

# A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO COLLEGE WRITING

by Robert Saba

## CHAPTER 3

### Planning Essays as Communication \*

#### Planning: An Indispensable Step

If you have ever watched an old Hollywood movie about a writer or journalist, you may recall a scene that goes like this: the hero or heroine sits in front of a typewriter with a burning idea for a story, but instead of dashing it off, ends up ripping pages out of the typewriter and tossing them into the wastebasket. Most of us have experienced that kind of frustration and would be happy to avoid it. Is that really possible or are false starts and frustration an inevitable part of writing?

You can begin to answer the question yourself if you remember the stages of writing that we reviewed in the last chapter. You will note that the movie writer jumps into the draft without planning. Yes, he or she has a good idea and feels inspired, but something isn't clicking; the idea and inspiration aren't enough.

Usually the movie writer will get the story on track. In real life, if a writer is persistent enough, he or she will do the same. But the hit and miss approach can be time-consuming and stressful. It's much like straying from a marked path in the woods, getting lost and trying to find your way out. You're happy when you finally do, but until then it

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\* The writing exercises included in this chapter and at the end are offered only as examples. I will make final decisions about them based on class testing and student responses.

is no fun thrashing about wondering where you are, what direction you are going in, or whether you'll find your way out before dark. You could kick yourself for straying from the path and swear you'll never make that mistake again.

The equivalent of the marked path for a writer is having an effective plan. But how to devise a plan is far from self-evident. Writing instructors and textbooks equate planning with a set of activities that include brainstorming, clustering, freewriting (coming up with topics and ideas), outlining and organizing. These are useful and important activities but they do not alone or in combination add up to an effective plan. What is planning? How is it done? In this chapter, I will answer those questions and present some basic concepts that you can apply to planning all of your college essays.

### Understanding Communication Goals

Planning implies having a goal. Writers at all levels share two simple, subjective goals: they want to finish the task at hand and do it well. For a college student the latter usually means getting an "A." For Shakespeare it meant writing a hit play for the London stage. These goals are real and understandable but don't help a writer plan.

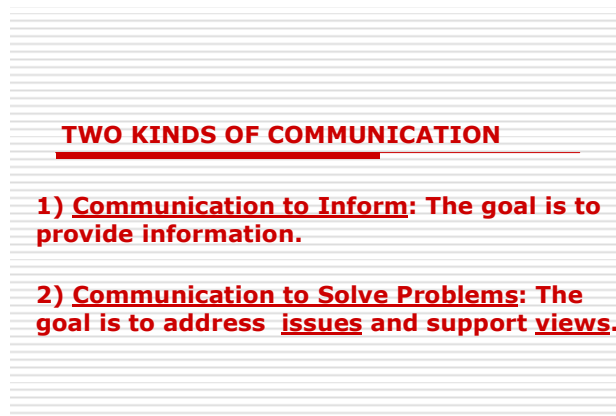
Effective planning starts with seeing beyond subjective goals and including readers in your thinking process—in other words, it starts with understanding why you are writing and what you are trying to accomplish. Most of us read much more than we write, yet when we have a writing task in front of us, we tend to focus on being a writer and forget what we know about being readers. When we do that, we short-circuit the planning process, because writing, as I have stressed before, is a form of communication.

A writer's most fundamental and worthy goal is to connect to readers in a meaningful and satisfying way. Doing that is difficult, though. Readers aren't a

convenient abstraction. They are real people of different ages, with different backgrounds, interests and temperaments. Like you, they are finicky about what they read. They are on the look out for reasons not to read an essay, story, article or whatever. Of course, no essay will appeal to every reader, just as no movie, no matter how highly acclaimed, ever appeals to each and every viewer. But good movies do achieve a positive consensus and good writing, good essays, can do the same. The key is to understand what writing as communication involves and plan your essays with that in mind—in other words, to base your plan on what readers are looking for.

### Two Kinds of Communication

Communication can be analyzed in complex ways, but for the purposes of planning an essay that connects to readers, it is enough to distinguish between two basic kinds—1) communication to inform (to provide information), and 2) communication to solve problems (to address issues and support views).



