

WSUN 102D Discovering Humanity - Engber

Essay Topic Description

“ONCE I WAS _____ ; NOW I AM _____ .”

- **Length:** At least one page, typed, double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins on all sides.
- **Due:** Tuesday, August 30th by end of day (midnight)
- **How Long Will This Take Me to Complete?** The invention exercise and essay writing should take 1.5 to 3 hours. Don’t worry if it takes you longer. Enjoy the process.
- **Possible Points:** You will receive 10 points for completing this assignment. That means you must turn in at least one page, formatted as indicated above.

I will read and respond to your essay with regard to organization and content, but you will receive full points if you turn in an essay that addresses the assignment/question and meets the length requirement. Feel free to take some risks and find what you really want to write.

Assignment:

You will develop this essay from a seed sentence or “kernel” sentence. The sentence for this essay is: “Once I was _____ ; Now I am _____ .” The structure for the essay exists within the two-part structure of the sentence. In this case, we are writing a “coordinate” structure—one in which two equal (or equivalent) items are related. Grammar serves as a metaphor for the relation of meaning. In a coordinate structure, two independent clauses are connected with a semi-colon (or a comma plus coordinate conjunction).

As you begin searching for a topic for this essay, think about the changes in your life and the way you have changed. There may not be a definite relation between these different times or a related cause for the differences. You’re just different now; each time has its own independent existence. To help you get a feel for the topic (and help you complete the invention exercise), here are a number of example kernel sentences:

- Once I was shy; now I am mellow.
- Once I was fat and self-conscious; now I am slender and happy.
- Once I was a freak; now I’m a hero.
- Once I played soccer as if a fire were in me; now I study and smoke a pack a day.
- Once I was a housewife; now I am a student.
- Once I complained, but now I am free.

Notice, by the way, that none of the sentences has a negative half. The writer doesn’t say, “Once I was shy, but now I am not shy.” Also, the two sides are not polar opposites. They could be, but mostly the two sides are just different.

- **Example:** Read this [example Once I Was; Now I Am Essay](#) to get an idea of what this essay can be.

Invention Activity

- 1) To begin the essay, do some creating activities. Take ten minutes and write as many sentences as you can on this kernel, "Once I was _____; Now I am _____." (you might get 6 - 20: around ten at least is ideal)
- 2) Pick one sentence to work with (if you haven't found one yet, keep listing sentences). Try rewriting this kernel sentence four to eight different ways—say essentially the same thing but with different words. See if you can find the way to say your kernel sentence that you like the most and that seems to fit the best.
- 3) Brainstorm on each side. List or freewrite (or both) for ten minutes (maybe more) on each side of your kernel sentence. Try to list details about when the "once" was. Describe yourself then. Think of examples that illustrate the way you were (specific time, specific place, specific people). Think of at least three examples. Do the same thing with the "now" side.
- 4) Think: What are some of the relationships or perspectives you see by comparing these two descriptions of yourself?

Now, WRITE! Focus on writing the body. Put all of the ONCE in one part of the essay and all of the NOW in another part. You can start with either the ONCE or the NOW.

Remember this is a comparison/contrast. It isn't a cause/effect essay. You don't have to say WHY.

Assignment adapted from

Ponsot, Marie, and Rosemary Deen. *Beat Not the Poor Desk : Writing : What to Teach, How to Teach It, and Why*. Montclair, Nj, Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1982.