

# LEARNING COMMUNITY COURSE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

Experienced learning community professors and instructors were invited to share an assignment or activity that has been used successfully in a learning community course. We hope that the assignments included here are useful to you as a resource. Our intention was to provide you with some examples that can be modified or used as a basis for ideas. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to those who submitted the assignments included in this packet.



Compiled by the Curriculum Development & Enhancement Subcommittee for the 2002 Learning Community Institute, May 2002.

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If you have an assignment or activity that you would like to share for future use,  
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*This assignment was the third essay in English 104, a freshman composition class. Members of the Business Learning Team were asked to attend the annual career fair and write an essay detailing their observations and reflecting on the experience.*

### **Introduction**

The second major assignment in this class helped you develop self-awareness. This assignment is designed to demonstrate the power of another source of knowledge: observation and reflection. The powers of keen observation and thoughtful reflection enable professionals to advance quickly in their careers and find satisfaction in their personal lives.

### **Purpose**

In the fast-paced years of this century, finding time to observe and reflect will be a challenge. Once you've experienced and practiced observation and reflection, however, you may find it easier to return to the practice. This assignment is designed to give you such experience and to reveal your natural powers to learn about the world around you by processing latent input. This assignment, then, will require you to gather information from the unguarded state of the world around you and apply that information to your own world perspective.

### **Audience**

The audience for this paper is your instructor, adviser, and fellow writers.

### **Assignment**

BLT members of English 104 will attend the Career Fair at Hilton Coliseum. If you are a business major but not a BLT member, you, also, must attend the Career Fair. If you are not a business major, please see me to arrange an observation experience that will be meaningful to you. Your assignment is to observe the exhibitors at the booths and write a paper that not only describes what you've seen but also draws some conclusions for yourself and your readers, based on reflections of what you expected vs. what you found.

### **Format**

Your paper must be typed. You must submit at least 1000 words. Write a title at the top of your first page. Turn in all drafts, including one marked by a peer reviewer. Be certain all your work bears your name and the date, and fasten all your work together with staple or paper clip, with the final draft on top. Turn in the entire package at the beginning of class on. A draft is due on Thursday, Oct. 4.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

To earn an A on this paper, meet the following criteria:

- Your paragraphs should link smoothly through effective transitional devices.
- All paragraphs should include an obvious topic sentence (near the beginning of the sentence) and all sentences within the paragraph should directly support or explain or exemplify the topic sentence.)
- Provide details that enable your readers to "see" what you observed.
- Paint pictures of the scenes and portraits of the people you describe.
- Include meaningful reflection. As such, you will draw conclusions or lessons from your observation. Your reflection should show clearly that you have discovered something that confirms or contradicts an expectation or presumption you previously held.
- Be Concise: Don't settle for the first word that comes to mind when you describe your experience, yet strive to use only as many words as are necessary. Edit redundant messages.
- The tone of your essay should reflect your knowledge of your audience and purpose.
- Your paper should display an academically appropriate formal writing style. In other words, eliminate contractions, slang, and colloquialisms, as well as casualness and satire.
- Your paper should have few spelling, punctuation, and word-usage errors.

*Members of the Cross-Cultural Learning Community were asked to attend a series of campus and community activities together with the goal of writing a reflection paper about each. A series of assignments is included here followed by guidelines for all of the reflection papers and the rubric that was used to evaluate student work. These assignments are for LAS 130.*

### **ISU -UNI football game**

- What were the highlights of the ISU-UNI football game experience for you?
  - American students - What insights into American culture did you gain by attending the ISU-UNI football game with students from another culture?
  - International students - What insights into American culture did you gain by attending the ISU-UNI football game?
- 

### **Visit to Green Hills Retirement Community**

#### **Special presentation about Marvin Hamlisch & ISU Big Band**

- In your opinion what are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a community such as Green Hills?
  - How does this compare with the living experience of older people in your home community?
  - What types of things did you learn about your audience that will be important in your presentation?
- 

### **Marvin Hamlisch & ISU Big Band**

**CY Stephens Auditorium 7:00 PM**

#### **Meet members of Green Hills Retirement Community**

- Big Band music is associated with the decades of the 1930's and 1940's in the West. What do you think will be the musical legacy of your generation? Why?
- 

### **Rent**

**CY Stephens 7:00PM**

“Rent is about being young in New York, being brave and being scared, being in love and being in trouble - yet having hope for today and faith for tomorrow.”

