CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Composition 1
Course Introduction

English Composition I is designed to help students develop their ability to think logically and to organize and express ideas clearly. The theme and title of this course is Writing about Your World: Landscapes–Past and Present. You may be wondering what landscapes have to do with writing essays. What type of images do you see in your mind when you hear the word landscape? A landscape may be a picture of a natural scene or an artistic rendition of it. It may be a description of the geological features of a large landmass or a description of a smaller area such as your back yard. A landscape can be a particular area of activity, such as “the political landscape.” And landscapes can be personal—your personal experiences and observations of people, places, things, and times of your life, past or present.

You will write rhetorical essays that draw on your personal experiences with landscapes. Writing about your personal experiences is like unpacking your memories and making a new home for them through your writing. You will not be able to write about your experiences in these essays in the same way you might write a letter, a lengthy email, or a blog, but the purpose is similar: to share your experiences with others. In this course, your classmates will be able to read and respond to what you write.

You will learn how to use descriptions, examples, comparisons, contrasts, and analysis techniques to organize and develop your writing to convey your opinion and observations about the topic assigned. Before learning the steps of the writing process and the parts of an essay, the question what is a rhetorical essay? will be explored. The exploration will help you see the broader picture in order to understand the purpose of this course.

What Is a Rhetorical Essay?

First, let’s tackle essay:

In its broadest sense, an essay is a form of nonfiction prose writing that expresses the writer’s point of view about a subject that is meaningful to her/him. There are many definitions of the word essay. We like this one: according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, an essay is “an analytic, interpretive or critical literary composition . . . dealing with a subject from a limited and personal point of view.” Thus, an essay is not a report. It is a form of personal expression.

In Western culture, the first essays were written by classic writers such as Seneca and Plutarch in the first century. They wrote about their everyday thoughts and experiences, reflecting on issues as well as the things that surrounded them. In “On Noise,” Seneca describes the noise on the street below his rooms above a bath house and muses about moving to a quieter place but reasons that it is impossible to escape noise if one is alive. Plutarch wrote biographies about philosophers, but his short essays were addressed to his wife, and he wrote copiously about his family in them. Today, we see the personal essay in the popular form of creative nonfiction, in short pieces that share the writers’ respective points of view about their personal experiences and observations of the places, people, and things around them. These pieces also comment on the landscapes of everyday life. These essays often resemble memoirs, which are widely read today.

Next, rhetoric:

The word rhetoric has classical origins as well. It is from the Greek words meaning “I say.” In On Rhetoric, Aristotle noted that humans make decisions based on what they already know to be true and that
these premises can be used to reason with people in order to persuade. He outlined forms of reasoning that could be used in persuasive speeches. As writing became more common over the centuries, these rhetorical strategies were applied to written arguments as well. Today, we often use the word *rhetoric* to identify only persuasive or argumentative communication. Debates, commentaries, editorials, sermons, and many blogs are argumentative or persuasive. However, rhetorical strategies are now found in all nonfiction prose writing that expresses a point of view, not just in argumentative writing.

In modern composition textbooks, the most common rhetorical strategies are defined as example or exemplification, cause and effect analysis, comparison and contrast, definition, process analysis, classification, narration, and description.

**Now let’s apply the term *rhetorical essay* to this writing course:**

Essays are classified as expository, descriptive, narrative, or argumentative. Expository writing is used extensively in academic courses and is often used in business settings since expository writing explains a topic. Because we need to learn and practice expository writing skills, we will write (with the exception of the first assigned essay) expository essays about our experiences and observations. We will organize these essays by using *rhetorical strategies*. Each expository essay will explain a point of view about a topic by using one of the rhetorical strategies listed above. One will explain a point of view by using examples. Another will analyze causes or effects. Others will compare and contrast topics or define them.

