A SAGA OF UNSUNG SYMBOLS: WRITING ASSIGNMENTS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

ROY F. FOX

Never—or at least, almost never—would I dare walk into a room full of faculty members from other disciplines and lay down my commandments about how writing assignments should be handled in their courses. And even if I did pull this stunt off, and afterward fled to my sanctuary in the writing class, I would soon realize, as I slipped out of my flak jacket, that those people would never heed my advice. This approach is fruitless. And it tends to make people cross.

Rather, teachers in disciplines other than English often need to undergo fundamental changes by airing and discussing and working through their long-standing misconceptions about writing *before* they can offer their students any kind of "new" writing assignment which may prove to enhance both writing and learning. When faculty get together for an extended period of time for communal exploration of writing/learning issues (which must necessarily range from initial considerations of what "good" writing is, to prewriting, to revision, to specific thinking strategies, etc.), these barriers to attitude change will visibly melt away. Only then can we all better realize that we are concerned about the same things: Can students

create and invent? Can students analyze and synthesize and draw conclusions? Can students articulate their findings?

The primary way in which this communal exploration leads to common ground with other faculty, is, of course, writing. I think that any workshop or seminar about writing *must* require that faculty themselves actually write. Many faculty members need writing to be demystified. Many others need to become more confident about their own writing and about their ability to *respond* to writing. Faculty in this situation need to write and respond and revise something real and purposeful: that's why I ask them to write *about writing*.

In constructing these writing assignments for faculty, I have tried to 1) make sure that they are writing for a real audience—their peers—and that they know ahead of time that they will have to read their papers aloud and have them responded to; 2) provide faculty members with freedom and options within some structure, and 3) *sequence* the assignments in a "chinese box" way, with successive assignments enveloping or encompassing the previous ones.

There are three "tiers" or levels in this set of assignments. The initial assignment for faculty from other disciplines is "up close" and "in tight." It asks for them to write a profile of *themselves* as writers. I tell faculty that they are free to organize their writing either deductively or inductively. I provide a list of items for them to focus on, stating that they can develop one or a few or several points in their papers. These "points" for them to consider include the following:

* Try to put into words *where* your writing originates. Can you discern where your thoughts and ideas initially reside? Do they "grow out of" or "spring forth from" an image? Do they originally come from numerous sources that are eventually assimilated? Explain the mysterious as best you can.

* In describing your writing processes, don't neglect any little quirks, superstitions, ways of avoiding writing, or any other good, bad, or middling habits you may have picked up. Aim for reality; don't try to paint an idealized picture of how you *should* work.

* In all of your writing behaviors or writing processes, what "dichotomies" do you see? Do you see any such oppositions in your finished work? If so, describe them as specifically as you can.

* How does your writing differ from other people's writing? How is it similar?

* In revising, what things do you look for to improve?

At some point in any writing across the curriculum project, I think that faculty from other disciplines need to learn about the ways that real people really do write—not what the textbooks say about how they *should* write, but how they actually *do*. So I review with faculty a simplified summary of research findings that concern the ways in which both "effective" and "ineffective" writers go about their business, such as the fact that effective writers procrastinate and avoid writing, yet they have ways of both recognizing and overcoming such avoidance; that effective writers recognize that writing is *generative*—that they *expect* to get new ideas and insights as they write, that writing is an act of discovery; that effective writers know that writing is *recursive*, that they go back and reread what they have written in order to decide what to write next; that effective writers trust their intuitions; that effective writers work in stages and don't expect to finish anything in one sitting.[1] What results is this: a kind of collective exclamation of "Hey, I do it that way, too," and "Hey, I thought I was the only person in the world who writes that way."

Hence faculty members come to see that they behave rather normally as writers. What they previously thought were convoluted and idiosyncratic behaviors, now turn out to be typical ones, and typical of "effective" writers, to boot. Now that faculty feel like they *know* how they and other "real" people really write, it's time for the second writing assignment's iron-like jaws to clamp down on them.

So, assignment #2 goes like this: faculty are asked to consider what they have recently learned about their *own* writing behaviors, and what they have learned from the research findings about the writing behaviors of effective writers. The essential question for the assignment becomes, "How do *these* two elements jibe with how you *presently* handle writing with your *own* students?"

