Writing Genres Explained and Applied

Narrative Essay Features:

1. Well-told
2. Vivid Descriptions of People and Places
3. Autobiographical Significance (What is the purpose?)
4. Audience

Authentic Real-world Scenario: Students may discuss published research in the context of their own experience.

A respected longtime regional manager for a state’s highway department has been asked to give the keynote speech at a meeting on workplace safety. The manager has long considered employee relations of paramount importance in keep the workplace safe, so he decides to open his speech by recounting his recent dramatic confrontation with an unhappy employee who complained bitterly about the work schedule he had been given and threatened to harm the manager and his family if the manager did not give him a better schedule.

The manager reflects on his fear and on his frustration over not knowing how to handle the confrontation: the department’s published procedures on workplace safety offered no specific advice on such a situation. Finally, the manager summarizes the data he complied on the nature and frequency of such workplace incidents nation wide and concludes by calling for new guidelines on how to handle them. (Axelrod, R. & Cooper, C., 2010, p. 15)

Profile Essay Features:

1. Detailed Information
2. Organizational Plan: Narrative, Topical or Both
3. Writer’s Role: Spectator, Participant or both
4. Perspective on the Subject: Main idea or cultural significance (Purpose)
5. Audience

Authentic Real-world Scenario: Students may study a particular profession through observation, participation, and then profiling the experience.

For a company news letter, a public-relations officer profiles the corporation’s new chief executive officer (CEO). He follows the CEO from meeting to meeting, taking photographs and observing her interactions. Between the meetings, he interview her about her management philosophy and her five-year plan for the corporation. With her permission, he records these brief interviews. Immediately after the interviews he listens to the recordings, making notes and writing down questions to ask in a follow-up interview.
A day later, the CEO invites the writer to visit her at home. He stays for dinner and then watches the CEO help her daughter with homework. He converses with her husband. He also takes more photographs.

The writer reviews his notes, the recordings of the interviews, and the photos he took. He decides to illustrate the profile with two images, one showing the CEO at a meeting and the other showing her with her daughter. As he reports some of the immediate challenges she anticipates for the corporation, he tries to convey the ease and confidence she shows both at work and at home. (Axelrod, R. & Cooper, C., 2010, p. 65)

Concept Essay Features:

(A concept may be any of the following: A principle, ideal, value, theory, condition, specialized term)

1. Focused Explanation
2. A Readable Plan: Divides information, forecasts the topics, presents topics in logical order, uses topic sentences, transitions, and summaries to guide the reader.
3. Appropriate Explanatory Strategies: Defines key terms, Classifies or groups together related material, comparing and contrasting, narrating anecdotes or processes, illustrating with examples, reporting established causes and effects
4. Smooth Integration of Sources
5. Purpose: Teach, engage, better understand, demonstrate knowledge
6. Audience

Authentic Real-world Scenario: Students define key terms to show understanding of discipline-specific topics.

At a seminar on the national security implications of satellite photography, the CEO of a spacing-imaging company takes part in the debate about symmetrical transparency, which involves using satellite photography to make everything on the planet visible at one-meter resolution—enough detail to reveal individual cars in parking lots and individual shrubs and trees planted in parks.

Aware of the financial implications for his company, on his return the executive drafts a presentation that will succinctly explain the relevant issues to his employees. He begins by providing an overview of the impact of changing technologies and the politics of global terrorism; he then gives a brief overview of key issues in the debate on symmetrical transparency. He accompanies his remarks with PowerPoint slides that highlight statistics and lend emphasis to the key points of his presentation. (Axelrod, R. & Cooper, C., 2010, p. 127)
Argument Essay Features:

1. Well-Presented Issue
2. Well-Supported Position: Asserts facts, cited authorities credible, statistics taken from reliable sources
3. An Effective Counterargument: Acknowledges readers’ concerns and points of view, concedes an objection and modifies argument to accommodate, refutes readers’ objections
4. A Readable Plan: A forecast of the argument, thesis statement, key words introduced and defined, topic sentences, repeated use of key words and synonyms throughout the essay, clear transitional words and phrases.
5. Purpose: Change readers’ minds, confirm readers’ opinions, convince readers to look at the issue in a new way, move readers to take action, etc.
6. Audience

Authentic Real-world Scenario: Students argue in favor or against a controversial topic.

An executive in the financial industry writes a blog entry defending American International Group (AIG) for paying out $165 million in bonuses after the company was saved from bankruptcy by an infusion of taxpayer money. The executive, whose company is not affiliated with AIG, begins by acknowledging the justifiable public indignation at the situation. Nevertheless, he argues that, legally, AIG had no choice but to honor the contracts that guaranteed the bonuses. He claims that efforts by the government to void the contracts would set a dangerous precedent. He warns, too, that punitively taxing the bonuses would make companies less likely to accept government help, even when doing so is in the nation’s best interests, as in the case of AIG.

He refutes charges that Congress acted inconsistently in allowing AIG executives’ contract to stand while requiring the autoworkers’ union to renegotiate their contracts with bailed-out automakers: The AIG situation, he points out, refers to past contracts, whereas the autoworkers’ situation refers to future contracts. He concludes by reminding his readers of what he assumes is a shared value: not getting paid for work already performed is un-American.

To his surprise, his blog entry provokes nearly two hundred responses, most of which disagree with his defense of bonuses, arguing that incompetence and greed should not be federally subsidized. (Axelrod, R. & Cooper, C., 2010, p. 265)