The first kind of communication—communication to inform—is the kind we do most often in our day-to-day lives. We call a friend, settle on a time and place to meet for dinner, chat about how a class went, about a movie or a ballgame we saw, a new gadget or outfit we bought, a road trip we took or the latest gossip about an old acquaintance.

This kind of information can be useful, congenial or entertaining. Most of us enjoy providing it and do so with ease.

The second kind of communication—communication to solve problems—is trickier. You call your friend, not because you want to set up a rendezvous or chat, but because you have a problem that you need to get off your chest and hope to resolve. Your friend has been dating someone you dislike. You've refrained from saying anything, but over time you've observed your friend changing to please this other person, and not for the better—behaving in self-centered or self-destructive ways. This behavior is affecting your friendship. You've decided that you have to say something about it—address the issue as you see it and express your point of view.

Now, you are involved in problem-solving communication and face a conversation whose outcome matters and that has to be handled thoughtfully. Most of us are not especially good at this kind of communicating and don't do it with ease or pleasure, but it does command our attention because we recognize its importance. This is the kind of communication we have in mind when we refer to “communication skills” and people being “good communicators.”

Communicating to solve problems always commands our attention because it arises from a need that is more significant than providing or receiving information. Whether we like it or not, trying to solve problems is almost the definition of life. Our lives are full of problems, an endless succession of problems, big and small; problems at home, at work, at school—financial problems, social problems, transportation problems, romantic problems, moral problems, spiritual problems, image problems and so on. Even in pursuit of hobbies and fun—anything from scuba diving to golf to paintball to dancing

to Internet role playing games—we are faced with problems and challenged to find solutions.

In short, information is interesting and important when we need it, but problems resonate more and engage us on a deeper level. We connect to them even when they are not *our* immediate problems because we recognize that they might be someday, or at the very least, that they have an indirect relevance to our lives. Divorce, for example, is not a problem that directly affects many college students, since most students are not married. However, statistically the majority of students will marry someday. In any case, many of the problems that lead to divorce—dishonesty, incompatibility, selfishness, disrespect or lack of assertiveness—are relevant to all kinds of relationships.

### **For Writing and Discussion**

#### **Communicating to Solve Problems**

Think about issues (or problems) in your life that you have tried to address and resolve through communication. Using the chart below, make a list of some of the issues. Identify the person or persons that you needed to speak to about the issue (your “audience”). Summarize the view or message that you put forth in order to resolve the issue. (Note that the categories overlap—for example, a parent also could be your “boss” at work. It is not important where you list a particular issue.)

After listing some issues, choose one, and in a paragraph or two, elaborate on the circumstances. Why was the issue important? How hard was it for you to talk about it? Were you able to resolve it or not? Looking back, do you wish that you had done or said anything differently? Share your reflections with two or three of your classmates.

#### **CATEGORIES**

#### **ISSUE**

#### **AUDIENCE**

#### **VIEW**

#### **Close Relationships**

**(Parents, Other Family  
Members, Friends,  
Significant Others)**

**Weekend curfew - Your mother/father - Old enough/responsible**

<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>AUDIENCE</b>	<b>VIEW</b>
<p><b><u>Social Relationships</u></b></p> <p>(<u>Roommates, Teammates,</u> <u>Members of a Club, Band,</u> <u>Religious Group or Other</u> <u>Organization</u>)</p>			
<p><b><u>School</u></b></p> <p>(<u>Teachers,</u> <u>Classmates,</u> <u>Administrators,</u> <u>Coaches</u>)</p>			
<p><b><u>Work</u></b></p> <p>(<u>Supervisors,</u> <u>Co-workers,</u> <u>Customers</u>)</p>			

### College Writing and Communication to Solve Problems

Communication to solve problems is the essence of college writing and the key concept for planning college essays and research papers. Problem-solving communication—writing to address issues and support views—exercises the most important skills that we associate with a meaningful, college education: critical thinking, research and analysis. More broadly, it involves us in the kind of writing or speaking task that challenges communicators in the professional world and commands the attention of an audience.

