

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

ENGL 421, 423 & 430 (or Vol)
Writing Mentors
PA: Lauren
FALL 2011

As a JEP student, your work in the community is similar to that of a social scientist who conducts “participant-observer” research. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, and you will write about your experiences on a weekly basis. These JEP Reflective Questions (RQs) are designed to help you focus your observations and critically reflect on your experiences in relation to what you are learning about in your USC course.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS HINTS:

1. **Read the questions first.** Reading the question before you go to your JEP site is required in order to answer many RQs, and having the questions on your mind will when at your site will help focus your observations and improve your response to all RQs.
2. **Write as soon as possible.** As soon as possible after leaving your site, sketch out your answer to that week’s RQ. Even just taking a few notes about some difficult moments, things that surprised you or highlights will make writing later much easier and will provide the examples and observations you need to write an outstanding journal.
3. **Proof your work.** Like any college-level writing assignment, proof your work to make sure the writing is clear, error-free, and that you answer the question at hand.
4. **Read and respond to your PA's comments.** The questions are related to and build upon one other. So refer back to previous responses and to take seriously your PA’s feedback each week and respond to the feedback by following the PAs suggestions.
5. **Be respectful.** Show your respect by being mindful of the limits of your experience and knowledge. Avoid generalizations and stereotypical explanations of behavior; in other words, do not make arguments that assume you know how someone else thinks or feels or use these assumptions to explain the way people act or their circumstances.
6. **Use examples.** Focus on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings and conversations (including direct quotes, when possible). Never make claims without evidence or examples!

YOUR ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

The core parts of each assignment (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in **bold**. Use the additional questions to guide/supplement your answer. Please refer to the PA agreement you received in training for instructions regarding journal due dates and format requirements. *Note that some weeks require longer responses and are worth more points.*

ESSAY ONE - “Preflection”
(1 page, 10 points, due: 9/26)

Please respond to **one** of the following prompts. Question #2 is for returning NAI writing mentors only.

#1: For students who HAVE NOT previously served as a JEP/NAI Writing Mentor
Please review this five-minute video featuring the writing mentoring program:

- <http://dornsife.usc.edu/videos/view/176/students-mentoring-students/>

To learn more about USC’s community programs (including JEP and NAI), please review the following USC websites:

- <http://communities.usc.edu/>
- <http://communities.usc.edu/education/nai.html>
- <http://www.usc.edu/jep/>

How will your work as a writing mentor this semester contribute to the goals of both JEP and NAI? Consider your unique status (as a teacher and as a student) as well as the unique social context in which you will be working (i.e., a mentor for high school students meeting in a USC-sponsored tutoring facility). What do you hope to achieve as an educator? **What do you hope to learn as a service-learning student? Do you have any concerns about your JEP role? What challenges do you anticipate?**

#2: For students who HAVE previously served as a JEP/NAI Writing Mentor

How will you take what you learned through working as a JEP/NAI Writing Mentor to improve your experience this time around for yourself and/or for your mentees? **Now that you know something about how the JEP/NAI Writing Mentoring Program works, what do you hope to learn from serving as a Writing Mentor again? What was the biggest obstacle you faced in your last JEP experience and how will you address that issue this time?** Make sure to use clear and detailed examples from your last JEP experience to explain your reasoning.

ESSAY TWO: Service Learning
(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/3)

If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.
— Booker T. Washington

The above quotation espouses the philosophy that people help themselves when they are helping others, which is also a key concept in service-learning. Reflect upon these quotations in the context of your JEP assignment. **How can you draw upon the lessons you are learning in your English literature course to mentor your students? How has your literature course helped prepare you for your mentoring work?** What kinds of skills and/or knowledge do you anticipate you will gain from this service-learning opportunity? What techniques from your English literature courses do you plan on sharing with your students? Have you considered how your JEP assignment might influence your own strengths and weaknesses as a writer, reader, mentor, and/or student?

Hint for JEP non-course credit volunteers: reflect on why you chose to volunteer as a writing mentor and what you hope to gain from this experience, and consider the lessons you have learned through your literature coursework in general.

ONE-ON-ONE CHATS:

(Scheduled with your PA, 10/10-10/14)

This week you will be meeting one-on-one with your Program Assistant to talk about your experiences in JEP. In place of a full-length essay this week, we ask that you take a few minutes to **jot down any questions, comments or concerns that you have about your JEP assignment so far**. For example, what are your tasks at the site and how are you adjusting to your new role? How are you relating to the people at your site? Are you having any problems with any of the logistical aspects of your assignment (e.g., schedule, transportation, Blackboard access, etc.)? *You do not need to submit these notes on Blackboard; rather, take them with you to your one-on-one chat with your PA so you are prepared and remember to talk about any issues that need to be addressed.*

ESSAY THREE: The Study of Literature

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/17)

Now that you know the students you are working with a little better and have more of an understanding of the challenges of your writing mentor assignment, **reflect on the importance and relevance of literature to your mentees. Think broadly, for instance, why should high school students learn about literature, beyond studying for a test or writing a paper? How would you categorize your mentees' attitudes towards literature and the study of literature?** What kind of relationship do your mentees have to reading and to the study of literary works? Think about what larger ideas or themes are communicated through literary works. Think also about your own experience learning about literature in high school: how was the subject matter made relevant to you then? Why is it important for your mentees to participate in close reading of literary texts, research primary and secondary sources in their analysis of the text, and learn how to properly structure an academic essay?

