

## TWO MESSAGES

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This writing exercise will demonstrate how **rhetorical context** influence a writer's choices. (The whole assignment, which has three parts, should be no more than 500 words long.)

### 1 A Text Message to a Friend

Write a text message to a friend using the abbreviations, capitalization, and punctuation style you typically use for text messages. Explain that you will miss an upcoming social event (movie, football game, dance, trip to the local diner or coffee house) because you feel sick. Then ask your friend to text you during the event to schedule another get-together. (Make up details as you need them.)

### 2 An E-Mail Message to a Professor

Compose an e-mail message to a professor explaining that you cannot meet an assignment deadline because you are sick and asking for an extension. (Use the same sickness details from Part 1.) Create a subject line appropriate for this new context.

### 3 A Reflection on the Two Messages

Using items 1 and 2 as evidence, explain why different rhetorical contexts caused you to make different choices in writing these two messages. You may find it helpful to refer to the [Rhetorical Triangle](#) in your reflection.

**DUE:** Friday, January 17

## MIND MAP

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A Mind Map is a Brainstorming exercise designed to generate ideas for your essay.

Start with a blank page. Write down the main topic for your paper in the center and *circle* it. Next, just start adding ideas — the more the better.

Jot down whatever comes to mind. Try to capture each thought in just one or two words; it doesn't have to make sense to anyone but you.

As you generate thoughts, draw branches from the main topic. For every major idea, use a branch off the center circle. For supporting ideas, try branching off from a major branch.

Your Mind Map should include everything you can think of related to your topic. You want to get lots and lots of ideas down on paper without worrying about where they go or how they fit together.

So be creative. Perhaps draw an picture for your central topic. Or use different color inks for the different branches. And remember: a mind map has no top or bottom.

**DUE:** Wednesday, January 22

Friday, February 21

Friday, April 4

## INFORMAL OUTLINE

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Your Mind Map helped you generate lots of ideas for your essay. Your *Informal Outline* will help you organize those ideas and provide a blueprint for your Rough Draft.

An informal outline should include a critical **question** that your essay will answer, a **working thesis** that provides your answer to that question, and a bullet-point list of main points and supporting reasons for your thesis.

### Sample Informal Outline

**Question:** Why do the first lines of dialogue between Romeo and Juliet (1.5.94-108) take the form of a sonnet?

**Working Thesis:** Although many in the audience don't even notice it, the sonnet-dialogue Romeo and Juliet share when they first meet demonstrates how well matched the two lovers are and helps dramatize how quickly they develop a sense of intimacy.

- **Alternate View:** most people won't even *notice* that R&J are speaking a sonnet
  - Even if you don't consciously notice it, it can have an effect on you, like subliminal advertising.
  - Actors will know about the sonnet and use it in their performance.
- **Sharing a sonnet makes R&J seem like they were made for each other.**
  - Trading lines back and forth makes R&J seem like an old couple who finish each other's sentences.
  - Juliet's replies make her seem just as clever and quick-witted as Romeo; they make a good couple.
  - By analogy, R&J fit together like the parts of a sonnet: the parts are greater than the whole.
- **The progression of the shared sonnet demonstrates how quickly R&J fall in love.**
  - The sonnet begins with the couple holding hands and ends in a kiss.
  - Units get progressively smaller (first quatrains, then couplets, then single lines, then a shared line) which makes it feel like they are literally getting closer to each other.

**DUE:** Monday, January 27

Friday, February 28

Friday, April 11

## THE BELIEVING/DOUBTING GAME

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This assignment will help you understand the power of alternative arguments and points of view by showing you how to formulate and explore alternative positions. (The whole assignment, which has two parts, should be no more than 500 words long.)

### Part 1 — The Game

Play the Believing/Doubting Game with ONE of the assertions listed below:

1. Nighttime is more fun than daytime.
2. The Christmas holiday season is the best time of the year.
3. Facebook is a good way to make new friends.
4. Cats make the best pets.

