

Inclusive Essay Prompt Questions

The following are a few examples of assignment prompts from Writing 150 faculty members that explicitly ask students to draw on their own knowledge and communities, providing all students a point of entry into the assignment.

From Zen Dochterman’s Fall 2021 Writing Project 1, “Global Citizenship and National Belonging,” in the Writing 150 Globalization Thematic:

Globalization—the interconnectivity of people, economies, and technology at a worldwide scale—and thinking of oneself as a “global citizen,” has come under fire in recent years. The rise of far-right governments in the UK and U.S. has created a rise in “nation-first” and anti-immigrant policy, while the protectionist, populist Left has questioned the inequalities produced by a globalized capitalism. In 2020, the Coronavirus, or COVID-19 and the attendant economic recession further stifled the process of global integration. These events have caused some to wonder whether globalization has caused us to overlook the welfare of our home nations in favor of free trade and cultural integration. Others see these events as signs that only a truly worldwide perspective can help meet the challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to income inequality. This prompt asks you to reflect on whether you view yourself primarily as a national or global individual, weighing the risks and benefits of each side. Then, answer the following question:

What is the one main reason people in your home country should identify either globally or nationally?

From Rory Lukin’s Fall 2017 Writing Project 1, “The Globalization of the Local,” in the Writing 150 Globalization Thematic:

Required Reading

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, Introduction and Chapter 1

“Globalization,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Thomas Friedman, “The Globalization of the Local,” from *The World Is Flat*

Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Chapters 1 & 2

Premise

In his landmark exposition of globalization, the Pulitzer-prize winning economist Thomas Friedman wrote:



Here I was in Bangalore—more than five hundred years after Columbus sailed over the horizon, using the rudimentary navigational technologies of his day, and returned safely to prove definitively that the world was round—and one of India’s smartest engineers, trained at his country’s top technical institute and backed by the most modern technologies of his day, was essentially telling me that the world was flat—as flat as that screen on which he can host a meeting of his whole global supply chain. Even more interesting, he was citing this development as a good thing, as a new milestone in human progress and a great opportunity for India and the world—the fact that we had made our world flat!...I scribbled down four words in my notebook: “The world is flat.” As soon as I wrote them, I realized that this was the underlying message of everything that I had seen and heard in Bangalore in two weeks of filming. The global competitive playing field was being leveled. The world was being flattened.

As I came to this realization, I was filled with both excitement and dread. The journalist in me was excited at having found a framework to better understand the morning headlines and to explain what was happening in the world today...It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world—using computers, email, fiber-optic networks, teleconferencing, and dynamic new software. That was what I discovered on my journey to India and beyond...When you start to thinking of the world as flat, or at least in the process of flattening, a lot of things make sense in ways they did not before. But I was also excited personally, because what the flattening of the world means is that we are now connecting all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network, which—if politics and terrorism do not get in the way—could usher in an amazing era of prosperity, innovation, and collaboration, by companies, communities, and individuals. But contemplating the flat world also left me filled with dread, professional and personal. My personal dread derived from the obvious fact that it’s not only the software writers and computer geeks who get empowered to collaborate on work in a flat world. It’s also al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks. The playing field is not being leveled only in ways that draw in and superempower a whole new group of innovators. It’s being leveled in a way that draws in and superempowers a whole new group of angry, frustrated, and humiliated men and women.

Professionally, the recognition that the world was flat was unnerving because I realized that this flattening had been taking place while I was sleeping, and I had missed it.

Our purpose in Writing Project 1 is to follow Friedman’s lead and analyze a process of globalization that has had unacknowledged transformative effects on your life. Therefore, in a thesis-driven essay, respond to the following questions:

What was the most transformative globalizing process in your locality that went largely unnoticed? What has been its more profound effects and why did your community not notice it sooner?

From Alisa Sánchez's Fall 2019 Writing Project 1, "The Global and Ourselves," in the Writing 150 Globalization Thematic:

Readings

Campbell, Patricia J., et al. *An Introduction to Global Studies*. Wiley, 2011, pp. 4-9.

