

## Ashland English 102 Essay #1

### Reading Response

Begin by reading

- Frederick Douglass, “Learning to Read and Write,” *50 Essays*: pp. 125-130
- Malcolm X, “Learning to Read,” *50 Essays*: pp. 240-249

### Your Writing Task

Choose one of the essays above and write a four-page essay that gives a thoughtful, intelligent response to the author’s ideas.

### Hints For Success

**Purpose of the paper:** To demonstrate your understanding and analysis of a piece of writing; to clearly communicate the author’s argument and your evaluation of and/or agreement/disagreement with that argument.

**Audience:** Your classmates and instructor as an academic audience. You can therefore assume that your readers have read the essay to which you are responding and will need only a brief summary of it. You can also assume that your readers will be interested in your response but expect you to have read thoroughly and critically, to support your assertions, and to demonstrate how you have come to your understanding of the text. Assume that personal experience alone will not be sufficient to convince your audience. Additionally, academic audiences expect you to use a reasonable tone, to write in standard English, and to respect your readers and sources.

These essays are well-regarded pieces that show up in a lot of student anthologies. You will not do yourself any favors, therefore, if you start on the offensive and claim that the author is an idiot or that the writing itself is stupid. Yes, it is OK to disagree with the author, but do it with some tact and give specific support for your ideas, quoting from the source and discussing your point of disagreement.

A successful essay will be much more than a simple summary and will go beyond “I liked this.” It will discuss how the author’s ideas and your world interact. Is literacy really as important as Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X claim? What about that dictionary strategy? Would it work? Have you ever known someone whose life was revolutionized by learning to read? What about that sense of freedom the authors mention?

Don’t be superficial. If you had to look up a lot of words or if you were confused by the cultural references (after all, Douglass published his piece 170 years ago), that’s not really the material for a critique.

**Danger point:** The point of both essays is literacy, not race. If you really don’t like black people, this is not the place to spew your hatred. That would not be responding to the content of the essay, and your effort would get a very poor grade. Write about how literacy changed the author’s life.

## Mechanical Details

**Length:** Minimum 1300 words not counting title, your name, etc. That's about a four-page paper. There is no maximum, but try to keep it under 1950. Papers significantly under the minimum (90% or less) will not receive the best possible grade.

**Format:** Standard MLA format. (12-point Times Roman type, double-spaced, 1" margin all around, MLA header.)

### *Submitting the paper:*

- The English Department wants electronic copies of all your essays this semester, so please upload the final product to the drop box in Blackboard. Some students (especially those who use Google Docs) have trouble figuring out how to do this, so ask if you are uncertain how to proceed!
- If you have any trouble getting the Blackboard upload to work, simply print a copy and bring it to class.

## Due Date

- **Final copy:** Friday, September 6, 2019

This essay is worth 100 points.