Faculty are asked to focus upon whatever "parallels and/or contradictions" they wish. In cases of contradictions, faculty are asked what they might change and *how* they might change. In a sense, faculty talk and reason and reflect and argue with themselves in this assignment, because many must grapple with incongruities between their new knowledge and their current practices as teachers. Other faculty reinforce certain of their practices. But here, I think, faculty themselves actively use writing as a way of learning and discovering.

The third writing assignment is more general than either an examination of one's self as a writer (as in #1) or an examination of one's handling of writing with students. Writing #3 asks faculty to consider all of the major topics dealt with so far in the institute (topics like definitions of "good writing," James Britton's model of Expressive/Speculative—Transactional—Poetic language, and its implications; thinking in writing; revising writing; etc.) and to select one or two of them and to explore their relationships to the writing commonly practiced within their own disciplines, or to *teachers* of their own discipline. Hence, writing #3 takes them one step further in their conceptions of writing: from themselves to their students to their entire discipline. Here, many faculty confront an entire stable of new smoldering, slobbering, toothy dragons. Many faculty members begin to realize that the kinds of writing being produced in their discipline's journals and publications maybe just aren't so terribly great as they once thought.

With this background of assignments, with this prior writing and thinking about writing, we turn, as we ultimately must do, to the formal writing assignments faculty members ask *their* students to do. (We also spend a great deal of time with "informal" uses of writing with their students, whether it be freewriting, journal writing, or summarizing.) But with formal writing assignments in non-English courses, there are several points that faculty should be aware of:

1. Though it seems obvious to us, many faculty never put their writing assignments down on paper for students. This avoids multiple misunderstandings by students and helps rid faculty of students who say, "But you said. . . ."

2. If faculty have one big assignment—one they place a lot of emphasis upon—I advise them to have that paper due well before the very end of the semester. For example, in my technical

writing class, the longest, most important paper is due a good month before the end of the course—and I invariably get better results because of this simple change in schedule. If you want the very best from students, don't make it due on the last day or week of class.

3. Faculty should examine their assignments to determine whether or not the question presupposes a particular skill that students may not have. For example, a chemistry teacher devised a pretty good assignment that asked students to determine the ingredients in a chemical that had been accidentally spilled onto the interstate highway—an incident reported in the local newspaper. Students were then instructed to determine whether or not the reporting of the event was "objective" or "sensationalized." To do this effectively, students would not only need to know about the chemicals involved, but also would have to know something about objectivity and subjectivity in the reporting of news events; they would have to be able to *recognize* biased reporting (in terms of the *order* in which the events were recounted, in terms of connotation and denotation of the language used, in terms of undocumented or unwarranted assertions, and a host of other critical reading skills). The point is that the chemistry teacher *assumed* all of his freshman students would know these things.

4. Faculty should examine their assignments to determine whether or not they are presupposing a single and *specific* line of reasoning necessary to fulfill the assignment. That is, we sometimes have hidden agendas in the questions we ask. We cannot assume that a student's line of reasoning will necessarily match our line of reasoning; if we ask a question that has more than one valid possible response, we must be prepared to accept them. For example, if the American history professor asks students to interpret the motto, *E Pluribus Unum* or "one out of many," and the student writes about how the U.S., out of so many other developing nations, managed to create a democracy—but the professor interprets "one out of many" as indicative of many separate states forming a single, federal government—and that professor is not prepared to accept the possibility of varying interpretations inherent in the question—then everyone suffers.

5. I work diligently to help faculty in other disciplines develop an awareness that writing is a—you guessed it—"process." In doing so, we need to be very aware of the jargon we can slip into;

it will not help us in our efforts. And we should be picky and choosy about what we decide to bother them with and discuss those things in clear, nonthreatening, simple ways. Thus, in dealing with the whole notion of process, I do my best to limit myself to (other than intervention at various stages) concerns of *prewriting* and *revising*, the two basics they should have some *specific* methods for dealing with.

First, for teaching prewriting, other than exposing faculty to freewriting, I think the clearest, simplest, most easily learned invention and organization tool for both other faculty and their students is that of clustering/mapping. I have seen faculty from almost every discipline pick up on this simple tool so quickly and find it so useful, that I'm sure it spreads easily to their students. In terms of inventing and organizing material prior to writing, clustering seems to be the most widely applicable tool I know of. In terms of comprehending and retaining material from reading, mapping is the most effective tool I know of.