For example, the most challenging writing tasks in any business or corporate environment are problem-solving in essence. They address issues and support views. The same is true of writing in the sciences and social sciences. Artistic forms of communication—songs, novels, movies—invariably address problems, and have issues

and views at their core. The great speeches we remember as milestones of spoken communication are no different—the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s “The only thing we have to fear...,” Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner,” or Reagan’s “Tear down this wall.” None of these speeches is remembered for providing information or as a mere exercise in eloquence. They were conceived and delivered to address an issue or issues and present a relevant view or views: Lincoln to reunite a torn nation; Roosevelt to bolster a worried, discouraged one; Kennedy and Reagan to rally repressed populations against tyrannical regimes.

In college, writing instructors and professors look for essays and research papers that reflect real problem-solving goals. True, some professors may take it for granted that you understand this standard. A professor may give you a general topic area to write about without specifying a problem-solving goal for you. Even so, as a general rule, professors look for and expect problem solving in your written work. Their training, teaching, research and writing are steeped in problem-solving goals. Problem solving is a way of life for them. In short, in any college discipline, when you plan an essay or research paper with problem-solving goals in mind, you always will energize the assignment, and enhance its meaning and value.

### The Essence of Planning: Addressing an Issue and Supporting a View

Since problem solving presupposes an issue creating the problem, the first step in planning an essay (or any other compelling communication task) is to identify the *issue* at the core of the problem. If a writer can’t identify an issue, it is unlikely that he or she will be able to write a focused essay, let alone plan one.

With that said, the relevance of addressing issues is incomplete without the second part of the problem-solving process—supporting views or viewpoints about the issue (the equivalent of a *thesis* in academic writing). Even when readers identify with an issue and can learn something from a discussion about it, they ultimately are looking for and expect applicable answers, insights, arguments or perspectives. In other words, readers need and expect a view or viewpoint to complete the communication process.

Let's examine this idea in a non-academic context. Say you work for a corporation and are asked to author or co-author a report about sagging sales or the cost/benefits of a potential acquisition. Your report would not be complete or satisfying if it simply analyzed, described or presented data about the problem. Readers of your report would expect a view: how to turn sales around, or whether or not the potential acquisition is a good idea.

Artistic communication functions the same way. Stories, songs, movies are based on problems, launched by issues. But the audience needs or expects some kind of resolution or closure—in essence a view or viewpoint expressed implicitly or explicitly by what the artist and his work leave us with at the end. Shakespeare's *Othello* revolves around the issue of sexual jealousy, but its tragic ending—Othello murdering his innocent wife—reflects Shakespeare's view that human values like honor, love, trust and faith are easy prey to evil and hate. The song "Unconditional Love" by rap legend Tupac takes us through a life full of struggles and problems, but also presents the rapper's view of dealing with them. Roman Polanski's movie *Rosemary's Baby* portrays a woman who is used by a shallow, heartless husband and his satanic friends, but the movie ultimately gives voice to the director's profound reverence for motherhood and women's strength.



In the absence of these views, audiences would be left confounded and disappointed. The great Presidential speeches I mentioned earlier express cogent views as well. Those speeches don't just tell us what the problem is; they propose solutions. They would not be remembered if the speaker merely described the problem the nation or world was facing: the speeches are remembered as great because they express stirring and convincing views that people took to heart.

Essays also need to encapsulate both parts of the concept to be effective: they need an issue to get the reader invested, and they need a view that moves the issue in a problem-solving direction. An essay that defines and explores a relevant issue—let's say the rapid melting of polar ice caps—and does not express some kind of view, for example, that the melting has significant geoclimatic implications or not, will perplex or disappoint most readers. An essay that deals with a rocky relationship between a step-child and a step-parent and vividly describes hurtful incidents and bitter arguments, but does not express a view, an approach to conflict-resolution or self-preservation or moving on, will again perplex or disappoint readers.

To complete an effective communication process—in other words, write an effective essay—readers expect a writer to present an issue and a viewpoint.

It is accurate to say: *no issue, no essay*. Without an issue, the reader will be hard put to grasp a clear and compelling reason for reading.

It is also accurate to say: *no viewpoint, no essay*. Without a view, the reader will feel mystified or shortchanged.

