

What I Already Know about X (and about how to write an essay) assignment guidelines

GNED 1401-014, 007

Due: uploaded to D2L by midnight at the end of the day, Thursday, January 25

Worth: 15%

Length: ~1200 words, including words in comments

Format: Typed, double-spaced, in Word document or PDF format, showing comment bubbles in the margin

This assignment in a nutshell:

Write an academic-style essay (~1000 words or ~3 double-spaced pages) that

- persuasively presents your unique, personal knowledge about your chosen topic,

and

- explains the basis of that knowledge,

by

- presenting the evidence you have collected through life experience and observations.

The point you're trying to make in the essay is, exactly *whatever it is you would really like others to know about your topic*. Don't hesitate to also acknowledge what you can't know for certain.

Once your essay is complete, add comments pointing out different aspects of how you wrote and structured your essay.

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PART I: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT X?

1. Choose a topic that is deeply important or interesting to you—a topic you could happily spend time thinking about, reading about, and writing about for several assignments.

It must be a topic that you truly *know* something about on some strong basis. The basis could be, for example, close personal experience, long practice, deep reflection, or close observation. How to test this: if other intelligent adults knew about the basis for your knowledge, would they trust that you really do know something about the topic? For example:

topics Sarah's 7-year-old daughter truly knows something about: *Babysitters' Club* graphic novels

basis for her knowledge: she has read all 10 of them at least 10 times each

topics Sarah's daughter thinks she knows about but really doesn't: what it's like to be an adult

Think of your topic as a general topic, not a story. If you have an idea that's more like a story from your own life, translate it into a more abstract, generalized topic that other people might conceivably have written about too. For example:

"what it felt like when I was abducted by aliens last year" → "experiences of alien abduction"

2. Brainstorm and/or freewrite to generate things to say about the topic.

Ask yourself, What would you like others to know about the topic?

For every point you want to make, ask yourself, Am I really certain that it's the truth? How do I know this? What's the basis for my knowledge?

Draft some paragraphs where you tell your readers what you know about the topic. Persuade them to believe you by describing in detail the basis for your knowledge and the story of how you came to know it. (For an example of a draft paragraph, see page 3.)

Also brainstorm about the limits of your knowledge of this topic. Exactly what it is that you know for sure? What *can't* you be certain about? At what point can you no longer generalize or extrapolate from your experience?

PART 2: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ACADEMIC WRITING?

3. Now recall for yourself everything you've learned before about how to do good evidence-based academic writing.

What have you been taught about what to include and what to leave out?

What parts is an essay supposed to have?

What have you learned about the kind of voice you are supposed to write in?

How are you supposed to structure an academic essay? What are your paragraphs supposed to be shaped?

Who is are you meant to be writing to?

4. Write an academic-style essay (~1000 words or ~3 double-spaced pages) that presents your knowledge about your chosen topic. Draw on everything you've learned before about how to do good academic writing as you organize and polish your essay.

Remember when you asked yourself in Step 2, *What would you like others to know about the topic?*

Whatever it was—*that* becomes the point you want to make in this essay.

5. Once your essay is complete, use the comments feature on your word-processing software to add comments pointing out different aspects of how you wrote and structured your essay. Use the comments to show me (Sarah) how your essay showcases the different things you've learned about what good academic writing is supposed to look like.

For information about how to add comments, see page 3.

Note: "PRIMARY" AND "SECONDARY" EVIDENCE IN THIS ASSIGNMENT

Use ONLY primary evidence, not secondary evidence, if at all possible.

"Primary" evidence is samples of the real world that *you* have personally gathered and carefully observed: information you get from your own direct examination of the world.

- E.g.
- your clear memories of intense experiences you have had
 - your observations of things you see/hear/sense around you in the world
 - your records (photos, electronic messages) of interactions you have had
 - personalized teachings you have been given by your elders/coaches/teachers/parents* that you have personally put into practice

"Secondary" evidence is evidence gathered, analyzed, and interpreted by *other people*: information you get from sources.

- E.g.
- reports, commentary, articles, webpages, videos etc. you've read/seen
 - things you learned in school/university
 - things you have been told by your elders/coaches/teachers/parents/sources you respect

If you present any "secondary" evidence, or *represent anything you've learned *from others*, you must informally but fully cite all of your sources by writing something like, "as I learned from my elder/mother/highschool English teacher/the forty Youtube videos I watched last summer/my economics class/*The Joy of Cooking*..."

Example of a draft paragraph providing first-person experience as the basis for knowledge (not yet re-shaped into a piece of academic writing)

“I know that some sports equipment can damage athletes’ bodies if it doesn’t fit properly, because, as a teenager, I experienced damage from my equipment. I spent two years practicing figure skating for about 5 hours / week, 40 weeks of the year, wearing a pair of tight, strong, reinforced leather skates that pinched at the ankle bone. The skates were painful to put on, painful to lace up, and painful to skate in—thirty years later I can still recall the deep ache at my ankle bones when I was practicing. The intense relief I felt when taking off my skates was tempered only by the pain that lingered, even as the deep, pink welts left on my flesh by the pressure from the skate boot gradually disappeared. But the pain would fade by the time I was home after practice. What took much longer to fade was the deformity at my ankles. By the time I finally quit skating, my body had built up a half-centimeter-thick layer of tissue on the outside of my ankle bones. It was like a cushion to protect my bones from the pressure of the skate. The only problem was that the tissue actually worsened the pressure! The extra tissue on my ankles looked strange, and I would occasionally bump my enlarged ankles against each other when walking around. It wasn’t the worst thing that could have happened, although I found it embarrassing and upsetting at the time. My body gradually got rid of the extra tissue by itself. But it did give me a clear example of the damage that poorly-fitted athletic gear could do.”

