

# UNST 124g fall 2011

## *readings on education*

### 1 introduction

We will read and write many essays over the course of the year. An essay is a relatively short composition in which the writer examines an idea or set of closely related ideas. Essays require the writer to be concise and clear in purpose and may reflect the writer's personal experience or be developed from research on a specific topic.

Essays are written in a variety of styles, depending on the goals of the writer. Classification by style is not as important as content but identifying the purpose of the essay can help the writer to organize her thoughts in a clear and concise way. Essays we read and write in this class will usually fall into one of these categories

1. **expository** An expository essay explains an idea or closely related set of ideas, establishing and laying out evidence relevant to that idea, and drawing a conclusion based on that evidence. The conclusion does not restate the introduction but instead readdresses the thesis in light of the evidence presented in the essay.
2. **argumentative** In an argumentative essay, the writer establishes a thesis, states and evaluates evidence relevant to that thesis, and includes and refutes alternatives where appropriate. The goal is to demonstrate the validity of the thesis. This is similar to but different from a persuasive essay, in which the goal is to convince the reader to adopt the writer's position.
3. **descriptive** In a descriptive essay, the writer uses sensory information to provide an account of an event or object. This is distinct from the narrative essay, in which the writer describes a sequence of events (a plot) from a particular point of view.

You may find slightly different definitions or terminology in other sources. What matters most is that as a writer, you establish the purpose of the essay and proceed accordingly.

Essays all share a common underlying structure: introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction usually contains a clearly defined thesis and explains to the reader why the topic is important. The body of the essay contains a description and discussion of evidence related to the thesis. The conclusion returns to the thesis presented at the outset and addresses it in light of the evidence provided in the preceding paragraphs. Just as it can be helpful to create a hierarchical outline of an essay before you begin to write, translating an essay into an outline can be an effective method for identifying and understanding what you are reading.

## 2 assignment

Here, you are asked to read two essays in preparation for a classroom discussion on the goals of higher education.

1. Menand, Louis (2011). Live and Learn. *The New Yorker*, 6 June, 11 pages. Retrieved from [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2011/06/06/110606crat\\_atlarge\\_menand](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2011/06/06/110606crat_atlarge_menand).
2. hooks, bell (2009). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. (pp. 13-18). New York: Routledge.

*Live and Learn* is a relatively long (10 pages) expository essay written by a professor of English and American Literature at Harvard University. In the essay, Louis Menand reviews the book *Academically Adrift* by Richard Arum and Josipa Roska (2011). You may access the essay using the url in the reference above. The second reading is an argumentative essay written by a professor of English and African-American Studies currently in residence at Berea College. It is available via electronic reserve at Millar Library. Please print the documents, double sided if possible, so that you can annotate them as you read.

Read the two essays carefully, with the twin objectives of understanding their content and their construction. It might be helpful to highlight or underline ideas and sentences that stand out, either because they make sense or because they do not. Write notes to yourself in the margins or on a separate sheet of paper. Start by reading the questions listed below. Then read the essay by Louis Menand, answering the associated questions. Next read the essay by bell hooks and answer its associated questions. The questions are intended to help you read the essays effectively and to prepare you for an in-class discussion. Your answers do not need to be long but they should be written using complete sentences and correct grammar. Please type your answers and print them before you come to class. You may be asked to turn these in at the end of the discussion.

1. Menand presents three different *theories of education*. What are they?
2. Which of the three theories best fits the pseudonymous Professor X's view of education? Support your answer.
3. What does "postmodern modes of thought" mean? (Don't spend too much time on this, just identify some key words.) If you are a philosopher, be prepared to explain it to the rest of us.
4. To which theory of education does Menand ascribe? How did you come to this conclusion?
5. Identify the thesis in hooks' essay using a quote from the first paragraph of the reading. Where is this thesis restated in a modified form?
6. Which of Menand's three theories of education best fits bell hooks' view of education?
7. Thomas Jefferson was an Enlightenment Era thinker. How does hooks use his example to elaborate on her thesis?
8. Menand writes that the authors of a study conducted in the 1990s found that faculty salaries anti-correlate with commitment to teaching. hooks offers one interpretation for this relationship. What is it? Can you think of another interpretation?