Goh, Brenda. "'All the forces': China's global social media push over Hong Kong protests." *Reuters*, 22 August 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-china-socialmedia/all-the-forces-chinas-global-social-media-push-over-hong-kong-protests-idUSKCN1VCONF>

Lamy, Steven, et al. *Introduction to Global Politics*. 3rd ed., Oxford, 2014, pp.18-23.

Levi-Sanchez, Suzanne and Sophie Toupin. "New social media and global resistance." *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A feminist introduction to International Relations*, edited by Laura J. Shepherd, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2015, pp.394-401. (Read highlighted sections.)

McCarthy, Simone. "Why Facebook and Twitter cracked down on Chinese state attacks on Hong Kong protesters." *South China Morning Post*, 23 Aug 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3024125/why-facebook-and-twitter-cracked-down-chinese-state-attacks>

Shao, Grace. "Social media has become a battleground in Hong Kong's protests." *CNBC*, 16 Aug 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/16/social-media-has-become-a-battleground-in-hong-kongs-protests.html>

Premise

Hello, world! The Internet and other digital media have enabled social connection in infinite ways—to date, to trade, to mobilize, to inform, to learn, to discuss everything from theories about solar flares to what will happen next on your favorite television series. Remarkably, social connection via digital media happens without much regard to geographical distance. So, we can learn of social movements around the world, and adopt protest symbols in solidarity; or stay in touch with others of our nationality or religion, no matter where we are in the diaspora; or see concerts of our favorite artist, recorded with phones from other fans thousands of miles away. Or—we can share memes with friends we'll see ten minutes from now.

What are the complex, nuanced ways in which global digital connectivity makes our communities? How do global communication networks help create, sustain, challenge, redirect, tear apart, enliven, refashion, and otherwise play a role in our social groups—how we conceive of these social groups; our place in these groups; how we interact or participate in these groups?

This essay asks you to consider how globalization, focusing on the dimensions of technology and digital communication, has played a role in shaping a community of which you are a part. Through considering globalization's shaping force on a community meaningful to you, the essay

serves as an entry into exploring how globalization processes are both ubiquitous and at the same time deeply intimate, in terms of helping construct the communities important to our identity.

Prompt

Consider a community of which you are a part—for example, as a member of the USC community, or fan of a particular artist, or practitioner of a certain religion, or participant in a social movement or political group. Write a 4-5 page argument-driven essay on the following question:

How have global communication networks shaped your understanding or experience of this community?

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Essay Prompts that Explicitly Engage with Issues of Language Diversity

These assignments are excellent examples of how instructors might foreground questions of language, power, discrimination, and privilege in an assignment.

From Mandy Hobmeier’s Fall 2017 Writing Project 2, “Seeing Globalization Within Yourself: Analyzing Language and Identity,” in the Globalization Thematic:

Readings:

“What Global Language?” by Barbara Walraff

“English as A Global Language” by David Crystal

Critical Concepts (below)

Topic:

For this assignment, we will be continuing our investigation into the impacts of Globalization by looking at a phenomenon that unites and divides us all in substantial and meaningful ways: language. Language is a way of communicating thoughts and feelings. But it can also constitute a means of asserting one’s identity or one’s distinctiveness from others. A common language may be an important vehicle to express the unique character or identity of a social group.

According to Joanna Thorn Borrow, “identity is something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives and through our interactions with each other.”

With that in mind, since English is our shared language in this formalized setting: we will be thinking about the concept of English as a global language by exploring the various forms of English we use in different contexts and the power relationships that these forms of English create. We will be actively acknowledging that “standard English” is not necessarily superior, but is more appropriate in certain settings, especially academic and professional ones. We will be readily challenging the expectations of such settings and in particular genres, especially in an

ever-changing globalized world. Becoming a scholar and learning to use Standard English effectively does not mean people must set aside their other linguistic identities, though. This assignment is asking for you to think critically about linguistic identities and how they can be used as a resource in contemporary society, education, and business. Further, it is of specific concern for this class to engage with the questions that pertain to the issue of whether or not there is indeed a “Global Language,” what it is, and whether there should be one at all.