Expository essays, like any other kind of essay, require a writer to narrow and focus a general prompt to a specific topic and to develop a point of view about that specific topic. Therefore, you will need to assess the readers’ attitudes about this topic and point of view and determine what information the readers will need. Also, you will need to brainstorm and evaluate what you know about the specific topic that will support your point of view. Above all, you need to know the purpose of your essay and then organize your written thoughts for clarity. All this can be more than a little overwhelming if you do not have a strategic plan!

Rhetorical techniques of organization can provide strategies for beginning writers of essays. We aim to assist you so that you will be able to use any of these techniques or even a combination of them in any writing assignment in your college career.

Your first essay is a descriptive essay (not expository). Descriptive essays allow you to get in touch with your surroundings, because seeing, hearing, feeling, and even smelling and tasting are the only ways humans can gather information. We begin to formulate our own points of view about the world through observing and experiencing it through our senses. For this first essay, we provide a basic example (strategy) for organization. What better way to begin writing essays?

**The last and most important word:**

The word *I* is important in essay writing, for an essay expresses a personal point of view. Many times, students learn not to use the personal *I* in essays, probably for good reasons. But in this course, you may consider using the personal *I*, with some limitations. For example, since an essay is, by definition, about you and your point of view, you don't need to use *I think* or *I feel* to announce what you think or feel; however, we encourage you to consider using the personal *I* when writing about your observations of specific events or personal experiences that support a point within your thesis.

Above all, consider the essays you will write for this course as opportunities, perhaps the first ones, to write purposefully and clearly about what you have experienced in the world around you. This consideration is why we do not require you to write arguments or to do research until the last
essay. We want to hear your voice and to assist you in developing a strong standard English prose style that will serve you well in academic and real world settings.

So how do we begin writing essays? We do it step by step. Just like unpacking a box of our belongings in order to put them in new place: we make lists, we plan, and we organize. We think about our purpose. We write about it, and then we make the discovery that writers make: we discover something new about ourselves.

You will be writing five rhetorical essays and two timed essays. With the exception of the timed essay chapter, each chapter requires you to accomplish the following:

- Read model essays to observe examples of effective writing techniques for each type of rhetorical essay
- Practice writing essays
- Compose and submit essays applying the eight steps of the writing process, including submitting a draft and a peer review of other students’ drafts.
- Participate in discussion forums

Commonly Asked Questions

What will I write about?

In this course, you will be writing essays which express your point of view about a topic. General prompts are provided for each essay. For some essays, you may be given a specified topic or be able to choose a personal topic of interest to respond to the general prompt. You will learn how to organize your ideas about the topic into rhetorical patterns. Each chapter provides instructions on how to write one of the following rhetorical patterns:

- Description
- Example
- Comparison and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Definition (The definition chapter will require research to be completed for your essay)

How should the essays be formatted?

To illustrate the correct style and method for formatting essays, presentation and learning activities are included in the online learning management system. Before starting your first essay, review the formatting requirements.

On the first page of each essay, be sure to include your name, the date, and your instructor's name. Your essays should be double spaced throughout, the paragraphs should be indicated by indenting the first line one-half inch (tab right), and the margins should be one inch.

You should give each essay a creative title that captures the essence of essay. Center the title about one third of the way down on the first page.

How should I submit my essays to my instructor?

Your instructor will tell you which file format to use for your essay and how to submit your paper. You may be asked to attach your essay to an email, post it to the course discussion area,
or upload it through the assignment feature of your online management system. Follow your instructor’s directions exactly.

**What about grammar?**

Writing well-structured sentences and using formal English and correct spelling and punctuation are important. You will be given instructions as needed for any problems you may have. It is a good idea to have a grammar book, dictionary, and thesaurus available for reference.

**What if I haven’t written an essay in quite a while?**

At the beginning of this course, you will write a diagnostic essay and complete a diagnostic grammar exercise so that your instructor may help you assess the level of your writing skills.

