

Please design a 350-400 word brochure or flyer to get first-year and transfer students interested in the engagement activity. Give them the essential information they would need to get involved. Also provide appropriate links and images that will help inform your classmates about the activity’s mission in the community. Put the brochure into FAQ (frequently asked questions) format, with the most important questions leading the list. In a week and a half, you will share your brochures or flyers. Classmates will evaluate their three top favorites. Note: The University Writing Center has this assignment on file and can help you complete it successfully. Keep in mind that the UWC and other tutoring services also count as an engagement activity.

Why Study or Work Abroad?
Patel doesn’t get interested in a study abroad program until he is in graduate school. Once he wins a Rhodes Scholarship, he goes to study in Oxford, England, and the experience takes him in many unexpected directions (Ch. 6, pp. 101-123). You don’t have to wait ‘til grad school. You’ll find lots of undergrad study-abroad programs at:

Under “Programs” in the left navigation column, explore the links by country, college/major, subject, and internships. You can also get information by going to Williston Hall 417 any Wednesday or Thursday at 3:30. Also consider contacting faculty or students who have participated in such a program.

Go to https://sites.google.com/, https://drive.google.com, or https://www.facebook.com/ and set up an account so that you can create a 400-500 word website, slide show, or Facebook page. Your online composition should be on a study-abroad program that you could present to parents and friends. Choosing appropriate images and links will be as important as what you write.

What courses would you study? What credits would you earn? What kind of living arrangement would you have? How much would the program cost, and what kinds of financial assistance would be available? Where would you be able to travel as well? What kinds of health precautions would be necessary? How would you go about obtaining necessary documents (passport, study or work visa)? What could you tell others about the political climate? Local customs? Food? Most important, what would be the value of participating in such a program?

As an alternative, you might want to create an online composition about the Peace Corps. If so, go to: http://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/learn/meet/offices/chicago/ and consider the same questions above.

Make sure your URL is correct so that others in this class as well as family and friends can access your site. Note: The University Writing Center has this assignment on file and can help you complete it successfully.

Letter to the Vice Provost
“Just as college campuses have become models of multiculturalism… with concrete goals they commit to achieving,” Patel writes, “they can also become models of interfaith cooperation” (188).

Go to http://www.niu.edu/fsye/common_reading/index.shtml and play the 5:15 minute video where faculty, students, and Anne Birberick, the Vice Provost, speak about Acts of Faith and interfaith cooperation. Then write a 300-400 word letter to the ViceProvost, in which you let her know (1) what you learned from reading and discussing this book, (2) what you learned from engaging in activities and assignments related to the book, and (3) what you learned from your classmates’ responses to this book. How did Acts of Faith compare to other books you’ve read this semester? How did it affect the campus interactions you’ve had with “culturally different” students? What attitudes have you changed or more deeply confirmed? Why would or wouldn’t you recommend the book to others? Above all, what concrete goals have you identified and hope to achieve after reading Acts of Faith? Try to identify at least three.

Your letter will be due the last week of class. You and your classmates will choose 3 letters that best represent your class’s experiences. Then you will vote on the one that your instructor will mail to the Vice Provost.
WRITTEN RESPONSE, ASSIGNMENT #1: Read over this response to Assignment #1, and then choose one of the 3 following rubrics to score it. We’ll discuss what rubric you chose, what brief feedback you might give the student, and why. We might also consider whether or not you would use this writing sample in a class discussion before a peer review, focusing on the most constructive ways that students could provide feedback to their classmates.

A Career Decision

Going to a new school can be quite intimidating for a young child. I experienced this firsthand when I moved from a fairly large town (Elmhurst) to a very small town known as Hinckley. Like Patel, I was a new student in the second grade at Hinckley Elementary School and I was very unsure as to how I should approach the new school year in a territory that I was very unfamiliar with. I remember being very nervous that day as I walked into Mrs. K’s second grade classroom. But deep down in my heart I knew that everything would be alright.

While walking through the doorway that hot August day I was immediately approached by my teacher. I remember seeing the bright smile on her face as she welcomed me with open arms into her classroom. As the year went on I had a deeper understanding of the teaching profession and the passion that Mrs. K had toward her career. That year I also realized what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, I want to pursue a career in teaching. The same as Patel, my goal is to become a teacher just like Mrs. K. Because of her dedication, passion, and respect for the field of education, I know that this is the right path for me. It’s amazing that my culture and Patel’s culture agree on this value.