Writing Task:

Consider your experiences with and observations of learning language and the development of identity through language. Then, in an essay of 5-7 pages respond to the following writing prompt:

Select a language-based issue and discuss its relationship to identity. How does this issue impact society, educational systems, and/or business in a globalized world?

From Emily Artiano and Ben Pack’s Fall 2021 Writing Project 1, “Writing, Community, and Power,” in the Community Engagement Thematic:

Readings/Viewings

- Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009)
- Chimamanda Adichie, “It Is Obscene: A True Reflection in Three Parts” (2021)
- Aja Romano’s “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s cancel culture screed is a dangerous distraction” (2021)
- Luis J. Rodriguez “Love Poem to Los Angeles” (2017) (text, audio, and video)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to My Son” from *Between the World and Me* (2015) *The Atlantic*
- Stacey Waite, Selections from *Butch Geography* (2013)
- Students at Manual Arts High School, “Freedom and Future” from *Sounds of Freedom* (2019)
- Residents of the Francisco Homes, “Bodie,” “some wounds,” “I’m a Fan Of...,” and “The Return” from *Free Writers* (2021)

Premise

“Stories...are defined by the principle of nkali. How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.” ~ Chimamanda Adichie

Writing is the telling of stories. Many successful writers tell their own stories and often write about their own communities and the experiences of identifying with or being identified with a group. What makes a community? Who gets included or excluded? Does it matter if a community is physical (say a neighborhood) or digital (say on social media), something we join by choice (say a university) or by social structures (say our family, race, sex, or sexuality)? In what ways can writing about communities affect audiences’ perceptions of those within and outside those communities? How are our communities shaped and impacted by power structures? How do they oppress or empower? Whose stories are told and by whom and who listens?

For this assignment, we will look at the intersection between writing, community, and power and consider the ways that writing *from within* particular communities can shape and/or complicate narratives surrounding that community. This assignment takes as its premise that there is a unique value in analyzing texts from writers who do identify with a particular community and that you have something to contribute having lived as part of that community. In analyzing how an identity is expressed through a piece of writing of your choice, you will make an argument as to how your chosen piece shapes our understanding of that community in relation to systems of or individual power. Essentially, what does the addition of this story offer us, especially when considering dominant narratives surrounding this community?

Of course, no person or piece of writing represents an entire community. Communities are not monolithic or homogeneous, and identities are intersectional. The text you choose is one exploration of a community that you will interrogate in relation to your conception of power.

Writing Task

In this first assignment, you are tasked with exploring the questions above and any others you find relevant. How you think about and define the elements of this prompt will impact how you respond. First, identify a text written by someone who identifies with a particular community that you also identify with and writes about that community. After taking time to brainstorm ideas and question your preconceived notions, create a plan and respond to the following prompt in 1,300-1,500 word thesis-driven essay:

What is the relationship between community and power in this piece of writing, and why does this matter?

From Rachel Newman's Fall 2021 Writing Project 3, "Language and Globalization," in the Writing 150 Globalization Thematic:

Readings:

Barbara Walraff, "What Global Language?"

David Crystal, "English as a global language: Why a global language?"

Cathy Park Hong, "'Bad' English Is Part of My Korean American Heritage"

Jhumpa Lahiri, "Teach Yourself Italian"

Zadie Smith, "Speaking in Tongues"

Jenny Liao, "Forgetting My First Language"

James Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?"

Premise:

As we have discussed extensively in this class, there are many different social and cultural components of globalization which directly and indirectly relate to and intersect with the political, historical, economic, and environmental aspects of this multifaceted topic. Language is one way of transmitting and disseminating ideas across borders, and it is also a way for you

personally to communicate and develop your own thoughts and ideas. While in Writing Project 2 we focused on personal and individual experiences of globalization, for Writing Project 3, I am asking you to consider the relationship between globalization and language and specifically the effect globalization of language has on various aspects of culture and society, and how language itself is shaped, changed, and formed by globalization.

Prompt:

In a thesis-driven essay of 5-6 pages (1700-1900 words), double-spaced with normal formatting, utilizing research, answer the following prompt:

How is language shaped by the process of globalization?