**Learning Objectives**

After completing this chapter you will be able to

- Define essay, rhetoric, and rhetorical essay
- Identify five types of rhetorical essays
- Identify and describe the eight steps of the writing process
- Identify and describe the three parts of an essay

**Activities List**

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This course, Introduction to Composition 1: Writing about Your World: Landscapes—Past and Present, contains a guide to the writing process that students need to follow in order to produce a polished essay. The guide consists of steps that define the writing process sequentially. However, the steps in the process are actually phases wherein the steps blend and overlap. As you prepare an essay, you will find the need to revisit steps you thought were finished. This is normal. Don't feel that all the revisions represent failure.

The process of writing, for most writers, is essentially a series of steps that ends with a polished product. Although your personal process may vary, an awareness of these steps is a great way to build a piece of effective writing. Attend to each step gradually and carefully. The process of writing is recursive; that is, it is a procedure that must be repeated constantly. Recursive writing means, at any time in the process, a writer may go back to any previous step in an effort to improve upon the writing. This is the nature of the writing process for all writers, be they novices or published authors. A writer may discover a need to brainstorm more details while in the drafting stage or find that the purpose of the essay has changed, requiring her/him to repeat a step in the process.

For each of the five essays, you will engage in these eight recursive steps to write your polished essay. These steps will be restated for you in each chapter.

1. Prewriting—This is the first step of the writing process. One important task in prewriting is exploring and expanding on ideas related to a specific assigned or selected topic and its general prompt. A prompt is a general topic to which you as the author must respond, for example, “a place that is special to you, either in memories or in the present.” During the prewriting step you will want to write down everything and anything related to the prompt. From this exploration, you will be able to narrow or focus the general prompt into the specific topic and select the ideas which you will use to support it.

There are a variety of prewriting techniques to help your ideas to flow freely. Prewriting techniques can include brainstorming, freewriting, outlining, listing, charting, mapping, and interviewing. Based on the type of rhetorical essay, and the prompt, one or more of these techniques will be recommended.

2. Focusing—This is the process of identifying the purpose of your essay as well as identifying the audience for whom you are writing. The essay’s purpose is determined by the assigned general prompt, the specific topic relating to the prompt, and the type of essay you are writing.
3. **Organizing**—During this step, you will need to consider the organization of the content. This step involves writing a statement that expresses the main purpose of your essay. The purpose statement is referred to as a thesis statement (thesis statements will be discussed in more detail in unit 2 of this chapter). The thesis statement outlines your specific response to the general prompt. Each essay you write for this course will require a thesis statement. It is helpful to begin the organizing process by writing a tentative thesis statement and creating an outline or map of your ideas, which further prepares you for step 4—outlining and drafting.

Many students skip over prewriting, focusing, and organizing to start at step 4—outlining and drafting. However, you will save time, frustration, and many false starts if you complete the prewriting, focusing, and organizing steps before attempting to write the essay.

4. **Outlining and Drafting**—During the organizing step, you considered the organization and structure of your content. Outlining formalizes the organization of ideas. Outlining is typically hierarchical in nature, including three or more levels in the hierarchy. The outline should provide a road map for where the essay will go and the ideas it will present.

Drafting is the preliminary stage that follows outlining; a draft is just that—the initial writing of a paper. In the first draft, use the outline to expand ideas into coherent and organized paragraphs. Be sure to refer to the thesis statement, using topic sentences in the body paragraphs that refer to the main points in the thesis.

It’s important to remember that drafting is a first attempt. Try to complete the draft in one sitting so that your thoughts freely flow without interruption. Many writers find that writing leads to more ideas, so write notes of new ideas along the way.

5. **Revising**—The root of this word means to “see again.” Revising is changing and rewriting the draft from step 4 to improve it. In this step, the writer rearranges ideas and reshapes sentences to make clearer connections for the reader. Oftentimes, you will need to delete an entire paragraph or reorder paragraphs. You might even find that most of what you have written does not relate to the topic you stated in the thesis. At times, it may be necessary to completely start over. It is better to discover this earlier rather than later in the writing process.

With the exception of the timed writing in chapter 4, each of your essays will go through a peer review process. This step will be combined with step 5—revising. The purpose of the peer review is for a person who has not read your essay to read it for understanding and meaning from a fresh and objective perspective. Just as professional authors have editors and publishers read their works for understanding and clarity of thought so should any writer—professional or novice—have someone read her/his writing. It is ultimately your responsibility to select or reject the revisions recommended in the peer review feedback for your essay.

