

Unit 2: Point of View Essay (1)

Point of View Matters

Let's imagine for a moment that we are all sports writers, and we have been given the following facts:

- 1.) The Kansas City Royals have gone 4-1 (four wins and one loss) in their last five games.
- 2.) The Kansas City Royals have gone 5-10 (five wins and ten losses) in their last fifteen games.

Depending on who we are (whether we're Royals fans or not, for instance), we could relay this information in a variety of ways. Consider these two possibilities: "The surging Royals have won four of their last five games." vs "The struggling Royals have won only five of their last fifteen games."

Notice that both sentences are factually true; neither of these writers are lying to us. And yet, the first sentence definitely seems more positive, doesn't it? But why?

***Word Choice:** "Surging" implies the Royals are making a comeback while "struggling" implies that the Royals still aren't cutting it. Also, the word "only" in the second sentence emphasizes just how few games the Royals have won.

***Selection/omission of data:** The first sentence chooses to give us the statistics of only the past five games, while the second sentence includes the statistics of the past fifteen games. In this way, the second sentence seems somehow "more fair," giving us a fuller vision of the Royals' record. But what about the past 30 games? Or the past 50?

In the end, the only difference between these two sentences is the writer's use of rhetoric, the writer's decisions about phrasing and inclusion of information. The only difference, in other words, relates to each writer's goals and his perspective, or point of view. This does not mean that there is no such thing as Truth or Real Facts. And this is not to say that writing is completely manipulative. However, even with the most basic facts, the writer's own innate subjectivity clearly plays a substantial role.

All of us have our own particular perspective or point of view. Our point of view affects how we see the world, how we interpret data, and how we communicate with others. The concept will inform our approach to composition in this course. In particular, the following assignment, the point of view essay, allows students to explore how a writer can communicate his/her perspective, using a variety of rhetorical tools.

Unit 2: Point of View Essay (1) - Objectives

Objectives:

*Students will learn five major rhetorical tools (which we will refer to as the Writer's Toolbox).

*Students will write two factually true descriptions of the same place--one positive, one negative--thus employing the Writer's Toolbox.

*Students will "show" readers their place, using sensory details.

*Students will strive to use verbs that show action, rather than linking verbs.

Unit 2: Point of View Essay (1) - Reading

Though the content is very similar, the specific page numbers of your reading assignment may vary depending on your edition of the textbook.

9th Edition Reading Assignment:

The St. Martin's Guide to Writing, Chapter 15, pages 628-638

Major Paper #1--The Point of View Essay

We will be working on this paper for the next three units. The final draft of the paper--with all three sections described below--will be due at the end of Unit #4.

Purpose: This paper assignment has several purposes. As the first major paper for this class, the Point of View Essay is designed to re-engage you with the fundamentals of all good writing, including using lush sensory details to show the reader a particular place (rather than tell them about it), basic organization, clear focus, etc. However, this unit does not function as a mere review. The Point of View Essay will also introduce you to the concept of "thinking and seeing rhetorically, and analyzing writing rhetorically"--using the Writer's Toolbox described in this unit to improve your writing and critical reading skills. Finally, the Point of View Essay allows you to reflect on this process.

The Assignment:

1. Pleasant/Unpleasant Description of the Place: Choose a place you can observe for an extended period of time (at least 20-30 minutes). Use all of your senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, even taste if possible) to experience the place, and record all of the sensations that you experience. As you record your data, you may wish to note which details naturally seem more positive, negative, or neutral, in terms of tone. (For instance, a stinky and overflowing trash barrel swarming with flies in a nearby alley might seem more inherently negative than a little white bunny rabbit hopping playfully across the lawn.) Then, you will use this information to help you write descriptions of the place: one positive, one negative. Both descriptions should be factually true (same real time and real place), but you will want one description to be positive in terms of tone and the other to be negative. In addition to including the information and sensory details you've collected as the basis for these descriptions, you will also use the Writer's Toolbox to create your two contrasting impressions for this assignment. (The Writer's Toolbox is explained in the Lecture Notes section of this unit.) As you revise and refine your descriptions, please be sure you are "showing" your readers your place (really putting the readers "there" in the moment and in this scene), rather than simply "telling" them about it. You will also want to try to eliminate unnecessary linking verbs as much as you can, incorporating verbs that show "action" whenever possible.

