Week One: Expos Review

Introduction:

Welcome to 201: Research in the Disciplines. Whatever subject you may be studying this semester--whether it is War and Ethics, The Family, Urban Life, Popular Culture--remember that your work in this course is not very different from your work in Expository Writing (101). As in 101, you will be required to make connections between disparate texts and construct an argument supporting the connections you see, pursuing their implications and considering their political, historical, social or economic relevance. In fact, many students say they enjoy 201 more because, finally, they get to write on texts they choose and on ideas they care about. So don't feel threatened by the requirements of the course, including the research assignment; think of this course as an opportunity to read, learn, think and write about texts and ideas you care about. You can do it--by fulfilling each research and writing assignment, by following the guidance of your instructor and other students, using the Writing Center and by utilizing the critical reading, thinking and writing skills you've already developed in 101 and in your other classes here at Rutgers. This week, focus on the considerable skills you have developed in 101.

Critical Reading Skills:

Remember when you first began 101 and felt overwhelmed by the length and/or complexity of your first reading assignments? Now think about the more confident way you approached the reading at the end of the semester. What's the difference? The difference is due to the fact that you learned critical reading skills, a set of skills like underlining or highlighting important passages or phrases, re-reading difficult passages, unpacking the words/ideas in those passages by looking up words in the dictionary and writing about those passages in your own words, making connections between passages you understand and the passages you're having difficulty with and by writing responses and ideas in the margins, directing you to other ideas in the essay or in other essays under consideration. Then you re-read the entire essay, paying close attention to the beginning and the end and getting a broader sense of how the essay was constructed, even if you still didn't understand each and every idea. By following these steps, you gathered enough of an understanding of the text to make connections to other assigned texts. With your own work, you've gained your own view of the world.

(Week 2 of the 201 Tutorials discusses how to approach difficult readings in more depth.)
Critical Thinking Skills:

After reading and re-reading the text, understanding its main point, or thesis, and thinking about the broader context of the essay or story, after thinking about what conversation this text is participating in and perhaps hitting some websites to better understand the terms/ideas/issues the text is engaging and thinking about these terms/ideas in relation to the reading you have done in other classes you have taken, you then thought critically about the world view of this text, the perspective it takes and how it jibes with your own. You thought, "Do I agree or disagree with this author's perspective? Which passages do I agree or disagree with and why?" In 101, you learned to write out your answers to these questions as a preliminary stage in constructing your argument, quoting and analyzing pertinent passages from the reading to support your claims. That's good, because 201 will give you a chance to further develop these skills, skills that will shape, to a large degree, the topic and direction of your research paper.

Connections:

You have begun thinking critically about the reading, how it conflicts with or corresponds to your own view of the world you live in and the experiences you have had in it, but as you know, you also have to figure out how this text and its argument corresponds or conflicts with previous texts you have read.

At the beginning of 101, you perhaps did not fully understand what the teacher meant when talking about "connections," about "frame" and "case" and the connections you will need to make between them. But as the semester progressed, you learned to make connections between new texts and other texts that you had already read in the class. You understood that if a new text was primarily focused on telling a story, or narrative, then it provided examples, perhaps with some complications, of the more abstract ideas defined in the previous essay; you understood that if the previous essay contained a lot of "big" ideas that were at first difficult to comprehend, then it might be considered a "framing" essay and that the current essay would probably be used as a "case" text, exemplifying or illustrating, perhaps with some complications, those larger abstract or "framing" ideas. Often times, the essays you read contained both--abstract ideas and narrative or examples of those ideas--and that made it easier, not only to understand that particular essay but to connect it to others.

You learned how to make these connections by following a few easy steps:

1) First you wrote out two passages, one from the previous reading and one from the current reading, that you thought might connect.

2) Then you began circling words/phrases that were similar in both and drawing lines between them. You learned that in order to find evidence for the connection you saw, you needed to focus on the words rather than the abstract ideas they convey and by actually drawing these connections, you also created a visual aid that helped you to construct your argument.
3) Then you began constructing your argument, writing sentences, using words from both essays, to show the connection between them. You paid close attention to any conflict in the language of both essays and perhaps addressed complications between the “framing” idea and the “case” passage.

4) You used these connections to develop the body of your paper by developing paragraphs around these connections and, in these paragraphs, considering the implications of each connection, what it suggests about these two essays, how they correspond or, at times, conflict and how the essays and the connections you’ve made correspond or conflict with your own worldview.

**Critical Writing Skills:**

Often, you found that the connections you made reflected your worldview, that while some of the connections you made were also made by your classmates, you saw connections and complications your classmates didn’t see. You then used this unique perspective to participate in the conversation you created between the essays by constructing a thesis or main argument for your paper and by using that argument to give shape to the connections you made and their implications in body paragraphs with topic and concluding sentences that reflect your thoughts on the issues at stake. Finally, you created a fully shaped paper with an introduction and a thesis, a series of body paragraphs that support that thesis and a conclusion in which you considered the broader implications of your argument.

**How Does this Relate to 201:**

You will be using all of these skills in 201. The only difference is that you will be using them with multiple rather than just two or three texts. While the first two paper assignments often rely on texts the teacher provides you with, the research assignment requires that you find your own “case” or set of “case” texts that will illustrate and perhaps complicate some of the “framing” texts with larger abstract or theoretical ideas the teacher has already introduced in the reading for the first two assignments. As you continue your research, you will be required to fill out the context of your case text(s) by finding secondary texts, texts that help you create and participate in a conversation about your case text(s) and the issues at stake in it/them or, conversely, you may “discover” your case text(s) by researching a particular issue or idea you find interesting. Eventually, you will be putting all of these texts together in one coherent 10 to 15-page argument. But you will be constructing this argument in steps; so don’t get overwhelmed. Follow your teacher’s instruction and fulfill each of the assignments that help you build your research paper in stages. Remember: You can do this!

For further review of skills learned in 101, please refer to the 101 Tutorials located at: http://newhum.com/for_students/tutorama/index.html