## **What Is an Essay?**

□ An Essay = A Central Issue + A Viewpoint

This does not mean that to plan an essay you always need to formulate a view before you begin writing. Whether you should or not depends to some extent on the kind of essay you plan to write, a point I will clarify in the next chapter and address in Part Two of the book. For now, suffice it to say that, to complete your planning, it usually is preferable to have an initial or provisional view, but not always necessary. Sometimes a meaningful view will evolve and crystallize through the thinking, focusing, analysis and/or research that drafting and revising the essay requires. What you always need to do from the beginning is to identify and define the issue that your essay will address, and know that your goal is to present and support a view.

### **For Writing and Discussion \***

- 1) Read Paul Theroux's "Fresh-Air Fiend" (see "Additional Readings"). Make a note of the first issue that you perceive in the essay. Quote the exact words that raise the issue for you. What does Theroux say to reinforce and elaborate on the issue?

At what point in the essay does Theroux's view about the issue begin to emerge? What is the view? How does he support it? Is the view relevant to general readers, or only to Theroux and perhaps other professional writers? Discuss your observations with two or three of your classmates.

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\* The reading selections are offered only as examples.

- 2) Read the lyrics to the song “Stay (Faraway, So Close)” by U2. Make a case for what you think is the central issue that the song is about, and the view that the songwriter is trying to express. Quote specific lines to support your points.

Based on the central issue and view that you identified, do you think the song is relevant to a general audience? Discuss your analysis of the song with two or three of your classmates.

### Distinguishing Essays from Writing Exercises

Keep in mind that the concepts I have explained in this chapter only apply to writing assignments that have real communication goals. In college that includes essays and research papers (the latter being essays that incorporate research). Not all college writing assignments, even in writing classes, are essays or research papers. Some assignments are designed strictly to provide information or for practice. For example, if your instructor wants you to practice descriptive writing, he might ask you to “describe a memorable concert, rally, party, or other social event that you attended.”

An assignment like that is an exercise, not an essay, similar to a finger exercise for the piano. It is not a communication task in the problem-solving sense, because it lacks a central issue; it has no objective beyond re-creating the experience and transferring information about it. Perhaps a reader is interested in the information, perhaps not. There is no issue and view that defines the writing task, no inherent problem to address.

However, if you conceptualized the exercise as more than a description, that is, if you planned it with an issue and view in mind, you could transform it into an essay, a communication task with problem-solving implications. Perhaps your memorable concert experience involved a controversial genre of music, “thrash metal” or “hip hop,” a genre

that you consider misunderstood or underappreciated (an issue), and you conceptualize your description, not just to re-create the concert, but to show that the genre has artistic value and meaning (a view). Then you would be planning an essay.

If your concert experience involved a brawl or rampant drug use (issues) that you want to describe and express a view about, again you would be conceiving an essay, rather than just an exercise.

As we go forward, keep these two points in mind:

1) Planning an essay means *conceptualizing* it, something different from generating ideas, outlining and organizing.

2) Conceptualizing means defining an essay as *issue + view*—in other words, understanding that essays communicate to solve problems by addressing issues and supporting views.

## THE ESSENTIALS OF PLANNING

□ **Planning = Conceptualizing**

□ **Conceptualizing = Defining Issue and View**

### Planning Different Kinds of Essays

The planning strategy that I advocate assumes that essays share a common conceptual structure (issue + view). Yet, when we write and read them, they seem more different than similar. They touch on infinite issues, in a variety of styles, and follow dissimilar and complex organizational patterns.

These differences make essays interesting. But for a student writer trying to get a handle on how to write good essays, the differences can be perplexing. In a writing class, you likely will be given a sequence of assignments that present different challenges and ask you to practice different skills. In your other college classes, you will receive different assignments from different professors with different rules, guidelines, priorities, requirements and advice. Trying to adapt to all of these assignments and harmonize the objectives can be one of the hardest and most frustrating challenges a college student has to face.

Let's assume you recently wrote a very common type of college essay in your writing class, an essay analyzing and responding to a "text." The text in this case was a newspaper article about teaching "intelligent design" in high school biology classes. The central view of your essay—in other words, your thesis—was that the writer of the article did not make a persuasive case. Your view—in other words, your thesis—was that the writer was biased, used a false analogy, dismissed students' free-speech rights, and made several assumptions that lacked factual support. You supported your thesis with three pages of analysis.