- Did you find a message of hope and faith in the musical? Why or why not? Are the issues in the musical common to young people in your home community? Explain.
-

**Group presentations for members of Green Hills Retirement Community**  
**Transportation will leave Linden Hall at 6:30 PM. Will return by 9 PM.**

- What did you learn about your presentation topics?
  - What did you learn about making an effective presentation?
  - What did you learn about being a team member?
  - What did you learn about your audience?
  - Was this experience valuable to you? Why or why not?
  - How could you improve the service learning project experience?
- 

**Reflection Paper Guidelines**

1. All questions should be answered.
2. Answers should include your personal opinion on the subject and examples to support your opinion.
3. Essay should reflect correct use of grammar and contain no spelling errors.
4. Essay should be written on a word processor / computer.

**Reflection papers were evaluated based on the following rubric.**

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXEMPLARY 2 points</b>	<b>ACCEPTABLE 1 point</b>	<b>UNACCEPTABLE 0 points</b>
Content	Answers are fully developed. They include personal opinions and ideas. They include examples to support opinions and illustrate ideas.	Answers are not fully developed. They do not include personal opinions and ideas. Or they do not include examples to support opinions and ideas.	Did not answer the questions.
Grammar	Essay is thoroughly spell-checked and contains no errors in grammar	Essay contains some errors in spelling and/or grammar.	Essay contains frequent misspelled words and serious grammatical errors. This indicates that time was not taken to spell-check or proofread.

**Group presentations were evaluated using the following rubric.**

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXEMPLARY 3 points</b>	<b>PROFICIENT 2 points</b>	<b>ACCEPTABLE 1 point</b>	<b>UNACCEPTABLE 0 points</b>
Team member Involvement – 2  2 X _____	All members Participate equally in Presentation	Some members participate more than others	Presentation consists of individual reports	Some members did not participate
Length of Presentation  _____	Presentation is between 10 and 15 minutes	Presentation is too long or too short by 2 minutes.	Presentation is too long or too short by 5 minutes.	Presentation is too long or too short by 10 minutes or more.
Information Presented  _____	Information is accurate. Show understanding of topic.	Some information is inaccurate.	Much information is inaccurate	Information is inaccurate and presentation shows lack of understanding.
Visual Presentation  _____	Visual aids are used frequently. They are easy to read and understand. They are of professional quality.	Visual aids are good, but a few are sloppy or difficult to read.	Most visual aids are sloppy and hard to read.	There are too few visual aids. Those used are carelessly prepared.
Oral Presentation  _____	Diction is clear. Sentences are complete. Presentation flows well. Words are well chosen for precise meaning.	Some diction is not clear. Presentation is somewhat disjointed. Some words are not well chosen.	Diction is often unclear. Presentation is choppy. Word choice frequently does not clarify understanding.	Diction is muddled. Grammatical errors and use of slang distract and confuse the audience.
Audio Presentation  _____	Sound level is appropriate to the audience. Selections illustrate topic.	Some parts were too loud or too soft. Some selections do not illustrate topic.	Many parts were too loud or too soft. Many selections do not illustrate topic.	In general sound level was too loud or too soft for audience.
Organization  _____	Presentation is clear, interesting, and well organized. It starts and ends well.	Presentation is interesting, but some points are unclear. The introduction and/or conclusion are weak.	Presentation has some interesting points but is difficult to follow. Either the introduction or the conclusion is missing.	Presentation is hard to follow and poorly organized. It appears to be off-the-cuff. There is no introduction or conclusion.