Note: For this paper, I am asking you to narrow down your focus to a specific aspect of the relationship between language and globalization, since this is a fairly broad issue. Please be concrete and specific about which languages you are talking about (you might want to pick just one language to discuss), how you are considering the relationship between language and globalization, which aspects of globalization it connects to, how humans use language in a global manner, etc.

-Choose an aspect of language that is particularly interesting to you— you can also talk about your own experiences with language, modeled on some of the creative nonfiction/memoir work we have read, as long as your response is answering the prompt question in a clear and specific manner and driven by research.

From Atia Sattar’s Fall 2021 Writing Project 1, “By Whose Standards Do You Speak?,” in the Writing 150 Identity and Diversity Thematic:

Readings:

Vershawn Ashanti Young, “Should Writers Use They Own English?”

bell hooks, “Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words.”

Amy Tan, “Mother Tongue.”

Gloria Anzaldua, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.”

Anne Lammott, “Shitty First Drafts”

Premise:

One of the main goals of this class is to help you discover who you are as a writer. We begin the semester by interrogating the key component of any act of writing or speech—language.

Language is enmeshed with our identities, with our embodied, emotional and intellectual experiences. It reveals patterns of our history and culture, our places of origin and residence, our deep-seated beliefs, and our distinct desire to relate to one another. But language is also a social system of communication and, therefore, is bound up with power. Even as we share language, we may judge or treat one another differently because of their use of language. And beyond the individual level, our social institutions—such as government, education, economy

and the media—influence how language is used in society to provide some groups with acceptance, power, and credibility while preventing others from those same things. Within US academic institutions, our teachers, disciplines, and scholarship similarly teach us to speak by only one “Standard English,” leading those of us who speak otherwise to censor ourselves and code-switch, to inevitably internalize an unequal power dynamic.

This assignment asks you to investigate your own personal, familial, and social uses of language. It encourages you to inquire critically, “who benefits from particular uses of language?” How does language impact one’s sense of worth? How can it be implemented as a tool for oppression and also as a tool for freedom and revolution? How has language impact your experience of being a student? How do you benefit or suffer from different modes of language use in different settings? How do your different social identities affect your language rights?

To know and write who we truly are, we must first explore how different uses of language allow us to do different things. As bell hooks aptly notes, “Shifting how we think about language and how we use it necessarily alters how we know what we know.” Only then can we choose each act of our own writing or speech as an opportunity to conform or resist existing expectations and standards.

Writing Task:

Identify a non-traditional, non-Standard English text of your choosing—for instance, song/rap lyrics, poetry, a text chain, blog posts, a diary entry, a family letter or recipe (or anything else really). This may be a piece that is particularly meaningful to you or one you wish to explore further. Next, analyze your chosen text and develop an essay that answers the following question:

What does it mean to “write rite”?

Elizabeth Durst Fall 2016 Writing Project 3, “Does Language Matter?” in the Writing 150 Globalization Thematic:

Assigned Texts and Resources:

Judith Thurman, “A Loss for Words: Can a Dying Language Be Saved?” *The New Yorker* (30 March 2015).

William Brennan, “A Lifeline for Endangered Languages,” *The New Yorker* (12 June 2013)

Language Matters with Bob Holman, A film by David Grubin,

<http://www.languagemattersfilm.com/> (2015)

The Endangered Languages Project: A Project by the Alliance for Linguistic Diversity,

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/>

Mark Turin, “Globalization Helps Preserve Endangered Languages,” *Yale Global* (3 December 2013)

Patrick Cox, “The World in Words Live: From Ainu to Zaza,” *The World in Words*. Public Radio International (29 June 2016):

<http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-29/world-words-live-ainu-zaza>

Emma Jacobs, “Purists Don’t Like this Mix of Acadian French and English, but it may be helping the French Language in Canada,” The World in Words. Public Radio International (5 April 2016).