Ever since I took a step in the second grade classroom that year, I have gained more appreciation for teachers in general. I realize that there was more to the teaching world than what meets the eye. Not only do teachers assign homework, grade tests, plan agendas but they also needed to have an inspiration to teach children. They need to be dedicated, persistent, patient, responsible and most of all they must love working with children. While sitting as a student in Mrs. K’s classroom I saw that Mrs. Kohler displays all of these characteristics and so many more. It has been a goal of mine ever since to obtain and refine these attributes that my teacher displayed so well.

THREE RUBRICS: Below are an assignment-specific analytical rubric, a holistic rubric for a series of assignments, and a rubric adapted from the national VALUES rubrics on writing and critical thinking. Please choose one of the 3 rubrics, score the student writing sample, and provide brief, constructive comments to the student.

Assignment-specific Analytical Rubric: Making a Decision about Your Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>No Credit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>You give evidence that you understand Patel’s insights and motives for trying to prove himself to his teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You develop a personal story that clearly connects or contrasts with Patel’s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your conclusion explores the cultural and interfaith values that create differences and similarities between your story and Patel’s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You show you’ve put together and revised your essay, not just turned in your class notes.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>You show you’ve edited carefully for grammar, spelling, and errors.</td>
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Holistic Rubric for a Series of Assignments on Acts of Faith:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rubric Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Instructions followed exceptionally well; format highly organized with functional &amp; well-placed electronic features if needed; insightful connections to book if applicable; a strong main idea supported by substantially researched answers to secondary questions &amp; thoughtfully developed evidence; grammatically fluent with no evident editing issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instructions followed accurately; format well organized with functional electronic features as needed; good connections to book if applicable; clear main idea supported by relevant, researched answers to secondary questions &amp; reasonably developed evidence; very few noticeable grammatical or editing issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Instructions followed somewhat inconsistently; format somewhat disjointed but electronically functional where needed; connections to book, when required, overly general; identifiable main idea somewhat supported by research or evidence but some secondary questions overlooked; problems with grammar &amp; editing distract at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instructions minimally followed; format confusing with irrelevant, missing, or nonfunctional electronic features when needed; connections to book, when required, missing or weak; main idea unclear &amp; research or evidence inadequate; grammatical and editing problems interfere with comprehension</td>
</tr>
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# Written Communication/ Critical Thinking VALUES Rubric Adapted for UNIV 101-102

(When the description that best matches the overall written performance for each criterion, determine the raw score, divide by 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Progressing</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Score Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question or Problem</td>
<td>Precise description of a question/ problem &amp; context.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reasonable description of a question/ problem &amp; context.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sketchy description of a question/ problem, some contextual information.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Incomplete or missing description of a question/ problem; little or no context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Development</td>
<td>Original, well-conceived ideas drawn from strong control of content.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Well-synthesized ideas based on good control of content.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptable ideas, but reflect uneven control of content.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fuzzy or misinformed ideas, show limited control of content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources &amp; Evidence</td>
<td>Knowledgeable use of sources or evidence, multiple views represented, well-integrated; correct citation.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable, balanced use of sources or evidence, accurately represented &amp; integrated; minimal citation errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant use of sources or evidence, fairly represented, but in need of better integration; citation problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal use of sources or evidence, not always relevant or at times misrepresented; incorrect citations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Logical format faithful to instructions. Strategic placement of figures or electronic links.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organized format with orderly transitions. Helpful placement of figures or links.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate but disjointed format. Figures or links could be better placed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disorganized or truncated format. Figures or links not well placed or relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Insightful conclusion consistent with content &amp; thesis; reflects on outcomes &amp; implications.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Justified conclusion, connected to development of content &amp; thesis.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Predictable conclusion, drawn to fit a desired end.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Offhand conclusion—may be inconsistent with content or too abrupt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax &amp; Editing</td>
<td>Well-crafted, varied sentences; grammatically fluent, carefully edited.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Syntactically clear sentences; few grammatical errors or typos.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Readable but sometimes confusing sentences; distracting errors or typos.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unclear or poorly constructed sentences; frequent errors or typos that impede meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raw score (add scores of 7 criteria): ________________ Final score (raw score divided by 7): __________