**TOTAL POINTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Titled “Hypertext Assignment” by its creator, this English 105 activity is really a series of layered assignments. Students are asked to create a Web document as a team and to analyze their own creations individually. This activity could easily be adapted to fit material from another discipline or divided so that students either create or analyze a site.*

### **General Directions**

You have been reading texts that discuss agriculture, consumer society, technology and media this semester. You have been reacting to these issues in your reading journals and group discussions. Now, it is time to join your reading journals and group discussion questions with other students’ texts in an electronic environment.

### **Purpose and Audience**

The purpose of this assignment is to learn the rhetorical structures, information architecture, and practices of a hypertext document. It is also a test of your ability to synthesize your ideas with those of others. Your audience will be your classmates here at ISU. **This site will not be published.**

### **Specific Directions**

Join into groups of three and combine your reading journals and group leader questions into a hypertext document. This hypertext document must have a coherent structure (that means there must be a guiding reason behind your links and files—although the choice of a particular structure is up to each of the groups). Groups should feel free to be creative. Although the majority of the writing will come from what has already been done in your reading journals, each group member will be expected to write an additional three pages of text reacting to the ideas found in your group members’ writings. This document will also have a multimedia component with no less than 20 pictures per web site. The pictures must be used to augment an argument made in the text, or even make an argument separate from the text. At least one of your picture files must be hot-linked in a way that makes a statement or argument. (Refer to [The Medium is the Massage](#) as a model if need be). Additionally, each group must demonstrate web skill by using rollovers (including disjointed rollovers), Flash text, Flash buttons, MPEG (video files) and associated sound files. Often, many of these elements can be combined in one Flash movie. If the group decides to combine their multimedia requirement into a Flash movie, I would like to discuss it with the group before you begin.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

In addition to creating the web site, each group member will write a four page rhetorical analysis (with MLA citations) discussing the choices made in the creation of the structure of that site. In writing about these choices, you will refer to ideas on hypertext structure from assigned readings (such as Bernstein’s essay), and will include these on a works cited page. Individually, each of you will comment on your satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the combination of your ideas with your peers, making specific references to the interweaving of your material. Additionally, you will comment on the pictures used in the site, explaining where they came from and how they add to the argument. Pictures also need to be cited in your references. Finally, you will discuss your role in the creation of the site, as well as the roles of other group members. The rhetorical analysis will be due on the same day as the project.

### **Evaluation**

Your web site should have a consistent structure, message, and logic. Additionally, your writing on the site should be clear and free from errors. Pictures used must add to the arguments in the text, or make arguments by themselves, and at least one picture must be hot-linked in such a way as to make an argument by itself.

### **Grading**

Members of the group will be given one grade for the web site. Grades for the rhetorical analysis will be assigned individually.

*This assignment, “The Web of Life,” asks students to consider the ecosystem of which they are a part. This assignment is also an excellent example of a creative assignment in the sciences with particular appeal to learning community students who will almost certainly compare notes outside of class.*

### **Assignment**

How large is your network of inter-species interactions? To find out:

1. Keep track of all the things that you make use of, consume, or interact closely with over a single 24-hour period (example: from midnight tonight to midnight tomorrow).
2. Make a list of all the organisms or species that contributed to all those items (example: rubber tree - bicycle tires; cotton plant - bed sheets; sheep - wool blanket)
3. Add to this list all the organisms or species that provided ingredients to the food you consume during this 24-hour period.
4. Add to this list all pets, the ingredients of food given those pets over the past 24 hours, and all other close interactions that you have had with other organisms. Do not include in your list birds or plants you saw on your way to campus, but if you keep houseplants or tropical fish, include each of those different organisms on the list. People certainly belong there.
5. To be complete, consider all of the various things you have done and used, including foods, medicines/pharmaceuticals, spices, clothing, tools, perfumes, shampoos, etc.
6. Each individual is to make his/her own cumulative list, which can then be combined into a group list. For complete credit give the total (best estimate) count of all the different species in your 24-hour web of life.