Secondly, for teaching revision, I have learned from experience what I want faculty to know and in *which simple terms* I want them to remember it. Since revision so much overlaps with evaluation of writing, the first thing I want them to know is that in terms of *both* revising and evaluating, faculty and students should be aware of a clear *hierarchy* of concerns. I refer to them as "large" things, "medium" things, and "small" things. "Large things," the most important concerns, are matters of focus, organization, audience awareness, compliance with assignment, support for assertions, logic and reasoning, etc. "Medium things" are largely limited to sentence-level considerations, such as redundancy, repetition, awkwardness, lack of parallel structure, uses of euphemisms, jargon, cliches, comma-splices, etc. "Small things" involve punctuation, spelling, omitted words and letters, etc. Thus, I prefer to break analysis of writing into only three parts, which I think helps me to communicate the concept of revising and evaluating in terms of this *hierarchy*. (Of course, it doesn't take long for professors to realize that a paper can be destroyed by an abundance of small things such as 20 spelling errors—or it can be greatly hampered by a single large thing, such as poor organization.)

6. My second point about faculty understanding revision is this: that when we say "revision," we really mean re-seeing the whole thing. We mean "reformulation" of the entire unit of

discourse, by means of adding, deleting, transforming, and changing of language. Faculty writers have just as hard of a time as student writers when it comes to the "But-it's-written-in-stone-and-I-can't-drastically-change-it" syndrome.

7. My final point about teaching other faculty about revision and evaluation is this: faculty need to know how to respond *specifically to student sentences*—and if they can do this, they can do much to explain to students how to remedy their problems. Keep in mind that I have never wanted to make a faculty member into another little English professor. I would never, ever wish that fate on anyone. But when it comes to revising and responding to student writing, I have found that faculty want some nitty-gritty. Here, as before, we must be wary of intimidating faculty with jargon: a term like "abstract nominalization" is likely to do more harm than you might at first think. Hence, I select what I consider to be the most important revision strategies for sentence-level problems, and present these to other faculty in simple, catchy phrases.

For example, the whole concept of "revising wordiness out of sentences"—which can involve numerous operations, such as changing abstract subjects to concrete ones, cutting various types of redundancy (e.g., redundant pairs, such as "free gift," etc.), and changing passive voice to active voice—is simplified into a mere phrase: "Lean, not lard."

8. The last point I want to make about writing assignments in general is this: I want to know whether the writing assignments within any course go somewhere. That is, are they related? Do they become more conceptually demanding? Does one assignment build upon the following one? Do they culminate in a situation where students can integrate several shorter papers into a longer one? If this is true (and it's not an easy trick) then teachers have built in intervention stages. That is, if a series of shorter papers leads to the final, most complex one, then instructors will have responded to the paper during the process of its creation—not merely at the end when it's too late to help anyone or anything.

I want to turn now to the matter of creating specific assignments in other disciplines. Faculty are increasingly turning to us for some guidance, as the many writing across the curriculum programs and conferences demonstrate. So, we periodically need to ask ourselves this question: Out of all of the research in cogni-

tion, in the teaching and learning of writing in the past 15 years, out of all the discussions and advancements in theory, out of all the new journals and conferences about the teaching of writing, out of all the years of grief and experience we all have—what should our profession select and hold up to other disciplines as models for writing and learning within their courses? It's a big and tough decision. And in working with faculty, if we are to be of help, we have to make it. Here, then, are my responses to this question. You can think of them as "qualities" of assignments or as "models" for assignments in other disciplines. However you think of them, I have great difficulty in stating that one of them is "more important" or a "larger" concern than any of the others; that's why you'll find no particular order to them.

For one, I believe that assignments in other disciplines should sometimes request students *to write to a naive or to a lay audience about the course's content.* To many people, this quality or model for an assignment strikes them as being simplistic. But I would argue the opposite: students must *thoroughly* understand a principle or concept before they can explain it to a naive audience, before they can reduce complexities and assimilate them *for* a lay readership. If we accept Britton's theories about how, essentially, writers must be able to explain something to *themselves before* they can effectively explain it to a more *distanced* and formal audience, then I think we're on reasonably solid ground with this assignment. Additionally, writing about course content to a lay audience will often literally force students into a use of metaphor—and we have known for eons about the role and power of metaphor in learning, writing, and thinking.