ESSAY FOUR: The Makings of a Classic

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 10/24)

The works you and your mentees discuss together have withstood the test of time in that they have been included on a high school or college syllabus. **Choose a text that you discussed with your NAI mentee(s). Based on your conversations this semester (in your college class discussions and in your mentoring sessions), why do you think this particular text has become a "classic"?** What aspects of this story continue to interest readers across racial, cultural, temporal, and educational lines? Why did you and your mentee(s) choose this particular text to discuss in your mentoring sessions? Hint: You might consider how this text has been interpreted in various film adaptations and other popular cultural venues.

BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION: Topic To Be Announced

(2 posts to Blackboard, 10 points, due: 10/31-11/4)

Instructions and topic will be posted on Blackboard.

Discussion purpose: Your weekly journals consistently reveal a wide range of interesting insights and abilities that result from your coursework and service-learning assignments. Since students participate in JEP from more than 100 different courses each semester, and rarely do all students in a particular class choose to enroll in JEP, we lack the opportunity to bring you together on a regular basis to learn from one another. As a result, the educational benefits of participating in JEP are limited mostly to your individual or small group experiences. This forum is designed to counter the relative isolation of JEP's service-learning assignments by providing an opportunity for you to share your insights with your peers.

ESSAY FIVE: Key Terms from your USC Literature Course

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 11/7)

A good understanding of basic terms is necessary for any literature scholar. Pick a word that relates to the material you have been covering in your USC English course (for example, genre, poem, prose, play) and look it up in your textbook and/or class notes. Now, look up the term in *The Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. This is available via USC's electronic resource page (<http://www.usc.edu/libraries/index.php#eresources>): search for *The Literature Resource Center* and access the website, select "Dictionaries" (found below the heading) and search for your term in the encyclopedia of literature. **Finally, develop your own, unique definition of the term, drawing from your experiences through JEP and your course. How has your JEP experience changed the meaning of this word for you?** Use specific examples from your writing mentoring experience in your answer.

Hint for JEP non-course credit volunteers: consider key terms related to education in general, or a term that you and your mentees specifically discussed together, and conduct your search for the definition of the term in a comprehensive dictionary such as Merriam-Webster (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>).

ESSAY SIX: Character Identification

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 11/14)

Compare your own experiences as a mentor with the experiences of a character you have studied (or written about) in your literature course this semester and/or discussed with your mentee. How have you and/or your mentees grown morally, psychologically, or otherwise as a result of the mentoring project? Do you personally relate to any of the characters' motivations, struggles, or stories? Hint: If you consider your journey as a kind of *bildungsroman*, it might help to look back at your first two journals to remind you of your state of mind as the mentoring partnership was just beginning.

Hint for JEP non-course credit volunteers: consider characters from books you have read, either through a course or in your personal reading, who might relate to your mentoring experiences.

ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections
(2.5-3 pages, 25 points, due: 11/21)

Take a look back at the essays you have written (make sure to use Blackboard, so you can see your PA's comments), and think about what you have learned over the past few weeks. One of the benefits of service-learning for participating students is "higher academic achievement." For this final essay, we want you to focus on this particular outcome vis a vis your JEP assignment. **First, consider the premise itself: how does participating in a service-learning program lead to higher academic achievement?** When does it fail to do so? Do students' outcomes vary by the subject matter of the course? Or do they vary by their experiences in the community? **Describe what you think are the most important factors in a service-learning assignment that ensure "higher academic achievement" for university students.**

Next, think about your JEP experiences in the context of your USC course: What is the most significant "academic" outcome of your JEP assignment? How has being a writing mentor affected your understanding of the course content, or improved your skills as a writer and as a student of literature? Why do you think your professor is giving academic credit for JEP? What are his or her goals for you? In answering these questions, make sure to use specific examples from your course. Think broadly about the relationship between JEP and your course. Even if you believe there is no direct connection, consider specific learning outcomes of being a writing mentor (e.g., helping your students with close reading of literary texts and how teaching helped you improve your own close reading skills; or better understanding how to use secondary sources in your own academic work). **How could the JEP/NAI Writing Mentoring program be improved for the benefit of future JEP and NAI students?** What worked well? What did not work well? How could the mentoring work be better linked up with your literature coursework?

The goal of this assignment is for you to think critically about the academic outcomes of service-learning and describe what you learned from your experience. If you are struggling to make the connection, as an alternative, explain, in detail, how you think the course or JEP could be redesigned to foster a more meaningful connection between your course and a service-learning experience in the community.