When you **Believe** an assertion, you agree, support, illustrate, extend, and apply the idea.

When you **Doubt** an assertion, you question, challenge, rebut, and offer counter reasons and counter examples to the assertion.

To generate your ideas, spend ten minutes listing points for Believing and then ten minutes listing points for Doubting the assertion, for a total of twenty minutes. Then use your ideas to write one believing paragraph and one doubting paragraph.

### Part 2 — Reflection

Write a reflective paragraph in which you assess the extent to which the believing and doubting game extended or stretched your thinking. Particularly, answer these questions:

- What was difficult about this writing activity?
- To what extent did it make you take an unfamiliar or uncomfortable stance?
- How has the game helped you see multiple sides of an issue?

**DUE:** Friday, February 7

## CREATIVE IMITATION

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Imitating the writing of others can help you improve your own writing. For this assignment, you will examine passages from expert stylists and try to emulate them. You will substitute different subject matter but try to imitate the exact grammatical structures, lengths and rhythms of the sentences, and the tones of the original.

Begin by carefully analyzing the style of the original passage. Consider how choices about sentence length and complexity, vocabulary, figures of speech, voice, tone, and so forth contribute to the style. Jot down all the specific observations you can make about the stylistic features of the passage. Then, explore a new topic using the sentence structures and kinds of words used in the original. Try to imitate the original phrase by phrase and sentence by sentence.

### Sample Creative Imitation

ORIGINAL PASSAGE	CREATIVE IMITATION
<p>Then came puberty and hunkhood. Over the last few years, the boys' domestic skills have atrophied because handmaidens have appeared en masse. The damsels have driven by, beeped, phoned, and faxed. Some appeared so frequently outside the front door they began to remind me of the suction-footed Garfields spread-eagled on car windows. While the girls varied according to height, hair color, and basic body type, they shared one characteristic. They were ever eager to help the guys out.</p> <p>— Victoria Register-Freeman, “My Turn: Hunks and Handmaidens”</p>	<p>Then came prosperity and popularity. Over the last ten years, Seattle's special charms have faded because expansion had occurred too rapidly. Traffic has multiplied, thickened, amplified, and slowed. Traffic jams appeared so often on the freeways and arterials they began to remind me of ants swarming over spilled syrup. While the congestion varied according to time, seasons, and weather conditions, it had one dominant effect. It increasingly threatened to spoil the city's beauty.</p>

Write creative imitations of TWO of the following four passages:

### Care of the Seasick

Seasickness makes you lethargic, weak, down at the mouth, and hopeless, in addition to dizzy and prone to vomit. It makes you want to roll through the lifelines and slip into the waves to end the horrible condition that flesh is heir to. You may not care if the fuel needs checking, the sails need trimming, or the navigation needs updating. It can make you furious with yourself for being out there at all, so furious that you don't care if you are wet and cold, hungry and dehydrated, or drifting into harm's way.

Queene Hooper Foster  
*Boating Etiquette*. New York: Hearst, 2005, page 89.

### King James I

James was nervous, deeply nervous. He could relax, toy with abstruse scholarly questions, get drunk, fondle his handsome male favorites, lose himself in the peculiar joy of killing animals. He could, in the right mood, laugh at himself and be teased, even quite coarsely. But he could never entirely escape the terror that haunted him. Attempts to delight him with firework displays or surprises tended to go awry; chance events could conjure up horrible memories of his past; and though he was an ardent hunter, he could never learn to fence, because the sight of a drawn sword would suddenly send him into a panic.

Stephen Greenblatt  
*Will in the World*. New York: Norton, 2004, page 333.

### Hollins Pond

Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the quarry and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is also called Murray's Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it, merely dampening their hooves; from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle's nonchalance. Now, in summer, the steers are gone. The water lilies have blossomed and spread to a green horizontal plane that is *terra firma* to plodding blackbirds, and tremulous ceiling to black leeches, crayfish, and carp.