Another reason that I favor students writing to naive audiences resides in my observation that many students, particularly freshman students and insecure students, want to take refuge in the discipline's jargon. Such students are under the false impression that jargon and words built with billions of syllables carry the real weight of real meaning. My observations tell me that students *think* we actually *want* pretentious style, polysyllabic words, jargon, convoluted sentence structure, and all other shades of fog because *they* are under the impression that *that* is the kind of stuff that we turgid, profound, pedagogues find challenging in reading. But I say it ain't so. My God, do I say it ain't so. I refer you to physiology Professor Bob Murray's writing assignment in Appen-

dix A which requests students to write to a lay audience. You will note that Professor Murray has crafted a series of metaphors *within* his writing assignment, metaphors that students are to carry out or to extend.

Secondly, I believe that assignments in other disciplines should sometimes request students to *demonstrate*—not recall or summarize—their understanding of course material by *writing within a fully defined and fleshed out rhetorical context, where audience, purpose, and physical and psychological constraints are all specified for the writer.* Perhaps the best way to communicate this to other faculty is to tell them to place students within a scenario that the instructor selects and defines in detail. Here I refer you to political science Professor Greg Raymond's assignment in Appendix B. Putting students into a specific jam and asking them to write their way out of it invariably turns up more convincing evidence that students understand course concepts—and it usually generates better student writing for a variety of reasons. This "situational" approach enables professors in other disciplines to respond to this student writing as a somewhat more objective intermediary within the situation, not solely as a professional with vested interests. Also, I favor the "situational approach" to writing assignments because I think that students should be given the opportunity to see and respond to any course's content as it might function and apply in a detailed, "real world" setting.

Thirdly, I believe that assignments in other disciplines should sometimes *request students to grapple, in writing, with seemingly contradictory realities, whether they be facts, attitudes, or ideas.* Every discipline has its debates, its unsolved dilemmas, its unanswered questions. And for a student to be able to investigate and argue and somehow try to reconcile such incongruities, will likely place that student in a demanding situation in which learning can hardly help but occur. For an interesting example (see Appendix C) philosophy professor Alan Brinton created an assignment that asks students to grapple with such contradictions by writing from an opposing point of view. As you will see in his "note" after the assignment's directions, Professor Brinton builds in several steps to this assignment, with each step *further distancing* the writers from their subject: they begin with a diary entry in first person, move from there to a critique (written in third person) of their own diary entry, and then they re-examine their diary entry and third person response and *refute* the response.

Fourthly, I believe that assignments in other disciplines should sometimes *request students to synthesize, to inductively arrive at conclusions drawn from at least two or more sources, or from a fair amount of data.* I've spent considerable time with faculty from other disciplines in getting them to tell me which kinds of mental operations are most frequently required in their courses. Almost uniformly, regardless of the nature of the course, instructors report that they most often expect students to synthesize, to make wholes from parts. To my mind, synthesizing is an extremely common thinking strategy, particularly necessary in most kinds of writing, but it is a thinking strategy that we know very little about in terms of how to teach it directly.[2] For example, I refer you again to Professor Raymond's assignment in which students must synthesize a CIA cable, a memo, a communique, and a briefing paper—before they can attempt to respond very specifically to the assignment. I also refer you to economics Professor Chuck Skoro's brief in-class writing assignment (Appendix D) in which he employs the process of synthesizing or "drawing conclusions" in order to teach his students about the nature of "theories."

These are my choices, the big four "qualities," or "characteristics" or "models" that I like to suggest to faculty in other disciplines. But often, the best assignments are *hybrids* of the above four elements, such as Professor Raymond's assignment, which was characterized by a full, rhetorical context (or a fully fleshed out situation), *as well as* containing data that students needed to synthesize. Hence, I very much encourage faculty from other disciplines to be creative and produce cross-breeds.

Finally, if I had to draw one inference from all of these concerns about the relationships between composition faculty and people in other disciplines—and the dialogue between us about writing and writing assignments—I guess I would say that all of us need to stop and consider the very great extent to which writing assignments function as symbols: as symbols of what we consider to be of *prime* importance in our courses; as symbols of our own estimation of the powers and limitations of language, potentially, that most humane and civilizing of agents; as symbols of who we are as teachers and of what we represent.

Roy F. Fox is Director of Composition and Director of the Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum Project at Boise State University—Boise, Idaho.

