

Getting Started: Doing the Illustrative Essay Invention Exercise

Instructions:

Do a FILE and SAVE AS and put this document onto your own computer. When you are done, save the document. Then copy and paste the text into the discussion forum for this exercise inside our online learning environment.

1. Write down a number of things you know a good deal about. You don't have to be an expert, but you know about it from first hand knowledge. (Example: football, SAC, parking at SAC, smoking.)
2. Pick one of the items you are knowledgeable about, and make to five truth statements you could make about your topic.
3. Find one statement of truth that you think is best. Use this statement as your "illustrative truth" (it is your "point" or "main idea" or "thesis"). State this "illustrative truth" in a clear, declarative sentence.
HINT: Try putting the words "It is true that.." in front of your illustrative truth. E.G.: *It is true that* smoking is harder to quit when you are older. Eventually, you will trim out the "it is true that" so what you have left is a strong, declarative statement: Smoking is harder to quit when you are older.
4. Consider your "illustrative truth" to be your MESSAGE. WHO do you want to send this message to? You need to be specific (perhaps at the level of a group within a group or even to an individual). Write a list of all the potential audiences that you could send this message to who may need or want to hear this message. Review this list and pick the ONE specific audience you want to address for this paper.
5. Describe your audience. Be specific as you can and as detailed as you can. What does this audience already know about your subject? What is their attitude toward your "illustrative truth"? Why would it be important for them to hear or accept this "truth"?
6. Why do you want to send your audience this message (illustrative truth)? What desired effect do you want to have on them as and after they read your essay? You may want them to be aware or know something, but try to also press for what you want them to do.

7. What is the circumstance or occasion surrounding your communication of your message to your audience? What circumstance is your audience in that makes sending this message to them particularly appropriate?

8. Briefly LIST possible stories you could use to ILLUSTRATE your point. These should be incidents that show or prove your truth. Think of as many of these incidents as you can—again three to five is good or even more. Review your list and pick the best three or four stories that show your truth and will help to achieve your desired effect you wish to have on this audience? NOTE: These should be stories that you have first person knowledge of from experience.

9. Audience Imaginative Autobiography

This last prompt is meant to be an exercise in imagination. Play. Make it up. But your picture of this possible audience should be possible and plausible.

I want you to write a brief (250 words approximately) biography of a person who could be (or is) your audience. WHO is he or she? What is his or her personal history? Where does he or she live? What is his or her educational background? What does he or she do? What does he or she believe strongly about? What is his or her hobbies or interests? What is his or her history with the subject of your essay? You could write this piece as an “autobiography” (using “I” so you become this prototype audience) or as a “biography” (using “he” or “she” as you describe them).