2. Rhetorical Analysis: Looking back at your descriptions, analyze how you created these two very different impressions of the place (one positive, one negative) without changing any of the facts. How did you make your place seem so positive in one paragraph and yet so negative in the other paragraph, without changing the facts? Discuss how you incorporated each of the tools from the Writer's Toolbox, and cite examples of this from each of your descriptions. (This analysis should be at least 400-500 words in length.)

3. Reflection: In one to two paragraphs, consider at least one of the following questions: What have you learned about writing through this assignment? How might you apply this knowledge? Has this process of using the Writer's Toolbox affected your vision of various information media--for instance, television and print news sources, magazines, etc.? If so, how so?

Again, we will be working on the rhetorical analysis in Unit 3 and the Reflection in Unit 4. For this unit, however, you will want to draft the first portion of this paper, the positive and negative descriptions of your place.

The first portion of this assignment is a three step process:

- 1.) Find your place. This should be one single setting at one particular time. Do not use multiple places. For instance, if you want to write about your house, do not describe your entire house. Choose one particular room, or one particular view. Also, do not use different times. If it's morning in your positive paragraph, it can't be evening in your negative paragraph. If it's completely sunny in your positive paragraph, it can't be raining in your negative paragraph.
- 2.) Make a sensory chart of your place, recording all of the sights, smells, sounds, sensations, and even tastes (if applicable). Use your five senses to collect data, and be as specific as possible.

3.) Use the data you have recorded to craft your two descriptions, incorporating the Writer's Toolbox to shape each of your paragraphs and thus the impression of the place. Remember that in the first paragraph your place should seem positive, while in the second paragraph, your place should seem negative.

The following is a **student example** of the first portion of this assignment:

“Nature’s Call at Pillsbury Crossing”

Nature’s beauty surrounds me. On a calm, mostly sunny day, the bristles the leaves as if they were applauding the breath of the land. Green, yellow, and brown hues sparkle in the warm sunlight, offering a mosaic reflection on the water. A short waterfall branches like a limb from the pond, whisking the water down into a misty creek. The clear water rushes through the mossy rocks and falls, creating a soothing melody.

Different bugs whistle and chant around me, voicing their opinions and contributing to the symphony of nature. The tall sunflowers rise by the water, trying best to place their roots so they are not washed away when nature’s cool drink falls again. Two young people sit in inflatable chairs, drifting above the crystal clear water. Their shoes are off, and they dip their toes in the pond’s relieving temperature. They bathe in the sun like flowers in the springtime, soaking all of the sun’s warm, crisp rays. Short blasts of relieving wind soothe the skin and the backs of their necks. They sit and enjoy the day as the sun passes through the clouds, absorbing all the comforting rays before the sun is whisked away.

“Grim Times at Pillsbury Crossing”

Death has had her way here. On a partly cloudy day at the end of the tropical summer, the withering leaves fall from a dried tree that has been suffocated by days of countless painful sun rays. The gust swishes again and brings more brown leaves to their final resting place on the cracked ground. A waterfall sits not far from the leaf cemetery, filled with rotting garbage decaying to the roots of the hungry plants. As bugs swarm, a bright flash of lightning sparks the distant sky, serving as a warning for nature to take cover. Thunder bangs through the clouds like a cannon, echoing off the hills of the horizon. The old, moldy stench stealthily slithers in before the rain droplets hit the floodplain. All of nature will get their drink, but most will drown in the water to cover the fractured land.

Please be sure to review the Submitting Your Assignment of Unit #4 section for specific instructions on how you should turn in your work for grading. The Point of View Essay with all required sections is due at the end of Unit #4.

*This assignment was adapted from *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, (ed.) Ramage and Bean, pg. 81.

Unit 2: Point of View Essay (1) - Lecture Notes

What is the Writer's Toolbox?