NOTES

[1]For useful discussions of the writing processes of various student populations, see Emig 40-62; Pianko 324-336; Perl 324-334; Graves 234-241; and Stallard 210-217.

[2]For the best source that I know of for a specific discussion of teaching students how to "synthesize," see Behrens and Rosen 33. For a clear, theoretical discussion of how experts in various fields engage in inferential thinking based on their recognition of similarities (or analogical thinking), see Hunt 139.

APPENDIX A

Writing Assignment for Physiology Course (Writing to a Lay Audience; Use of Extended Metaphor)

Bob Murray, Physiology Department
Boise State University

During the past few lectures, we have taken an in depth look at the morphology and physiology of mammalian skeletal muscle. The simple fact remains, however, that muscles are nothing more than small engines made of jelly and gristle designed to move bones around a joint. In fact, the similarities between human muscle and man-made engines (e.g., internal combustion engines) are surprisingly numerous. For example, both engines function at an optimal temperature, rely upon oxidation of carbon based fuels, require cooling and exhaust systems, need structural support and rely upon communication from a central control mechanism.

For the next fifteen minutes, expand upon each of these similarities by providing additional and specific information. Please do this in narrative form as if you were explaining the relationships to a group of freshman physical education students.

APPENDIX B

Writing Assignment for Political Science Course (Full Rhetorical Context and Synthesis)

Gregory A. Raymond, Political Science Department
Boise State University

NOTE: The following writing assignment is designed for a class on the politics

of terrorism. Students will receive the assignment after we have covered several different approaches to dealing with terrorists in hostage/barricade situations.

The Scenario

You have just been appointed to the U.S. State Department's Office to Combat Terrorism. Mr. Peter Manning, the Undersecretary of State for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs, was kidnapped in Jamaica this morning while promoting the President's Caribbean Basin Initiative. The Director of your office has given you the job of preparing an options paper on this crisis. Within most foreign policy bureaucracies, options papers are drafted by lower level analysts and then sent to higher level officials for a decision. The purpose of these papers is to identify and evaluate the courses of action that are available for dealing with specific crises.

In order to help you prepare your paper, the Director has given you four documents: (1) a cable from the U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica; (2) a memorandum from the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; (3) the demands made by the kidnappers; and (4) a briefing paper on the crisis from the most recent National Security Council meeting. Using these documents and whatever other research materials you need, identify and evaluate three options for resolving the Manning crisis.

NOTE: The papers from this assignment will be used as raw data in the synthesizing writing assignment that follows.

CABLE FROM KINGSTON

Classification: Secret
Precedence Indicator: Immediate
From: U.S. Ambassador, Jamaica

1. Mr. Peter Manning, Undersecretary of State for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs, was kidnapped by a group of terrorists at 1000 hrs. this morning.
2. He was traveling with five U.S. businessmen on the "Governor's Coach" tour train between Montego Bay and the Appleton Distillery.
3. Jamaican police indicate that Manning and the businessmen are being held in Ipswach Cave. Thirty Canadian tourists are being held on the train.

MEMORANDUM

From: Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Subject: Manning Kidnapping

1. Ipswach Cave is located in the rugged jungles of central Jamaica. The Jamaican government does not have firm control over the area. It is inhabited by the descendants of runaway slaves known as "Blues."

2. The train is approximately five hundred yards from the cave.

3. We have learned that the terrorists are a group of fifteen Haitians who oppose the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier. They call themselves the Toussaint L'Ouverture Brigade, a name derived from the martyred father of Haitian independence.

4. Mrs. Manning and her two children are now under military protection in Villa 26 at Montego Bay's Round Hill Hotel.

5. The Jamaican government has decided to let the U.S. take the initiative in dealing with the terrorists.

6. The terrorists are armed with a few crude bombs, Kalashnikov automatic rifles, and Makarov pistols.

COMMUNIQUE FROM THE TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE BRIGADE

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Its people suffer from starvation, disease, and the Duvalier dictatorship. Because Duvalier and his running dogs are maintained by American imperialism, we begin our revolution by making the following demands:

1. The U.S. must terminate all aid to the Duvalier regime.
2. $10 million must be deposited in our account at the Bank of Zurich.
3. All Haitian refugees held in the United States must be released.
4. The Jamaican authorities must guarantee us safe passage to Cuba.
5. Cuba must grant us political asylum.
6. The Duvalier regime must release 50 political prisoners. They must be flown on Cuban aircraft to Havana.

