

English 7, Fall 2006

Third Essay Assignment

Due: 11/9 (Topic); 11/16 (Outline); 11/30

Choose one of the state-wide propositions from this year's election (except the one on which you presented your oral argument). Then, on one of the topics listed below, write: (1) a short paragraph explaining your idea (about 100 words, double-spaced, not on the proposition itself, but what you are going to say about it); (2) an outline in which you identify your basic points, and show how you support them (no more than two pages, double-spaced); and (3) a short essay (about 1200 words) on one of the topics indicated below. Please retain the marked topic paragraph and outline, and attach them to your essay when you submit it. As the culminating essay in the course, this will be an opportunity for you to employ the full range of critical thinking tools you have learned, by identifying and analyzing elements of the claims and arguments in the texts being discussed. Remember that this should be an essay about issues related to your proposition, and not about critical thinking; but the tools of critical thinking should be the means to a clearer and more accurate understanding of your subject. Your discussion of the proposition should utilize many of the techniques we have covered in class. In particular, you will want to focus on:

Inductive and deductive reasoning. Do not insert paradigms or "proofs" of the validity of an argument in your essay. Having identified the premises and conclusions of an argument, you can explain your evaluation as part of the paragraph. Supply a missing claim only if you intend to discuss it. Discuss the validity of an argument only if that argument is somehow important to your thesis and discussion.

Fallacious and non-argumentative reasoning. Do not stop with the identification of a fallacy. You need to explain how that fallacy works in the particular case with which you are dealing, and why its claim or impression should be dismissed. Discuss only those fallacies that are somehow important to your thesis, and discuss that importance, rather than digressing to identify others.

In the essay itself, try to be as specific as possible, quoting from the texts so that your reader knows exactly where your interpretations originate; even if you are quoting from one of the essays reproduced in the workbook, you need to make a standard citation; use short quotations integrated into your sentences rather than long, indented ones. If you have any questions about how to quote, look for answers in your handbook from English 1A, or talk to me. Essays must be typed and paginated. Revise your rough draft for clarity and structure, be sure to have an argumentative thesis, proofread your final draft thoroughly, and double-space. For all three topics, you will probably want to refer to sources other than the Voter's Pamphlet itself for some of your evidence. If so, be sure to evaluate within your essay the credibility or reliability of the sources you use, to quote from those sources in your text, and to document those sources in a Works Cited page, according either to APA or MLA style (examples of both will be given in your English 1A handbook).

1. Who Lost the Voter's Pamphlet Debate? The arguments and rebuttals in the official California Voter's Pamphlet (available online at www.voterguide.ss.ca.gov) for and against the proposition you have chosen may be filled with persuasive arguments and strong support, or with fallacies, misleading claims, and weak arguments. Still, voters had to come to a decision. Discuss some of the strengths and problems with the arguments on both sides, and suggest ways they might have been improved.

2. Agreeing on the Problem. While proponents and opponents of propositions always disagree about whether the changes put before the voters would solve the problems, they sometimes do agree that something is wrong with the status quo. What was the situation with your proposition? Was this a recognized problem where there was disagreement about the solution, or did the con side take the position, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"? And did this apparent disagreement or agreement result from understanding or misunderstanding about the central issues under debate? Discuss the underlying assumptions of the two sides, and determine whether the main disputes were real or only verbal.

3. Oh Lord, Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood. Newspaper editorial pages, while certainly not unbiased in their approach to political issues, including propositions, at the minimum try to give an intelligent reading of the issues. But do they succeed? Analyze the positions taken and the explanations for those positions on your proposition in at least three major California newspapers, at least one of which must have come out "for" and one "against," and decide whether their reasoning was, logically speaking, reasonable. (You can find lots of editorials to choose from in the Lexis-Nexis Academic database, on the library's web site).