### **Examples to get you started:**

- Did you sleep in a building?  
It was likely made in part of wood (various tree species).
- Does your bed have cotton sheets or did you wear cotton clothing?  
(cotton)
- Do you have a feather pillow?  
(goose down)
- Did you ride a bike, or drive a car or wear tennis shoes?  
(rubber)
- Did you eat bread?  
Bread, depending upon the type, contains wheat flour, baker's yeast, corn syrup or sugar (sugar may come from sugar cane or sugar beets, depending upon its source).
- Did you drink a beer?  
(barley, brewer's yeast, hops) The same yeast species is used to make bread, but a different species is used to make wheat beers, and a third species is used to make ales and wines)
- Did you eat nachos with hot sauce?  
Hot sauce typically contains tomatoes, garlic, onions, jalapeno peppers, vinegar (typically made by bacteria and apple cider), and various spices. Nacho corn chips contain corn, wheat flour, vegetable oil (variety of species), milk (cow), cheese (cow, cheddar-cheese bacteria), onion, cottonseed oil, garlic, gum arabic (from *Acacia senegal*), and jalapenos.

For information on the ingredients of different foods, what they are, and where they come from (e.g., what the heck is lecithin?), the following site has quite a lot of information:

<http://www.epicurious.com/run/fooddictionary/home>

For a list of medicinal plants with their descriptions and uses, check out

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/med-aro/toc.html>

**Turn in:**

Your personal list, with the species/organism listed at the left, one organism per row, and the uses made of that organism on the right.

Example:

Cow	hamburger, leather belt, milk, cheese, and butter
Rubber	bicycle tires
Cinnamon	spice
Honeybee	honey
Lactobacillus bulgaricus	yogurt
Streptococcus thermophilus	yogurt

This is not a contest to see who has the most or fewest species. Rather, it is an exercise that is designed to help you to recognize the extent of the biological network you exist within, and the resulting indirect but real effects you have on far-ranging ecosystems.

*Written for an English 105 course, this Web site analysis can be modified to apply to Web sites in a variety of disciplines. As students increasingly rely on the Web as an information source, their ability to evaluate the reliability of information provided is crucial. This assignment would also be useful for any group of students involved in creating a Web site or Web content.*

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this assignment is to enhance your critical thinking skills as well as to practice writing in an analytical manner. In your analysis, you will identify significant elements in an educational website and interpret them in a meaningful way.

### **Assignment**

Recently, we have dissected ads in your texts by recognizing their effectiveness, claims, gender issues, implied messages, etc. We have also looked at Web sites in class, noticing important attributes and functions. For this assignment, you will choose a particular educational Web site from the list provided, and analyze it.

Questions to consider:

- Who made this website?
- Who is the target group: teachers or students?
- Is the site visually inviting? Bright colors? Graphics? Music?
- What does the website provide? Lesson plans? Study aids? Activities for class? Activities for students?
- If it has activities for students, try a few of them and see whether they are helpful. Are they set up in the form of a worksheet or a game? Would this enhance the educational process? As a future teacher, would you consider using these activities in your classroom? Do the activities seem like a surrogate teacher or simply a time-filler? What age group would use these activities? Is there a wide range or only one or two focus groups? Would you recommend this Web site to parents?
- If the Web site has lesson plans or activities for teachers to use, analyze the structure of the lessons/activities. Are the instructions about how to teach the lesson clear or vague? Would you have to do a lot of outside planning and preparation to teach the lesson/ activity? What would the students ultimately learn from the lesson? Is the lesson creative? Does the lesson teach a particular point of knowledge? What subject does the lesson belong in, i.e. Math, Science, Language Arts, etc. What age group is this lesson for? Any other interesting attributes of the lesson/activity? Is the lesson too easy/ too hard for the age group that it targets?
- What specific components of this Web site are useful or not useful? Look critically at every aspect of the site.
- Is this a Web site you would revisit as a teacher and use in your classroom?

You will need to form a thesis, which will be illustrated throughout the paper and follow from your analysis. Narrow your focus so that you will be able to support your thesis throughout the paper. You will need to support your thesis about the Web site with insightful observations, inferences, and conclusions about both the visual and textual features of the site.