6. **Editing**—This step insures that the revisions you accepted from the peer review process are incorporated in the paper. Editing also involves checking the essay for proper formatting and correct spelling, grammar, and sentence construction. It’s also important to read the
essay for clarity of thought process, appropriate transitions, and understanding from your audience’s perspective. A grammar book, dictionary, and thesaurus are valuable resources to reference during the editing process.

7. **Proofreading**—This is the final stage; careful proofreading is required to double-check that you have made the revisions, edits, and modifications from the previous two steps. Proofread for corrections, quality, and flow of the writing. Also proofread the paper to make sure you met the essay formatting requirements—one-inch margins and paragraph indentations, type, double spacing, and other details identified by your instructor.

8. **Evaluation**—This step indicates the end of the writing process. No further changes can be made after the essay is evaluated. In the classroom, evaluation generally means a grade. In the workplace, it can contribute to a positive performance evaluation or a reward for quality work. Realize that your final writing represents your best work and writing ability. Take pride in your writing.

Remember to follow the eight steps of the writing process to help make your writing experiences more successful and rewarding. In the next unit, you will be introduced to the three major parts of an essay.
Parts of an Essay

An essay is a relatively short piece of writing in which the author attempts to develop one or more related points or ideas. Essays contain **three major parts:**

1. Introductory paragraph
2. Body paragraphs
3. Concluding paragraph

A description of each major part follows:

**Introductory Paragraph**

The introductory paragraph includes two parts: an attention getter and a thesis statement. In this course, the attention getter will at times be referred to as a “hook,” which is employed to pique the reader’s interest to continue reading. The thesis statement expresses the main idea, or purpose of the essay, which is the specific response to the general prompt. Sometimes, the main idea (thesis) is implied rather than directly stated. The thesis determines the content of the essay: everything the author writes must be logically related to the thesis statement.

**Body Paragraphs**

The body contains development paragraphs. Each paragraph explains one point that supports the thesis of the essay. A minimum of three body paragraphs is expected; that is, there will be three points that support the thesis. Just as the essay has a main idea (thesis), each paragraph has its own main idea, and every sentence relates to it. And just as the essay as a whole is organized coherently, the paragraph should be coherent with sentences and ideas arranged logically.

**Concluding Paragraph**

The concluding paragraph summarizes the main idea (thesis) and may rephrase the attention getter used in the introduction. It should provide a final statement in response to the general prompt and the specific topic. A conclusion should inspire the reader to further thought regarding the issues or ideas presented in the essay.
Practice Activity:
Identifying the Parts of an Essay

Directions: Read the following essay and locate the three major parts—attention getter and thesis statement in the introduction, supporting points in the body, and summary of the main idea in the conclusion. Compare your results with the underlined model (solution) in the learning management system.

1. Examine the first paragraph and underline or highlight the following.
   a. The sentence(s) containing the attention getter, or hook
   b. The sentence containing the main idea, or thesis, of the essay

2. Examine the three body paragraphs in the essay and underline or highlight one or two sentences that explain the supporting point in each paragraph.

3. Examine the last paragraph and underline or highlight a sentence that summarizes the main idea of the essay.

Tips for Tackling the Terrible Two's
By Sandy Marchaza

The knowledge and ability to control everything is mysteriously bestowed upon children when they reach the age of two. Equipped with this newly found knowledge—we’ll call it independence—a child undergoes behavioral changes capable of throwing even the most stable household into a state of confusion and chaos. With a few helpful hints, accomplishing ordinary tasks such as eating, getting dressed, and sleeping doesn’t have to become a test of wills between mother and child.