When you turned in your essay, you thought it was excellent, but your instructor assigned a B. In his comments, he said your arguments were too one-sided and disorganized. You mentioned a false analogy in your thesis but never discussed it in the

“body” of your essay. You ignored a couple of credible points that the author put forth. Your paragraphs needed better transitions, and you wrote some run-on sentences. In sum, your essay was good but it could have been better.

Since you thought the essay was excellent, the grade probably disappointed you. After reading over your instructor’s comments, perhaps you agree there are problems with the organization, the paragraph transitions and run-ons, yet you do not get the comment about ignoring the author’s credible arguments. Weren’t you supposed to support YOUR view?

Now, if your next assignment is to write another response essay, you have a good idea of what to do to improve the result. You realize that some readers, notably your instructor, expect you to acknowledge an author’s credible points, even if you disagree with his or her overall position. However, more than likely, your next essay assignment will be different from the one you just finished. Getting a new assignment may be refreshing, but also presents a new set of problems for you.

Here are just a few possibilities for the next assignment in a composition class:

- Write an essay about an experience that defined you or changed your life in some way. (This assignment usually is called a narrative essay or personal narrative.)
- Write an essay that uses “field research” to enlighten readers about a group, subculture or student organization on your campus—a fraternity or sorority, a religious or political group, the staff of the student newspaper, a club. (This type of essay often is called

"exploratory" and teaches students to use "primary" research, instead of traditional library sources.)

- Write an essay that teaches your readers how to do something that you know how to do well. (This kind of essay often is called a "process analysis"—sometimes identified as one of the popular "modes of discourse," along with "comparison and contrast," "classification," "cause and effect," and so on.)

All of these assignments are quite different from each other and from the analytical response to a text that you just wrote, but the basic planning concept is the same: issue + view.

Chances are you did not plan your response essay using that concept, but to the extent that your essay was effective, you put the concept into effect: you identified an issue (in other words, the persuasiveness of the article) and supported a view, or thesis (your negative assessment).

To plan any of the new assignments, you first need to define the central issue that the new essay will address. In Part Two of this guide, you will find detailed explanations of how to apply the principles outlined in this chapter to different kinds of essays that appear to have little or nothing in common on the surface. For now, let's take a brief look at how the principles apply to one of the three essays mentioned above—the narrative essay or personal narrative.

Some students enjoy narrative essay assignments; they appreciate the opportunity to write about themselves and are happy to find out that narrative writing can be part of a

college writing curriculum. On the other hand, some students find narrative essays frustrating or unpleasant to write. The purpose of the assignment strikes them as vague or open-ended. The narrative essay seems to require and reward creativity rather than practical skills.

The first problem a narrative assignment presents is, what do you write about? You can make a case for almost any experience defining you or changing your life in some way—anything from adopting a dog to your sweet sixteen party to a vacation in Spain to hitting a home run in a baseball game. To come up with good ideas, you probably will need to think about your life and perhaps do some freewriting and brainstorming. But how do you evaluate the ideas you come up with and determine if they are any “good”?

The key is to remember that you are writing an essay, which means that you are writing for your readers. You will have a hard time connecting to readers unless your essay addresses an issue and presents a view.

For example, let's say you do some thinking, freewriting or brainstorming and one of the ideas you come up with has to do with an experience you consider truly important—finding and adopting your dog and proverbial best friend, Emma. You plan to describe how you were out riding your bike one day and came across a stray, unkempt, funny-looking mutt that you fell in love with at first sight. You brought the mutt home, named her and cared for her. You will go on to describe how Emma changed your life, how caring for her made you feel needed and important, how she filled a vacuum and has become a constant positive, always happy to see you when you come home, always eager to interact and play.



Is the story of you and Emma good material for a narrative essay? I don't ask the question dismissively, because I love dogs. In fact, Emma is the name of *my* dog. I miss her when I travel. I even have had the ridiculous desire to talk to her on the phone. In my opinion, just about anyone with a heart should be able to "relate" to the story of finding and adopting Emma.

In truth, almost any idea, or subject, can lend itself to a compelling essay if it is conceived and developed creatively enough. Memorable essays have been written about snowflakes, bees, songs and dolls.\* But unless you base your narrative about Emma on a clear issue, I am not convinced that many readers would really want to read it. Possibly some would, but in the absence of well-defined communication goals, most probably would not. They already know what it all means. There is no compelling issue to connect to, nothing to learn beyond information about the writer, the writer's less-than-complete life and a loveable dog that semi-completes it.