If our demands are not met within twenty-four hours, we shall execute one American hostage and increase our demands. We are prepared to repeat the same procedure every three hours.

Freedom or death!

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING PAPER

The President has just received the following information from the National Security Council:

1. The Delta Group (two Ranger light infantry regiments) is on full alert at Fort Bragg.
2. The Canadian government has urged the President to move cautiously due to the possibility that the terrorists may blow up the train if attacked.
3. Jean-Claude Duvalier told our Ambassador in Haiti that he would refuse to release any prisoners if U.S. aid was terminated.
4. Fidel Castro appears willing to grant political asylum to the Haitians.

However, he has hinted that we must be willing to accept another wave of Cuban exiles.

5. Congressman George Hanson (R-Idaho) was seen rowing a small boat toward Jamaica.

APPENDIX C

Writing Assignment for Philosophy Course (Reconciling Incongruities)

Alan Brinton, Philosophy Department
Boise State University

In-Class Writing Assignment

You are on a backpacking trip, two days into a remote region of the Sawtooth Wilderness area, accompanied only by your sweetheart, Billie Joe Charismo. Billie Joe has gotten up early to make a two hour hike to a promising fishing spot, and you are gathering wood for a fire so you can boil water for coffee. As you are climbing a hillside to get to an old dead tree, you suddenly slip and come down hard on your left side on a jagged piece of rock. After rolling onto your other side and writhing in pain for what seems like five minutes, you gingerly pull your wool shirt out of your pants and lift it up to expose the wound you know must be there.

You gasp — there is a nasty looking gash, several inches long and at least ¾ of an inch deep. You can't help but think of the other night, at home, when you first sliced into that big rare tenderloin roast with your new $40 RazorSharp knife. The cut looks almost like that — so clean, so open, more a juicy redness than bloody — your own body, cut open like a piece of meat! And you, who never even had stitches before.

You are surprised by your own reaction to the situation — you are amazingly calm, almost giddy. And curious. Yes, you want to look into the wound. You gently separate its two borders and peer into the abyss. A sudden gasp! There is something in there, something black. Terror whallops you, right in the pit of your stomach. Shaking, you tenderly pry the wound further open and turn it toward the light. You still can't see this foreign object too clearly, but it is obviously no part of a human body, and it must come out. Digging the fingers of your left hand into the surrounding flesh, you work the object to the surface and then carefully clamp it between the thumb and forefinger of the hand at the end of your right arm. The object feels strangely smooth and rounded — you start to slowly draw it out.

Suddenly there is resistance, as though it had shot out tentacles into the inner recesses of your body. A paralyzing fear, a horror comes over you. You can now see where the tentacles are attached to the little black box between

your finger and thumb. They are different colors — a red one, a green one, two blues — Yes! it is a *box*! they are *wires*! There now is a *tube*!

It just now occurs to you that there is very little pain here — it all seems to be on the surface. Inside there, there is numbness. It's all very remote, like food being digested in your stomach, but you can see in and you have part of it between your fingers. You must find out what's going on; when was this implanted in you? By whom? For what reason? You begin to jerk the box, tugging on the wires — you feel tugging over by your heart and up by your armpit. You run your fingers up under your shirt, over the tugging by your armpit. Yes, beneath the skin there, it feels like a wire. As you probe at it with your fingers there is a more distant tugging in the side of your neck, just under the left side of your chin. You work your fingers around in the loose skin under your chin. Another wire? Yes . . . more tuggings up toward the side of your head, under your ear.

You turn your attention back to the little gismo in your side. Yes, there is a tiny screw, and another — one at the base of each little wire. You take out your Swiss Army Knife. You have to find out what you can. With the knife's eyeglass screwdriver you begin to turn the little screw at the base of one of the two blue wires, slowly to the left. You are having a little trouble seeing what you are doing. Yes, the vision in your right eye begins to get dimmer. You quickly turn the screw back to the right — the vision in your right eye gets brighter, and brighter, too bright! You turn it more carefully back toward the left, until you are satisfied with the adjustment.