How to add comments

If you’re using Microsoft Word (or something similar):

- place your cursor beside the thing you want to comment on, or click and drag to select a block of text to comment on
- select the Review tab in the top menu
- click on “New Comment”
- write your comment
- you can edit your comment later by clicking on it, or delete it by right-clicking on it and selecting “Delete”
- optional: if you want to write more without being distracted by the comments you’ve already added, click on “Show Markup” for a drop-down menu, and de-select “Comments.” Don’t forget to re-select to show your comments before you hand it in.
- submit your assignment as a Word doc

If you’re using Google Docs:

- place your cursor beside the thing you want to comment on, or click and drag to select a block of text to comment on
- hover over the righthand edge of your document
- three icons will appear. Select the top one, which looks like a plus sign in a speech bubble
- write your comment
- you can edit or delete your comment later by hovering over the comment and then selecting the three vertical dots that appear in the top right corner of the comment. You will see options to edit or delete.
- to submit, click on the “Share” icon in the top right corner, copy the link to your doc, and paste it into the submission portal on D2L

If you prefer low-tech, print out your essay with wide margins and write comments by hand in the margin, or add comments on post-it notes.

PART I RUBRIC	Excellent (A level work)	Good to very good (B level work)	Satisfactory (C level work)	Marginal to unsatisfactory (D to F level work)
Articulation of prior learning about academic writing	Comments show acute, carefully articulated, highly reflective awareness of how prior lessons influenced the writing of your essay, and how your essay showcases that learning; comments highlight a wide variety of different features, including subtle details; comments may reflect meaningfully on areas of uncertainty	An ample number of comments clearly indicate and explain how a wide variety of different features of your essay showcase what you know about good academic writing; comments show thoughtfulness and substantial reflection on prior learning	Comments indicate and explain how several different features of your essay showcase what you know about good academic writing; comments may label the features somewhat vaguely or simply; once or twice it may be hard to tell what feature you are highlighting or how it represents something you know about academic writing; comments are present on each page; they show reasonable self-awareness of your own learning	Comments may be present but brief, difficult to understand, or vague; there may not be enough comments to demonstrate self-awareness; they may feel perfunctory or show disrespect for the assignment; they may be off-task
Suitability of the essay for the assignment	The essay was carefully designed to use the style and format of academic writing to persuade an audience to accept your point about your topic, conveying your unique knowledge and revealing the basis of that knowledge; the essay really digs into the assignment and may undertake the task with exceptional nuance	The essay clearly sets out to persuade an audience to accept your point about your topic, conveying your unique knowledge and revealing the basis of that knowledge; it is recognizably academic in approach; it remains focused throughout on the topic and the task	The essay is on task: it seeks, using academic essay format, to persuade an audience to accept the point you are making on the basis of your own unique knowledge of a particular point; the format you have used is recognizably academic, or your comments help me to understand that it is a reasonable representation of what you have been taught about academic writing; your essay may occasionally and briefly lose focus on the topic or task	The essay may frequently veer off task or off topic; may demonstrate little understanding of the task; may seem to undertake a different task altogether; the essay may be too short, too simple, or may not demonstrate university-level engagement with the task
Effectiveness of the essay as an attempt to persuasively convey knowledge	The essay persuasively extends common knowledge on the topic, providing a very sound basis for its point and explaining articulately, in well-managed concrete detail, how you developed this knowledge; academic readers are likely to trust your account and find it illuminating; the essay draws careful distinctions between what it can and can't know on its basis	The essay is a thorough, organized, clear effort to explain what you know about the topic and how you know it; the basis is sound and reasonable and the explanations are coherent, detailed, and mature; you have identified a topic about which you can persuasively add something to	The essay works to convey some individual knowledge of the topic; it provides a reasonable account of what you know about the topic and how you know it; occasionally the basis for that knowledge may seem inadequate or the essay may make claims that are too strong or too broad for the basis; academic readers might find your point worth considering but perhaps not fully convincing	The essay may make claims about what you know that are not persuasively supported by the explanation you provide; claims may be too strong or too broad or generalized; the basis on which your knowledge rests may be unclear, or not explained in enough detail to be persuasive; academic readers may find the explanations have gaps, or are too brief, rambling or exaggerated, or incoherent; the essay may convey

		common knowledge		disinterest or disrespect for its audience
Grammatical correctness and quality of writing	Sentences are complete and correct; sentences flow well; word choice is precise and meaningful; you express complex observations clearly	Sentences are generally complete, correct, and coherent; one or two errors may recur; word choice is sensible and explanations are clear	Some sentences may not be complete or coherent; errors of grammar may be noticeable but not too distracting; word choice is sensible but may be basic; you make an effort to explain complex ideas; occasionally it may be hard to follow your point	Sentences may frequently be difficult to follow; grammar errors or word choice may be distracting
Academic integrity	Genuinely your own work	Genuinely your own work	Genuinely your own work	Parts or all of it may have been copied from or substantially influenced by other sources; the influence of other sources may not have been adequately acknowledged; even if other sources are acknowledged, too little of the essay may have been your own work