However, if the experience unfolded a little differently, or as you planned your essay you remembered something that you initially forgot (or repressed), the dynamics of the idea could change. Say while you were cleaning up Emma and feeding her in the garage, your dad came home from work. He glared at the stray dog, then at you: "No way! That mutt isn't staying. I'm calling Animal Services." Now you have an issue involving a battle of wills, family relations, authority and so forth, an issue readers can identify with and connect to: you want to keep the dog. Your dad doesn't want it around. Emma's fate—being adopted or "put to sleep"—hangs in the balance. Let's say that you eventually prevailed, but it took some doing; it wasn't easy. Readers will want to find out

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\* "The Colloid and the Crystal" by Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Nuptial Flight" (*from The Life of the Bee*) by Maurice Maeterlinck, "Tipperary" by George Santayana, and "Some Reflections on Dolls" by Rainer Maria Rilke.

what happened. With an issue in focus, you have an idea that can sustain a compelling narrative essay.

Because you experienced the issue, you also have the ability to make your narrative express and support a view. You had a role in how the situation played out. You know what you did right or wrong or could have done better or would do differently if you had to face a similar situation again. You learned something, and as a result, you have something to teach your readers.

Of course, if you conceptualize your essay like this, it will no longer be about Emma, although she will play an essential role. The essay will be more about you and your father, but it will address the stated objective of the assignment in an interesting and original way—how the experience of finding Emma defined you or changed your life.

### **For Writing and Discussion**

#### **Planning Different Kinds of Essays**

1) **RESPONDING TO A TEXT**

Working with two or three of your classmates, plan a response to the newspaper column “When Big Father/Big Mother Spy on Children” by Ellen Goodman.

Identify the central issue and view that Goodman presents in her column, then evaluate the case that she makes. The persuasiveness of her case is the issue that will launch your response. What will be your view? Has Goodman recognized a real

problem or is it exaggerated? Are there gaps in her arguments? Has she adequately presented parents' concerns and motives? How will you support your view? What experiences or observations of your own will you include in your evaluation?

2) WRITING ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE THAT DEFINED YOU

Freewrite or brainstorm about experiences in your life that marked or defined you in some way.

Working with two or three classmates, choose one experience that you think would lend itself to an interesting essay. With your classmates' help, conceptualize the essay using the principles discussed in this chapter. What is the central issue that will launch and define the essay? Can you project a view or viewpoint? In other words, did you learn anything important from the experience that you can share with your readers and that might prove illuminating to them?

### Beyond Planning

Once your plan for an essay is clear—that is, once you have defined the issue and view of your essay—the next step is to put the plan into effect. That means outlining, organizing, drafting, or some combination thereof.

How to go about organizing is the focus of the next chapter. Organizing essays can frustrate writers at all levels, students in particular. Whether you organize from an outline, as many writers like to do, or do it as you draft and revise, the key point to keep in mind is that effective and efficient organizing is the product of a plan, not a method of planning or a substitute for it.

Students who have been taught to organize from an outline and assume that they are planning when they do that are usually planning the wrong way. Instead of defining communication goals, they are trying to make the essay fit a format—some tired template (introduction, body and conclusion) or variation of the five-paragraph theme. This kind of

mechanical organizing puts an essay into a straitjacket that limits its vitality and ability to connect.

Good essays, whether they are written by students or professional writers, always have a fresh, organic feel and flow to them—not the dull, mechanical feel of contrived, preconceived paragraphs. At the same time, good essays strike us as focused and well-organized. What keeps them focused and organized, in spite of their organic feel, is planning, the conceptual framework of issue and view that defines the direction, goals and boundaries of the essay. Planning creates a space in which a writer can compose with the freedom to be fresh, creative, probing and real without getting lost or losing focus.

Inasmuch as I began this chapter by discussing movies, I will bring the discussion full circle and end the same way. It may seem far-fetched to compare essays and movies, but they share important communication concepts and goals. Think of your plan for an essay as jump-starting and guiding the essay exactly as a plot or storyline jump-starts and guides a movie. The concept of issue and view is your essay's plot. It gives your essay energy, movement, direction and a goal.