You pull the box out of the wound altogether. Its tentacles go in all directions. Now you see other tubes and wires, apparently not connected, at least not directly, to the black box — and there! a little pulley and cables. You begin to feel nauseous. You pack the little box back into the wound, with a little less care than you might think appropriate. Further experimentation will have to wait for later. You find that you have little difficulty closing the wound back up, and now it looks much less serious, as a wound.

You rise to your feet and discover that, except for a strange feeling in your throat and in the pit of your stomach, you actually feel pretty good. You make your way back to the camp site and prepare yourself a cup of coffee, drink it, and wait for it to make its way through your system.

You now have several hours to think about this strange experience and what it all means. What, if anything, should you say to Billie Joe? or to anyone else? You wish you had somebody to talk to. At the same time, you are a little worried about talking to anybody about this.

Fortunately, you have a little diary which you decided to keep on this trip. At least you can share your thoughts with it. Up till now there's been just one short entry, made last night. You read it over:

> Dear Diary:
> Sorry it has taken me so long to start writing in you. I should have taken a trip like this years ago. It's really giving me a chance to get to know Billy Joe. Since we met two weeks ago, we've never really had a chance to talk. Even more important than that, being out here in the wilderness, having to push my body along to keep up with the pace Billie Joe sets, but at the same time being away from the rush of schoolwork and parties

— this really is giving me a chance to do some thinking and to get in touch with myself . . .

Hah! Now you really have something to write about. And you have the rest of this class period to write about it. And you have to hand your new diary entry in to your instructor. Lucky for you, with all your other problems, he won't be assigning a *grade* to this piece of work.

NOTE on Assignment

This assignment is intended for introductory philosophy students. They will have completed about one fifth of the course. During that fifth they will have read Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus," which will have been examined in class with an emphasis on the feeling and notion of the Absurd. They also will have been told to give an initial reading to Descartes' *Meditations* and will have been told something about the skeptical doubts raised in the first Meditation.

This will be the first writing they have done in the course and will be intended to provide the backdrop for a related philosophical paper of about five pages in length. I think I will work this as follows. First, I will give them most of a class period to work on the diary entry. Second, I will read their entries and type excerpts on a ditto sheet, which will be handed out in class a few days later (when their initial writing is returned). I will comment on the difference between excerpts which raise philosophical issues and those which go in other directions. Third, on that same day, I will have them address, in a short "free writing" a philosohical problem (raised by me) about the writer of their own diary entry, but treated as a *third person* — probably they will be confronted with some problem about the treatment of that person, or something like that, so that they have to make a decision about action, but one which involves moral and conceptual difficulties. I will ask for a quick decision with their immediate justification. These will be collected. A few days later (fourth step), I will return their free writing and tell them that their essay assignment is to examine the diary entry and third person response and *refute* the response; that is, they will write an essay which makes a case for rejecting that response and its supports and for making a different decision about the diary writer. On that day, in class, they will have some time to work on this. I will collect what they have written and return it later (with comments) for a period of in-class writing and revising, and then repeat this commenting, returning, writing, collecting periodically through the course of the semester, until they have a final product, which they will then take home with them for final editing and typing.

There are two main ends I have in view. One is to have guided them through the writing of a paper wholly within the constraints of the classroom situation (as a sort of experiment). The other is to give them a sense of philosophical distance by making them step back away from what they have done to a couple of removes. They will not know exactly what I am going to do ahead of time, so I can make adjustments as I go along.

APPENDIX D

Writing Assignment for Economics Course
(Synthesis)

Chuck Skoro, Economics Department
Boise State University

Student Writing Assignment
(In class: 15 minutes)

The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand what a theory is and how new theories are created. Please read each of the following "facts." When you have read them carefully, write a one or two-sentence general statement that summarizes what is happening in these situations.

1. A very dry summer is always followed by higher-than-usual prices for food.

2. During the early 1960's a baggy garment called a "sack dress" came into fashion. The prices of maternity clothes fell dramatically.

3. During the recent recession factories used far less energy than they had during the preceding high production years. Consumers drove considerably less, in part because fewer of them had jobs to drive to. The world price of oil dropped dramatically.

4. Every year on December 26 the price of freshly-cut evergreen trees approaches zero.

5. When a heroin ring is broken and large quantities of the drug are confiscated heroin prices on the street always rise.

Once you have written your general statement, use it to open a paragraph in which you use at least three of the above "facts" to support your theory.

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