The **Writer's Toolbox** simply refers to five rhetorical tools that writers can use to convey their meaning: direct statement of meaning, selection/omission of details, figurative language, show vs tell, and word choice.

1.) A *direct statement of meaning* is a very direct statement that conveys your overall attitude about the place to the reader. For instance: “This is paradise.” “What a pit.” “I wish I could stay here forever.” “Why did I come to this dump to begin with?” You will want to limit these to one sentence per paragraph, and you will probably want to use your overt statement of meaning either at the beginning or end of your paragraph, to emphasize your positive or negative impression.

2.) *Selection/omission of details* is one of the tools used in the Royals example included in the introduction to this unit. What we choose to leave out or put into a description of a place can have a profound impact on a reader’s impression of that place. For instance, we might choose to leave a mildewed, overflowing dumpster out of our positive description, but include it in our negative description. On the other hand, we might choose to put a playful, baby bunny into our positive description, but leave it out of our negative paragraph.

3.) *Show vs tell* is the difference between describing in detail and summarizing. When we *show* readers something, we allow them to really see, hear, feel, smell, even taste the things that we are describing. We give them enough details to paint a sensory picture of the place. When we *tell* readers something, we state it directly, summarizing the situation and leaving out details. The following is a *show* sentence: “Clouds pile upon clouds, the sky an ever-darker gray, vague rumbles of thunder building in the distance.” If we wanted to *tell* readers the same thing, we might simply say “A storm is coming.” In most of your written communication, and in this assignment in particular, you will want to do a great deal of showing and very little telling. In your two descriptions, for instance, you will probably want to limit yourself to one tell sentence per paragraph. (And, in fact, your one tell sentence may be the same as your overt statement of meaning sentence.) Rather than simply telling us about your place, you will need to show us.

4.) *Word choice* can be used to describe the exact same thing in two very different ways. For instance, if you live in a small house, you might describe it as “cozy” implying that the place is comfortable and pleasant. In contrast, you might describe it as “cramped” implying that the place is too small, and therefore uncomfortable and unpleasant. Here’s another example: On a sunny summer day, you might describe the sun as “gleaming” or you might describe it as “glaring.” Both describe the same thing—the light emitting from the sun. But “gleaming” seems much more positive than “glaring,” doesn’t it? This tool will especially come in handy

when you are describing details that seem neutral—not inherently positive or inherently negative.

5.) *Figurative language* includes similes, metaphors, repetition of sounds, and personification. Similes and metaphors can be used to make a comparison between two unlike things to emphasize some quality of one of those things. “Betty was as big as a house” is a simile, using like or as to make a comparison between Betty and a house and thus the enormity of Betty. “Betty was a house” conveys the same idea, but this is a metaphor, as the sentence does not use like or as. We all understand that Betty is not literally a house, but we also get an impression of how big she seems to the speaker. Repetition of sounds can be used (in moderation) to emphasize a tone of either peace or discord. Softer sounds like “s” and “b” tend to imply peacefulness. Think of “the soft song of a swallow” or a “babbling brook.” Harder sounds like “c” and “r” tend to imply discord. Think of “cars clattering” a parking lot, or “raucous rebels raging” against society, spraying graffiti on those same cars. Personification can be used to give human qualities to something that is not human. Think of a “proud, sturdy oak, stretching his arms to the sky.” Trees aren’t proud, they don’t stretch, and they don’t have arms. But personification can be used to emphasize their majesty.

Additional Reminders: Choosing Verbs that Do the Work.

Action verbs are verbs that convey the action that is taking place. *Linking verbs* are the “to be” verbs—verbs such as is, are, was, were, has, have, had, etc. Active verbs are verbs that carry their own weight, while passive verbs tend to be lazy little placeholders. Here are a few examples: “The sun rose.” (action) vs “The sun had risen.” (linking) “Mike ate the candy bar.” (action) vs “The candy bar was eaten by Mike.” (linking) “Cars filled the parking lot” (action) vs “There were a lot of cars in the parking lot.” (linking)

In general, using more action verbs and striving to avoid unnecessary linking verbs makes your writing much more concise and compelling. Sometimes linking verbs are necessary, but do try to use action verbs whenever possible in your writing.