In James Bond movies, when “M” calls in Bond for a new assignment, the movie presents an issue that the audience immediately connects to: an arch villain or evil organization threatens England and the free world. Bond's mission is to destroy the villain or organization. Will he succeed or fail? Will he live or die? Realistically, we know he will succeed and live, but the movie tries to disrupt our assumptions and dramatize the issue. Often the opening scenes portray the villain as all but invincible, or show Bond struggling to adapt to new equipment or botching a training exercise. Indeed, we always see Bond as human, not a superman or android or Terminator, but one of us, someone who is fallible, who would rather live than die, who has a sense of humor, and if

he had a choice, would rather “chill” and enjoy life—relax, gamble, flirt with M’s secretary, Miss Money Penny—than tangle with arch villains and evil organizations. Still, he does what he is tasked to do without complaining, because like most of us, he loves his country, and beyond that, he is a professional. His sense of duty and professionalism define him more than anything else.

As the plot unfolds and moves to a conclusion, the issues that launch the movie are addressed and resolved in one way or another. The way they are addressed and resolved translates to views about the issues that we, the audience, consciously or unconsciously grasp.

Of course, Bond is successful (good conquers evil) but only after much struggle, adversity and doubt. In addition, we find out that Bond’s sense of duty and professionalism are not just noble personality traits; they are the qualities that enable him to triumph over his adversaries. His sense of duty—carrying out his mission for his country—is more important to him than life itself. He will make the ultimate sacrifice to succeed and will fail only if he is destroyed.

We also find out that professionalism, more than courage, tenacity or resourcefulness, is the reason for his success. He knows his tradecraft. He may make mistakes or miscalculations, but he is always focused, skilled and prepared.

Finally, perhaps the most important and endearing view conveyed is that Bond never loses his love of life, that quintessential human trait that makes him one of us. Even in the face of treachery, danger and death, he keeps his sense of humor and enjoys every minute of life—the well-made martini, the gourmet dinner, the high-stakes action at the baccarat table, the beautiful woman with the mysterious smile, the sunrise over a tropical beach.

In certain, essential ways, the James Bond movies that we know and love speak to us like essays.

When essays are written to communicate—when they present issues and views that make them relevant to people and life—they move, entertain and influence us as movies do.

### For Critical Thinking and Discussion

#### Movies as Communication: Identifying Issues and Views

##### OPTION ONE

Working with two or three of your classmates, collaborate on analyzing a movie as communication.

Your first option will be one of the most popular movies of all time, *The Wizard of Oz*.

You can select a different classic or audience favorite – for example, *The Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Harry Potter*. However, if you do, you may need to find a plot summary or synopsis that your group can refine and develop. Otherwise, you will have to be familiar enough with the movie to summarize the story in some detail from memory.

In your group, read and discuss the plot summary of *The Wizard of Oz* provided on page [24]. Add details that you consider important. As you do that, identify issues that launch the story and help us connect with Dorothy and the other main characters. Note, for example, that Dorothy's disenchantment and wishful thinking at the beginning of the movie are issues that an audience can identify with and connect to. Ironically, the wish fulfillment that occurs when Dorothy lands in Oz turns out to be an even larger issue than her humdrum life in Kansas, a survival issue that makes her want to return home.

How are the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion relevant to Dorothy's issues and her story?

Review the challenges and setbacks that Dorothy and her three friends face on their journey and how they deal with them. What views about Dorothy and her friends begin to emerge? How do the events that lead up to the end of the story and the ending itself clarify views about the characters? Do Dorothy and her friends grow or change in any significant ways? What do they learn about themselves and life that they did not know in the beginning?

To complete your analysis, collaborate on a statement (a page or so) about “the movie as

communication.” List the key issues that the movie addresses (for example, disenchantment, wishful thinking, misfortune, inadequacy, fear), and the views that the movie conveys about those issues.

How is the idea of “somewhere over the rainbow” different at the end of the movie from what it was at the beginning?

As you begin your analysis and discussion, consider these remarks about the movie by film critic Roger Ebert:

*The Wizard of Oz*...somehow seems real and important in a way most movies don't. Is that because we see it first when we're young? Or simply because it is a wonderful movie? Or because it sounds some buried universal note, some archetype or deeply felt myth?

