

Special Writing Assignment--50-word sentences & 5-paragraph essays

In this class you will be asked to complete several different types of assignments, among these being study guide questions, map questions, short answers, etc. Some of the more widely used ones I assign probably are not familiar with many of my students, so I will use this handout to explain what **50-word sentences** and **5-paragraph essays** are and how they will be used in this class.

50-word sentences

A 50-word sentence is used to get you to summarize a topic we are discussing clearly and correctly. I know a 50-word sentence is a run-on sentence and would make English teachers cringe. That is why when I assign a "50-word sentence" for a topic what I really mean is that I want my students (that's you) to use one or two sentences that are between 40 and 50 words. The whole idea for this type of assignment is to get you used to writing and getting to the point quickly.

I need to mention this, and YOU need to pay attention to this point. **Any 50-word sentence assignment over 50 words will receive an F from me.** It is quality, not quantity, that counts in this type of an assignment. **Any assignment less than 40 words will also receive an F.**

To show an example of a 50-word sentence, I include Prof. Charles Cohen's (UW-Madison) 50-word sentence on what it means to think historically below (do not let the strange words alarm you--I don't expect many of you to know what many of these terms mean. Just get a feel for the structure so you can do this assignment easily):

"Thinking historically is, first, an attitude acknowledging that every event can be meaningfully understood only in relation to previous events, and, second, the methodical application of this attitude, which entails both analyzing events contextually--as having occurred in the midst of pre-existing circumstances--and comprehending them from historical actors."

Keep in mind you will have to do quite a bit editing to create a good 50-word sentence. Be sure to mention the most important parts of whatever is being discussed. If you go over 50 words, get rid of any extra words or phrases that are not necessary.

5-paragraph essays

This type of assignment is probably more familiar with my students, as it is used both in English and history classes frequently. For those who do not know, or have forgotten, what a five-paragraph essay is, it is a writing assignment that tries to answer a given question or take a position on a controversial topic.

The first paragraph is the introduction to the essay, which should include a thesis statement--a declaration to the reader what to expect while reading the essay. The question being asked should be restated in some form in the first paragraph. The second, third, and fourth paragraphs are the body of the essay, where the writer presents evidence and examples to back up his assertion in the first paragraph. The more examples the writer can present accurately, the better the essay will be.

The fifth and final paragraph is the conclusion. There are several ways to write a good conclusion. One can restate and summarize the previous points, or one can make the final point in the given argument to drive the assigned point home. One can also the conclusion to refute any opposing arguments in a given controversy.