### **Planning and Drafting**

- Begin by looking through the website casually, and then move to a more critical approach.
- Take note of anything interesting you see throughout the website.
- Answer all of the questions I have provided, as well as any you have.
- Go back to the website several times, and perhaps ask a friend their take on it.

- If you have a chance, let a child try the activities, and notice the outcome.
- Begin prewriting by formulating your thesis (your overall opinion of the website.)
- Jump right in and write a draft! You can always change your mind, rewrite, or start over!
- Do not try to address too many ideas. Pick a few important aspects of the Web site for analysis.
- Start early.

### **Evaluation**

- One Web site is addressed throughout the paper.
- Analysis and critique of the Web site are obvious, as far as focusing on components of the site and writing about them critically.
- Thesis is strong and followed throughout the essay.
- Correction errors are minimal.
- Paper is turned in, with drafts and any prewriting materials, in a folder, with a heading. Paper is double-spaced, 12 pt. Font, in Times or Palatino Font.
- Please include a printout of the first screen of the Web site you have chosen.

*This three-page essay is the second assignment in an English 105 course, but it is adaptable to a variety of other settings. Here, students are asked to examine the notion of “community” and what it means to be a part of a community—a learning community, a family community, a departmental community, or the Iowa State community. By exploring values associated with communities, students often realize their own responsibilities in creating and maintaining positive communities.*

### **Purpose and Audience**

Each of us participates in several communities—social, family, academic, etc. Often we are so accustomed to our various communities that we don't need to think about the ways in which we act in them. For example, why does your family eat meals at a particular time? Does your community hold special holiday events?

The purposes of this assignment are as follows:

1. Describe a specific community activity that you engage in regularly
2. Examine what this activity says about the community's values (include a history of these values' development over time), and
3. Argue for the significance of these values. In other words, why bother to engage in this activity?

"Community" could refer to family, a peer group, church members, sports fans, etc—as long as it's from your *home* community. Do not choose an activity that has a clearly established set of rules or rituals (e.g., a football game or a wedding ceremony). Instead, focus on an activity where the "rules" are unstated (e.g., taking part in a 4-H fair; performing in the church choir; visiting relatives, etc.)

Assume that your audience for this assignment is not familiar with this home community, the community activity, and the community's implicit values.

### **Planning and Drafting**

Think about your home community in question and if possible, observe your community and take observational notes—what happens, what people look like, who speaks, and what language these people use when they take part in this activity. If direct observation isn't possible, draw upon specific, supporting detail from your memories. Once you've analyzed the community, think particularly about how its conventions reinforce and reflect its implied values. Also consider the background that led to the establishment of the values—how did things get to be the way they are? Who makes up the community? If the values are homogeneous, what circumstances have made these people agree? If the values are not homogeneous, how do the groups get along?

Keep in mind how your membership in this community affects your analysis—you might even comment specifically on *how* the influence of your membership affects your analysis. If you find this activity valuable, consider why others (non-community members, for instance) would find it problematic. Or if you are inclined to resist this activity, consider why other community members value it and why it even exists.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

This paper is the first opportunity in our class to demonstrate:

1. Your ability to describe a situation in memorable terms to an unfamiliar audience;
2. The tools you typically use as a writer to analyze a situation; and
3. Your ability to create and support an argument.

*This assignment is a fun scavenger hunt, but the learning outcomes are numerous. Assigned near the beginning of the semester, this exercise accomplishes the following objectives: to build community; to learn Power Point; to develop presentation skills; to meet with the learning community peer mentor; to discover how to check out equipment; and, to familiarize students with campus. Each group was assigned a different list of “items” to photograph.*

**Directions**

1. Check out a digital camera from the teaching office.
2. Take a photo at each site with at least one member of your group in each photo. Each member of the group must be in at least one photo.
3. Schedule a meeting with a peer mentor to learn how to put your photos into Power Point and add captions.
4. Show your photos to the class in two weeks.
5. Have fun!