Unit 2: Point of View Essay (1) - Discussion

Topic: Finding Your "Place"

Which "place" are you going to be describing for the first portion of the Point of View Essay? Why did you pick this particular place? What is your most dominant impression of your place (ie what stands out most as you observe your place)? What do you think will be your biggest obstacle in creating two contrasting impressions (one positive, one negative) of this same exact place at the same exact time without changing any facts?

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2)

Okay, so you wrote two contrasting descriptions about the same place. The question is: How did you do it?

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2) - Objectives

Objectives:

- *Students will learn more about the Writer's Toolbox
- *Students will analyze how they used these five rhetorical tools to create two contrasting impressions of the same place.
- *Students will learn about and use the claim-support structure in writing their rhetorical analyses.
- *Students will learn how to "cite evidence" from their own writing.

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2) - Reading

Though the content is very similar, the specific page numbers of your reading assignment may vary depending on your edition of the textbook. This reading assignment is for both Units 3 & 4.

9th Edition Reading Assignment:

Review handbook sections (in the back of *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* textbook) on Grammatical Sentences, Effective Sentences, and Word Choice, pages H-11 - H-56.

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2) - Assignment

The second portion of this assignment is the rhetorical analysis. In the rhetorical analysis, you will explain how you used the five features to make the same exact place seem so very positive in one paragraph and yet so negative in the second paragraph.

The second portion of this assignment is a two step process.

1.) Review your two paragraphs noting each of the places you used any of the tools in the Writer's Toolbox. Try to find at least two examples of each of the tools from the Writer's Toolbox employed in each descriptions (except for tell sentences and direct statements of meaning, which you should have limited to only one per paragraph). If you can't find two examples of the other features in each of your descriptions, you'll probably want to revise your initial description, adding more of those features.

2.) Write your rhetorical analysis, devoting at least one paragraph to each of the tools in the Writer's Toolbox. You will probably want to begin each paragraph of the rhetorical analysis with a general claim. "I used a great deal of word choice in each of my two descriptions." Then you'll want to follow that claim with examples. "For instance, in my positive paragraph, I described the sun as "gleaming," which implies that the light was pleasantly bright. However, in my negative paragraph, I described the sun as "glaring," implying that the light was too bright, and in fact painful to look at."

Here's a [student example](#) of the second portion of this assignment. (This is the same student who focused on Pillsbury Crossing in his positive and negative descriptions.)

Rhetorical Analysis

I chose Pillsbury Crossing for my descriptions in this paper. I enjoyed writing about Pillsbury Crossing because it seemed to offer many positive and negatives, and I had never been there before. This allowed me to record my own first impressions, both pleasant and unpleasant. The floodplain is very peaceful, yet it is scarred by humankind's misuse of the nature park.

I wrote my first sentence as an overt statement which explained the mood of the rest of the paragraph. For my pleasant impression, I stated "Nature's beauty surrounds me," emphasizing the beauty one can find in a place such as this. In contrast, for my negative impression, I wrote "Death has had her way here." The notion of death immediately makes the tone grim and unpleasant, even though death is also a fundamental aspect of the natural world.

With my tone clearly established, I next had to consider my word choice very carefully. In order to show the reader what I experienced, I had to choose words that fit the mood of the description as set by my overt statements of meaning. In my pleasant description, I discuss the sun's rays and how they are "crisp" and "relieving." These words make the sun's rays seem pleasant and positive; however, in the negative description, the sun's rays were "hazardous." This description emphasizes the fact that the sun's rays can be harmful and dangerous. I also describe the leaves in both paragraphs. While the leaves were colorful, reflecting "green, yellow, and brown hues" in my positive description, they were "withering" and falling to the ground to create a leaf "cemetery" in my negative description. This helps maintain the mood of each of my respective paragraphs.