Annie Dillard  
"Living Like Weasels" *Sisters of the Earth*. Ed. Lorraine Anderson.  
New York: Vintage Books, 1991: 106-111.

### The Boys' Ambition

When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient. When a circus came and went, it left us all burning to become clowns; the first negro minstrel show that came to our section left us all suffering to try that kind of life; now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn; but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained.

Mark Twain  
*Life on the Mississippi*. (1883) Chapter 4.

**DUE:** Friday, March 21

## ENLIVENED PROSE

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Writers addressing a general audience employ a vivid, engaging, and easy-to-read style quite different from most academic prose. You can see the difference in an experiment conducted by Michael Graves and Wayne Slater at the University of Michigan. For their study a team of *Time-Life* book editors rewrote passages from a high school history textbook. The editors tried “to make the texts interesting, exciting, vivid, rich in human drama, and filled with colorful language.” A group of 300 eleventh-grade students found the revised version both clearer and much more memorable than the original.

The *Time-Life* editors applied several specific strategies to enliven the textbook’s prose.

- They employed rich sensory details and concrete language.
- They added vivid, dramatic scenes. (According to the editors, such scenes, or “nuggets” — vivid events that encapsulate complex processes or principles — are the lifeblood of *Time-Life* prose.)
- They often delayed critical information for dramatic effect.

Look for examples of each of these strategies in the following *Time-Life* revision:

### Original History Text

The most serious threat to world peace developed in Southeast Asia. Communist guerrillas threatened the independence of the countries carved out of French Indo-China by the Geneva conference of 1954. In South Vietnam, Communist guerrillas (the Viet Cong) were aided by forces from Communist North Vietnam in a struggle to overthrow the American-supported government. ...

Shortly after the election of 1964, Communist gains prompted President Johnson to alter his policy concerning Vietnam. American military forces in Vietnam were increased from about 20,000 men in 1964 to more than 500,000 by 1968. Even so, North Vietnamese troops and supplies continued to pour into South Vietnam.

### *Time-Life* Editors’ Revision

In the early 1960’s the greatest threat to world peace was just a small splotch of color on Kennedy’s map, one of the fledgling nations sculpted out of French Indo-China by the Geneva peacemakers of 1954. It was a country so tiny and remote that most Americans had never uttered its name: South Vietnam. ...

Aided by Communist North Vietnam, the Viet Cong guerrillas were eroding the ground beneath South Vietnam’s American-backed government. Village by village, road by road, these jungle-wise rebels were waging a war of ambush and mining. They darted out of tunnels to head off patrols, buried exploding booby traps beneath the mud floors of huts, and hid razor-sharp bamboo sticks in holes. ...

No sooner had Johnson won the election than Communist gains prompted Johnson to go back on his campaign promise. The number of American soldiers in Vietnam skyrocketed from 20,000 in 1964 to more than 500,000 by 1968. But in spite of GI patrols, leech-infested jungles, swarms of buzzing insects, and flash floods that made men cling to trees to escape being washed away — North Vietnamese troops streamed southward without letup along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

## Your Task

Enliven the following paragraph (from a student argument opposing women's serving on submarines) using the *Time-Life* editors' techniques: concrete language, dramatic scenes or "nuggets," and delayed critical information for dramatic effect.

### Women on Submarines

Not only would it be very expensive to refit submarines for women personnel, but having women on submarines would hurt the morale of the sailors. In order for a crew to work effectively, they must have good morale or their discontent begins to show through their performance. This is especially crucial on submarines, where if any problem occurs, it affects the safety of the whole ship. Women would hurt morale by creating sexual tension. Sexual tension can take many forms. One form is couples' working and living in a close space with all of the crew. When a problem occurs within the relationship, it could affect the morale of those directly involved and in the workplace. This would also occur if one of the women became pregnant or if there were complaints of sexual harassment. It would be easier to deal with these problems on a surface ship, but in the small confines of a submarine these problems would cause more trouble.

**DUE:** Friday, April 25