I lean toward the third possibility, that the elements in *The Wizard of Oz* powerfully fill a void that exists inside many children. For kids of a certain age, home is everything, the center of the world. But over the rainbow, dimly guessed at, is the wide earth, fascinating and terrifying....

This deep universal appeal explains why so many different people from many backgrounds have a compartment of their memory reserved for *The Wizard of Oz*.

Salman Rushdie, growing up in Bombay, remembers that seeing the film at 10 “made a writer of me.” Terry McMillan, as an African-American child in northern Michigan, “completely identified when no one had time to listen to Dorothy.” Rushdie wrote that the “film's driving force is the inadequacy of adults, even of good adults, and how the weakness of grownups forces children to take control of their own destinies.” McMillan learned about courage, about “being afraid but doing whatever it was you set out to do anyway.”

After composing your statement, share your conclusions with other peer groups in your class.

### OPTION TWO

As an alternative to analyzing a classic movie, tell your instructor and classmates about a good movie that you have seen in the theaters recently. If two or three of your classmates have seen and enjoyed the same movie, form a discussion group with them, and following the guidelines above, collaborate on analyzing the movie as communication.

### Plot Summary of *The Wizard of Oz*

Dorothy, a schoolgirl who lives on a farm in Kansas, has daydreams about a better place—“somewhere over the rainbow.” While she is coping with mundane problems in her life, a tornado hits her house and sweeps her, her house and her dog, Toto, away to the magical land of Oz. Unlike Kansas, which the movie depicts in black and white, Oz is a world of dazzling beauty and colors, but not without evil and danger.

When Dorothy lands in Oz, her house falls on the Wicked Witch of the East. A good witch named Glinda tells Dorothy she has killed the Wicked Witch. Little people called Munchkins come out of hiding to celebrate Dorothy's arrival, but before the celebration is over, the dead witch's sister, the Wicked Witch of the West, bursts on the scene, claiming her sister's charmed, ruby slippers and menacing Dorothy. Glinda, the good witch, gives the slippers to Dorothy. The Wicked Witch leaves but vows to get even.

Frightened, Dorothy wants to return home. The good witch tells her she needs to ask the Wizard of Oz for help. To see him, Dorothy has to follow “the yellow brick road” to the “Emerald City.”

On her journey she meets up with a Scarecrow, a Tin Man and a Cowardly Lion. They all have issues of their own and join Dorothy on the journey to seek the Wizard's help. The Wicked Witch threatens and harasses them, but eventually they make it to the Emerald City, only to find that the Wizard, a disembodied head with a booming voice, is scary and unsympathetic: he will grant them their wishes only if they bring him the Wicked Witch's broomstick.

Resentful, Dorothy and her friends set off on their new mission. After some harrowing escapades, they manage to destroy the Wicked Witch and seize her broomstick. When they return to the Emerald City with it, the Wizard is not happy to see them again. While he huffs and puffs, Dorothy's dog, Toto, accidentally pulls aside a curtain near his station and exposes him as a fraud: not a mighty wizard but an ordinary man who has been using gadgetry to create an illusion of grandeur.

Dorothy and her friends are incensed, but the wizard redeems himself with some wit and double talk. He convinces Dorothy's friends that they already have the qualities they think they so badly need. He informs Dorothy that he came to Oz in a hot-air balloon and will take her back to Kansas in the same balloon. Unfortunately, as the balloon is taking off, Toto runs away, and in the confusion that follows, the wizard leaves without Dorothy and the dog. Dorothy fears that she is now stuck in Oz forever, but Glinda, the good witch, tells her that the ruby slippers can take her back to Kansas. Glinda has kept that information from Dorothy, so that Dorothy would learn an important lesson on her own: if she goes looking for her heart's desire again, she won't look any further than her own back yard.

Dorothy says goodbye to her friends in Oz. The ruby slippers take her and Toto home to Kansas. Back on her black-and-white farm, surrounded by her family, Dorothy is happy. She says, “I'm not gonna leave here ever, ever again.” Even so, some of the locals who stop by to see her look suspiciously like people she befriended in Oz.