I also left out details from certain paragraphs to keep the mood and tone consistent. In my pleasant description, I omitted the observation of garbage "decaying to the roots of hungry plants." I did not include the garbage in my pleasant paragraph because it did not fit into my description of the gorgeous scenery. If I had included the garbage and trash in the positive paragraph, the reader would picture a nice place filled with a bunch of filthy waste. This is not what I wanted. In the unpleasant impression, I left out how the bugs whistled and chanted. By simply describing them as "swarming" and omitting the beauty of their sounds, the bugs seem to be only an annoyance in the negative paragraph.

Similes and metaphors were helpful as well, allowing me to create an impression that nature was either alive and comforting or dead and disturbing. In the pleasant description, I wanted the impression to be welcoming and lively, so I wrote "the wind bristles the leaves as if they were applauding the breath of the land." I wanted to make Mother Nature have a personality. By using similes like "symphony of nature," it gives Mother Nature a graceful, caring attitude, which makes the description seem more pleasant. In the negative paragraph, I compare thunder to a cannon, "echoing off the hills of the horizon." This portrays thunder as a menacing force, roaring through the landscape, making Mother Nature seem mean, stingy, and threatening.

Throughout my descriptions, I also paid attention to sentence structure. I start each paragraph with a short, tell sentence, to make sure the reader knows exactly what impression I have of this place. "Nature's beauty surrounds me" contrasts sharply with "Death has had her way here." In the rest of the paragraph, I used longer sentences, which allowed me to truly show the reader my place. For instance, in the sentence "Different bugs whistle and chant around me, voicing their opinions and contributing to the symphony of nature," I state the object being described, describe it, and try to elaborate as much as possible.

Please be sure to review the Submitting Your Assignment of Unit #4 section for specific instructions on how you should turn in your work for grading. The Point of View Essay with all required sections is due at the end of Unit #4.

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2) - Lecture Notes

Shaping and Organizing Your Rhetorical Analysis

The sample rhetorical analysis (found under the assignment section of this unit) provides a good example of how to approach this section of the paper. Notice how the writer has devoted one paragraph to each of the five features. Also, notice how the writer begins each paragraph with a claim (I also used a great deal of word choice in my paper). Then, he goes on to provide examples--which he quotes directly from his own descriptive paragraph--and explanation about why he used these tools in this way. You'll want to use a similar structure for this portion of the assignment.

As you draft your own rhetorical analysis, please keep the following in mind:

- 1.) You want to devote at least one paragraph to each of the five features, if possible.
- 2.) Each paragraph should begin with a general statement that makes it clear which feature you are going to be discussing in this paragraph. (This is your "claim for the paragraph.")
- 3.) Each paragraph should include examples quoted directly from your positive and negative paragraphs. Be sure to use appropriate examples. Also, in the word choice paragraph, be sure that you are directly comparing/contrasting your examples from the positive and negative paragraph. (In other words, it should be clear how you described the same exactly things using different words in each paragraph to create contrasting impressions.)
- 4.) Each paragraph should include some explanation. How was this feature important? What were you trying to accomplish with this example (in the +/- paragraphs)? What is the effect of the example you cited (in the +/- paragraphs)?
- 5.) Transitions can be helpful to move us from paragraph to paragraph.

Unit 3: Point of View Essay (2) – Discussion

Topics: Analyzing Your Use of the "Writer's Toolbox"

As you look back at your two descriptions, did you use all of the five tools of the writer's toolbox? If not, how might you revise your descriptions to use the other tools? What tool seems to be most effective for you? What tool are you depending on most heavily in your descriptions so far?

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3)

By now, you've crafted both your descriptions, as well as your rhetorical analysis. You've put the Writer's Toolbox to use, and you've explained how you used those tools. The only question left is: Why does any of this matter?

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3) - Objectives

Objectives:

*Students will reflect on using the rhetorical tools of the Writer's Toolbox to shape impressions.

*Students will examine their process in completing the first two portions of the Perspective Paper.

*Students will reflect on how the process of thinking and seeing rhetorically has affected their writing and reading life.

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3) - Reading

Though the content is very similar, the specific page numbers of your reading assignment may vary depending on your edition of the textbook. This reading assignment is for both Units 3 & 4.