**Find and Photograph the following:**

- A. Your whole group in front of your favorite place on campus.
- B. The building housing the College of Design.
- C. Inside the horticulture greenhouse.
- D. The place to sign up for intramural sports.
- E. Someone in the Ag Career Services Office.
- F. The Marriage Ring.
- G. The Gene Pool.
- H. A building named after a past ISU president.
- I. The bowling alley on campus.
- J. A popcorn breeder.
- K. Someone from the Main Office.
- L. A peer mentor in his/her office.

*This assignment, although written for an English 104 (freshman composition) class, is highly adaptable as it asks students to provide a written response to an article related to the learning community. This particular article was about research being done by members of the department.*

### **Writing Task**

Write a response to this article, which appeared in the *Iowa State Daily* on August 30, 2001. Your opening paragraph should include a statement of the article's main idea/thesis. You will also need to include your own thesis statement. Be careful NOT to write only a summary. You are being asked to RESPOND to what you read.

### **Audience**

Your audience is this class, including the instructor and all students.

### **Format**

The essay must be computer-generated with standard font and margins, double-spaced. Times New Roman, Bookman, and Arial – 10 or 12 point – are good choices. Include a title. Your response should be 1 or 2 pages in length.

### **Writing Strategies**

1. Read the article a few times to be sure you understand the writer's main ideas and key points.
2. Using your own words, write a sentence that expresses the writer's main point.
3. Note the purpose and main point of each paragraph of the article. What is the writer saying? How does this point relate to the main idea? Make note of the writer's sources and the relevance of quotes included.
4. Using the information you have gathered in the previous steps, formulate your own argument. You will need to include your own thesis statement early in your essay.
5. Proofread your response.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

- Identifies the main ideas and key points of the original essay.
- States and provides evidence for a logical, clearly identifiable position.
- Is unified and coherent, exhibiting a logical progression from opening to end.
- Is clear, concise, and readable.
- Conforms to correctness standards within reason, given the time allowed (in-class essay).

*This assignment calls for students to reflect on why they have chosen a specific career path or major. Originally for an English 104 class linked with courses in Agriculture Systems Technology and Agricultural Engineering, this essay is useful in getting students to think about people or events that have influenced their choices.*

### **Writing Task**

Write a short, autobiographical essay about a significant person or event in your life. Choose an event or person that you believe influenced your decision to attend Iowa State University, your choice of major, and/or your career aspirations. You should choose a topic that you will be comfortable sharing with others in the class. Present your experience in specific, vivid terms. Choose your words carefully so that the autobiographical significance of the person or event is clear.

### **Audience**

Your audience is made up of students, faculty and staff associated with the AST and AE programs at Iowa State University. Thus, you can assume that your audience is familiar with Iowa State University and with the ABE department – although, levels of knowledge will vary.

### **Format**

The essay must be computer-generated with standard font and margins, double-spaced. Times New Roman, Bookman, and Arial – 10 or 12 point – are good choices. Include a title. Your essay should be at least 2 full pages and no longer than 4 pages in length.

### **Writing Strategies**

1. Using the invention strategies on page 53, explore the significance of various people and events in you life.
2. Use the exploratory writing strategies on pages 54-56 to develop your subject. Write more than you will need and choose the best. Be sure you are clear about the significance of the person or event. Choose the details that you include based on this significance.
3. Outline your essay. (Page 57 has some suggested sequences.) You can always change your mind about the organization later in the process.
4. Write an opening that captures your readers' attention. You will also want to include a topic sentence near the beginning of your essay (first or second paragraph).
5. Draft the remainder of your essay.
6. Solicit feedback from peers and/or your instructor.
7. Revise your essay.
8. Proofread and edit your essay.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

- Significance of the event or person is clear and supported by relevant details.
- Presents details that are vivid, specific, and memorable.
- Is unified and coherent, exhibiting a logical progression from opening to end.
- Is clear, concise, and readable.
- Conforms to correctness standards within reason, given the time allowed.