

## **Essay about a Job, Career or Business: A Thesis-Based Essay Using "Surprising Reversal"**

### **The Assignment**

Write an essay that develops and supports an "informative (and surprising)" thesis about a job, career or business that interests you.\*

Your essay will be based on concepts covered in Chapter 7 of your textbook, "Writing an Informative Essay or Report," on pages 157 to 167. Specifically, the essay will reflect "the third category of informative writing" – in other words, "thesis-based" writing – and the concepts discussed on pages 164 to 166, under "Informative (and Surprising) Magazine or Academic Articles."

You also should read the "Writing Project" on pages 171 to 175. This "project" will help you design your essay, although it differs in significant ways from your actual assignment as outlined below. (For example, your essay will not use library or Internet research in any significant way.)

To write the essay, you will need to do "field" research on a job, career or business (or community organization, etc.). That means your information primarily will be drawn from one or more interviews, as well as firsthand observation – in other words, one or more visits to the work site.

### **Planning the Essay**

As we will discuss in class, you should approach this essay as if you were an investigative reporter or a journalist writing a "story" for a newspaper or magazine (sometimes called a "feature story").

Plan and conduct your "field research" on a job, career or business with one overriding question in mind: what's the story?

In the essay, "Behind Stone Walls," which you will read as you prepare for this assignment, the "story" is that prisons and inmates are not all as horrible as people tend to think.

In the student essay, "Librarian by Day," which you also may read, the "story" is that not all librarians are fussy and proper (at least not after work!).

The first step in writing the essay is to come up with a good idea and plan. You need to consider basing the essay on a job, career or business that interests you.

Are you interested in being a teacher, a doctor, a social worker, a police officer, a fireman, a CPA, a trial lawyer, a broadcaster, a real estate agent, a wedding planner, an

---

\* As an alternative to the main assignment, you can take the essay in an "ethnographic" direction and investigate a group, subculture or organization on campus or in the community that intrigues you—for example, a fraternity or sorority, the staff of the student newspaper, a club, a religious group, or a political group.

interior designer, a politician, a hairdresser, an architect, a physical therapist, a commercial fisherman, a charter boat captain? (Or perhaps you are just curious about what being a teacher or doctor is really like?)

Any job, career or business that you want to learn more about can be the basis for this essay. However, you also need to think about access to the information that will develop a "surprising" or revealing "insider's view," and story. Can you line up the interview (or interviews) that you will need? Will you be able to make a "site visit" and include firsthand observations in your essay?

The point of departure for the essay (the issue) typically will evolve from the following:

- Find out to what extent common stereotypes, preconceptions or misconceptions about the job (career/business) that you intend to write about conform to the "reality" – in other words, the factual information that you uncover through your field research?

The goal of your essay (thesis or view) will be to:

- Identify and develop a surprising or unexpected feature of the job (career/business)—for example, a set of challenges, disadvantages, hardships or rewards—that are not commonly known or that you might not have been aware of prior to doing your research.

You may use *some* library sources for general *background*, but as noted above, the essay mainly should be based on "field" research (also called "primary" research). That is, you are required to conduct interviews, and if possible visit your chosen location and take detailed notes of your observations.

If you are interested in becoming a high school teacher, you may decide to interview one specific teacher and you may arrange to spend some time observing at a local high school. If you are interested in becoming a doctor, perhaps you can interview one or two doctors and spend the day in their office or hospital observing.

### **Basing a "Surprising Thesis" on Preconceptions, Misconceptions and Stereotypes**

Regardless of the job (etc.) that you choose to research and write about, the focus and goal of the essay should be to develop an "insider's view" – i.e. surprising or unexpected challenges, drawbacks, rewards and so forth. This "insider's view" will be the basis for your thesis and "story."

For example, is being a stock broker – analyzing volatile markets and making investment decisions for clients – as exciting and lucrative a profession as it might appear to some?

What about owning and operating a restaurant? To a casual diner, a restaurant is a "people business" that might appear relaxing and congenial. Is it? The truth is, the "people" side of the business – serving and hobnobbing with customers, hosting parties – may not always be as congenial as it might seem.