Your first job of the day is to get a nutritious meal into the tummy of your two year old. When he runs to the table with a candy bar, you must jump into action quickly. Remember never to use the word “no” outright. (The word itself could send a young child into tiny fits of rage.) Instead, say something along the lines of, “candy bars aren’t for breakfast,” or perhaps, “you can have candy later.” Your toddler will, of course, put up a fight. He will cry, stomp his feet, and roll around on the floor. You must stand your ground, even as his shrill cries threaten to drive you to the brink of surrender. When he shows signs of weakening, you must make your move. While he catches his breath, hurriedly explain that Superman eats oatmeal everyday because it helps him catch the bad guys. As your toddler apprehensively climbs onto the kitchen chair, run to the linen closet, grab a towel, and tie it around his shoulders. Sitting happily now at your breakfast table is one oatmeal-eating, cape-wearing crime stopper!

The next order of business is choosing the day’s apparel. Your two year old will invariably insist on handling this job alone. When he comes skipping out of his room clad only in a bright orange shirt and a pair of cowboy boots, do not allow him to sense your surprise. More importantly, you must immediately squelch the urge to laugh.
Laughing at a two year old is an automatic tantrum trigger. After wrestling your child’s head out of the armhole of the shirt, gently guide him, bare bottom, boots and all, back to his bedroom. At the mere mention of pants, your child will begin to fight, flail about and scream “NO!” Quickly pin one leg down while deftly shoving the other into a pant leg. He will be taken by surprise with this move, allowing you just enough time to get that second leg in. Your little fit pitcher will continue his protest with more fervor than ever. Keep talking to him in a soothing tone of voice until the screams have given way to noiseless sobs. Finally, when he settles down, give that sad little guy a hug and tell him how handsome he looks in his blue jeans. If he is still noticeably upset, you’ll need to take one step further. Drop to your hands and knees, instruct your tiny cowpuncher to hop on, then gallop around and around the house. I’m sure you’ll find his improved mood a fair trade for rug-burned knees.

At the end of what seems like an eternity, the day is done and it’s time to put your little fellow down for the night. Once again, your beautiful child will have slightly different plans. Instinctively knowing this is the battle of battles, he will pull out all the stops. The tactic most commonly used to prolong bedtime is the need for a drink of water. By limiting him to a single bedtime drink, you’ll only need to make one trip to the potty. With nature’s call answered, your toddler will ask about every person he knows. For a two year old, this list is relatively short. With his curiosity satisfied regarding the whereabouts of all his loved ones, it is safe to pull the blankets up to his chin and read a bedtime story. Be sure to offer your child several books from which to choose, giving him the feeling of control he so desperately needs. As you read, watch for signs of fatigue. Excessive yawning and heavy eyelids are good indication sleep is on the way. When these signs appear, gently rub his temples and continue reading in a soft voice. When the story is finished, cross your fingers and hope for the best. If your child’s eyes fly open and he begins to whine, you’ll have to repeat the process, starting with a drink of water. If, on the other hand, his little eyes stay shut, close the book quietly, slide silently out of his bed, and tiptoe from the room. As you stand at the bedroom door falling more deeply in love with this beautiful child, count your blessings. Finally, pat yourself on the back for a job well done, and immediately start planning tomorrow’s defensive strategy.

Sharing your day with a two year old can be challenging, frustrating, and chaotic. Yet with a little quick thinking, consistency, and a lot of love, you should be able to tackle the terrible two’s. After all, how tough can it be? There are only three hundred and sixty-four days until his third birthday.

Write a Diagnostic Essay

Your instructor will give you directions for completing and submitting a diagnostic essay. The diagnostic essay lets you and your instructor assess your writing strengths and developmental areas in preparation for writing the five rhetorical essays for this course.
Summary

In this chapter, you learned the meaning of essay, rhetoric, and rhetorical essay. You also learned to identify and describe the eight steps of the writing process and the three parts of an essay. The overview of the writing process explained how to build your essays from general ideas to fully developed, polished pieces of writing. The parts of an essay introduced you to the common elements for each essay.

Prior to moving on to the next chapter, review unit 1 and unit 2 assignment checklists to make certain that you’ve completed all of the requirements for this chapter.