<http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-04-04/purists-dont-mix-acadian-french-and-english-it-may-be-helping-french-language>

Premise:

In recent discussions of globalization’s impact on the evolution of societies, scholars frequently describe the growing phenomenon of “dying” or “endangered” languages. This discourse reflects an understanding of languages as living organisms, byproducts of human civilization that bear the mark of their geographic identity and cultural and political transformations. Most linguists see languages as an unparalleled resource for human inquiry, as some of the oldest languages still bear traces of ancient beliefs and cultural practices. Yet, when many of these obscure languages become moribund and die out, they often leave few artifacts of their existence behind.

While many blame the forces of globalization for “language shift” and the growing homogenization of languages, linguist Mark Turin tries to correct this thinking. He argues:

Globalization is regularly, and often uncritically, pilloried as a major threat to linguistic diversity. But in fact, globalization is as much process as it is ideology, certainly when it comes to language. The real forces behind cultural homogenization are unbending beliefs, exchanged through a globalized delivery system, reinforced by the historical monolingualism prevalent in much of the West.

In other words, if people in more developed nations of the world continue to believe that their language is superior and that speaking additional languages is unimportant, then peripheral languages will continue to lose their relevance. However, in some countries, such as the United States, interest in multilingualism has been surging. This shift has come as a consequence of a more advanced understanding of the way in which language functions in the brain. Whereas in the early twentieth century bilingualism was thought to be a threat to one’s intelligence, current research indicates that knowing more than one language only enhances cognition. In the heavily immigrant society of the United States, this trend has encouraged many people to retain a heritage language in addition to English. It has also led to the increase in “elite” bilinguals, children who study foreign languages in immersion programs, even without family ties to the language.

So while the rapid decline of linguistic diversity is inevitable, attitudes towards language and multilingualism will certainly continue to evolve. Given the central role of language to cultural identity, language policies and practices will likely remain a vibrant area of social interest.

Writing Task:

Choose a language issue anywhere in the world -- whether it's transitioning language use, the disappearance of a native language, or the imposition/repeal of a language policy. Then, in a thesis-driven essay of 1800-2000 words, respond to the following prompt:

How does the treatment/evolution of language in your chosen community inform broader social or political issues? In other words, how does language matter?

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Inclusive Assignment Sheet Strategies/Moves

The following are examples/models of inclusive moves that instructors can make when designing formal assignments and writing out the language of the assignment—moves meant to assure students that their language practices and cultural experiences are welcome and valued in their writing.

-“Bring your own voice, tone, and style to the project. There’s no right way to write. Given that this is a grading contract class, this is the perfect time to take risks you otherwise wouldn’t.” — Zen Dochterman, Spring 2021 Writing Project 2 in the Globalization Thematic

-“Select an issue that has personal meaning for you and that will allow you to add something insightful and creative to the discussion regarding this issue; avoid issues that are hackneyed or that do not afford you an opportunity to think and write for yourself.” —Mandy Hobmeier, Fall 2017 Writing Project 3 in the Globalization Thematic

“Use your own expertise. Questions of ‘aesthetics’ may seem new or challenging. But remember: whoever you are, you exist in communities that make aesthetic claims. You yourself use aesthetic categories to perform a range of social tasks, even if you have never thought about yourself doing so. And, no one is more an expert than your experience of the world than you. If you are uncertain about where to begin, lean in to your own experience. Trust that your world is interesting and that your perspective on it has the capacity to matter.” —Sarah Mesle, Spring 2020 Writing Project 1 in the Aesthetics Thematic

-Instructor’s Note on an assignment about a film of the student’s choice: “Your chosen film need not be a Hollywood blockbuster, nor does it need to be in English. International films are welcome and encouraged. As long as you can translate the dialogue (if necessary) and provide enough context for the reader to follow along with your claims, you should be fine.” —Amber Foster, Fall 2017 Writing Project 1 in the Globalization Thematic

-Part of an FAQ section at the end of the assignment on college admissions: “**Do I have to write about America?** No. I assume that most of you will, since you have chosen to attend college in America. But if you would prefer to write about college admissions in another country, feel free. The important thing is to make sure that your argument is culturally grounded. Think

about the laws, policies, values, traditions, and social problems in a particular time and place. Use those particulars to help you devise a more specific argument.”—Cory Nelson, Fall 2021 Writing Project 3 in the Education Thematic.