Customers can be demanding, overly-critical, obnoxious, unruly. Employees - chefs,

maitre d's, bartenders and servers - can steal or be testy and disruptive. Public health inspectors can abuse their authority and demand bribes. Moreover, many restaurant owners who cannot afford or find competent and honest managers, work sixteen-hour days or more, six or seven days a week, juggling stressful responsibilities and tasks that include ordering beverages, condiments, fresh food and supplies every day; revising menus, scheduling staff, picking up the slack when an employee calls in sick or the restaurant gets "slammed" by an unexpected crush of customers; overseeing the preparations in the kitchen, meeting with inspectors, doing the "books," paying bills, etc.

### **Preparation, Time Management and Research**

Time management is extremely important for this assignment. You should decide on a topic as soon as possible so that you can schedule your interviews or site visits.

Also, make sure early on that you can get the information that you need to make the essay interesting and meaningful—in other words, that you can arrange to interview a relevant person or persons, and if possible, visit the work site.

In order to make the essay truly exploratory, do not base the essay on a family business or a parent's job. However, you might consider the family business or a parent's job of a good friend of yours, or a perhaps a neighbor's job or business.

### **Tips on Conducting an Interview**

Since conducting an effective interview will be an important part of your research, here are a few tips:

- Don't be afraid to ask: You might think that certain people are too important or busy to talk to you. However, if you contact them in a professional manner as a college student working on a research assignment, you will find that most will appreciate the importance of what you are doing and will be happy to talk to you.
- Be prepared for the interview: Write down and review your questions in advance. During the interview, stay "on point" – focused on your objectives and what you are trying to learn.
- Conduct the interview over the phone (or by email), if necessary: A face-to-face meeting is nice but can be hard to schedule. Journalists conduct most of their interviews over the phone, or sometimes by email. Consider doing the same.

### **Organizing the Essay**

For most students, a "closed form" structure will work best for this essay.

In the introduction, preconceptions, misconceptions and/or stereotypical views about the job, career or business often will serve as the central issue.

A surprising insight or observation about the job etc. (a surprising challenge, reward, and so forth) will serve as a thesis.

Other alternatives for organizing the essay will be covered in class.

### **Reading**

In preparation for writing your essay, it is essential that you read the following sections of the Allyn & Bacon Guide:

- Chapter 7, "Writing an Informative Essay or Report," on pages 157 to 167 (give special attention to pages 164 to 166 - "Informative (and Surprising) Magazine or Academic Articles"). Also, read the "Writing Project" on pages 171 to 175.
- Chapter 24, "Analyzing Field Research Data," pages 737 – 750 to prepare for collecting data through observation and interview.
- Chapter 18 "Composing and Revising Closed-Form Prose" - pp. 577 – 615.
- Two student essays, "Librarian by Day" and "Fit for Your Trust," both posted under "Student Writing" on the course web site.

### **Assignment Objectives**

- This essay assignment will give you a chance to learn more about a job, career or business that interests you.
- The assignment also will help you develop your research skills - in this case "primary" research based on interviews and observation.
- The assignment will give you exposure to writing a "reader-relevant," thesis-based essay, which in most cases will have a "closed form" structure. (See pages 9 -12 in your textbook.)

### **Grading Criteria**

In grading your essay, your instructor will consider the following:

- Does the essay have an effective opening? Does it present a compelling issue or question (for example, a stereotype) to draw readers in?
- Does the essay provide detailed and convincing thesis support?
- Does the essay give classmates and other readers a meaningful, surprising, "insider's" view on the job, career or business?
- Is the essay based on "field research" – interviews and observations? (Essays based on library or Internet research will not receive a passing grade.)

Other considerations:

- Is the essay well-organized?

- Is the essay well-edited? In other words, have you checked your paragraphing, your punctuation, grammar, spelling, word choice and formatting in order to make the essay reader-friendly and enjoyable?

### **Length and Format**

The essay's word count should be approximately 1000 words – i.e. 4 pages.

Make sure that the essay has a title, and that you observe the formatting guidelines in the course syllabus.