9th Edition Reading Assignment:

Review handbook sections (in the back of *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* textbook) on Grammatical Sentences, Effective Sentences, and Word Choice, pages H-11 - H-56.

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3) - Assignment

You will have *two* tasks this unit:

- 1.) Complete the last portion of the Point of View Paper.
- 2.) Get feedback on your complete draft of Point of View Paper from an outside reader.

First, you'll need to finish the assignment.

The last portion of this assignment is simple. Reflect on what you've done. Why does any of this matter? How do these tools relate to other writing you've done, other writing you've read, etc.? How does (or how will) any of this apply to you?

Here's a [student example](#) of the last portion of this assignment. (Again, this is the same student who focused on Pillsbury Crossing in his positive and negative descriptions, and whose rhetorical analysis was included above.)

Reflection

While writing this assignment, I noticed that while we observe things everyday, choosing the right words to describe and observation is difficult and important. While walking in the park the other day, I noticed how the wind picked up, and I tried to think about how I would describe it. I realized that my descriptions would differ, depending on whether I was in a pleasant or unpleasant mood. I also noticed how choice of words can influence a reader's perceptions. For example, I've recently read several articles on the home-run race. One author reported that Sammy Sosa was beating Mark McGwire, but another focused on Mark McGwire, writing that he was ahead of last year's pace, so he wasn't technically "losing" the home-run race. Presentation of facts and phrasing of observations can be vital to crafting a good story that grabs the reader's attention; it can also sway the reader's opinions in many ways.

Second, I strongly recommend you get some feedback on your complete draft.

In this unit, you will want to revise your own work to the best possible quality. I strongly recommend that in addition to reviewing your work yourself, you find yourself an outside reader—someone who will read your work and offer you suggestions for revisions.

You have two options in choosing an outside reader:

* You can find someone on your own to read your work (ie. your spouse, one of your kids, a friend, a neighbor).

* You can sign up for the Peer Review Option by emailing me. (I'll set up an email list, so that you and 2-3 of your classmates can email each other your drafts and get feedback.)

Here are some questions you'll want to keep in mind when revising your Perspective Paper.

The Two Descriptions

- 1.) Do the two descriptions offer contrasting impressions of your place, without changing the facts?
- 2.) Do each of the descriptions incorporate all of the tools of the Writer's Toolbox? Are each of these rhetorical tools used to their fullest advantage?
- 3.) Are both descriptions well-organized, and easy to follow?

The Rhetorical Analysis

- 1.) Are each of the five rhetorical tools discussed?
- 2.) Does each paragraph follow the claim-support structure, making a general claim that clarifies the feature to be discuss, and then offering examples of how the feature was used and to what effect? Do these examples seem adequate and appropriate?
- 3.) Are transitions used to move the reader from paragraph to paragraph?

The Reflection

- 1.) Is the reflection at least one paragraph long, using appropriate transitions to move us from idea to idea?
- 2.) Does the reflection offer a sense of why/how the concepts of this assignment matter, beyond the classroom setting?

Please be sure to review the Submitting Your Assignment of Unit #4 section for specific instructions on how you should turn in your work for grading. The Point of View Essay with all required sections is due at the end of Unit #4.

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3) - Lecture Notes

As you've probably noticed in completing the first two portions of the Point of View Paper, writers have a great deal of power in shaping our impressions and opinions. By using word choice in a particular way, a writer can make the same thing seem either very positive or very negative. By choosing what to leave out and what to leave in, which metaphors to use, stating an opinion directly, and choosing whether to show or tell us something, writers also shape our impressions. Even as a beginning writer, you can use the same rhetorical tools.

Your assignment for this unit is relatively short (only a paragraph or so, or roughly 100-150 words), but this is the place where you can reflect on what it means to do what you just did. Are these rhetorical tools frightening or empowering? Manipulative or helpful?

Unit 4: Point of View Essay (3) - Discussion

Topic: Reflection

What was the most difficult aspect of writing your Point of View Essay? What was the easiest? What have you learned from this process?