



ESL MiniConference

Summer Vacation Participatory Classical Essay

This essay, constructed in June, 1992, with input from students in International Studies at Chubu University, in Kasugai, Japan, gave them a model to refer to in composing their own personal essays. This classical essay form was taught to me by Professor Peter Casagrande, at the University of Kansas, in 1977. I am indebted to him for the advantages I've gained through awareness of this rhetorical strategy as well as the benefits my ESL writing students have drawn from using this form as a "template" to more effectively structure their English writing and English learning experiences.

The Exordium is a "hook" to catch the reader's interest. (1st sentence of 1st paragraph)

The Narratio gives the context, where the essay topic came from and how it is relevant. (the rest of the 1st paragraph)

Summertime is a magical moment in the course of a year, and each summer vacation represents a brief period of freedom in a long life of serious labor, expanding responsibilities, and increasingly heavy obligations. About a month or so before the summer holidays arrive, young people tend to begin thinking a lot about how they are going to spend their free time after classes finish in late July. University students are especially interested in the upcoming vacation time because they are usually so busy with new ideas, homework assignments and complex concepts from their academic courses that they seldom can find time during the semester to do anything else besides studying, doing part-time work and practicing special skills. The students in 1B English this year are no different. Everyone is anxious about the upcoming summer vacation. In fact, when they were given a chance to pick a topic for this essay, and select it from a list of such vital issues as the P.K.O., the environmental crisis and racism, they overwhelmingly voted instead in favor of this topic: summer vacation. That is why I am now typing this essay and weighing carefully the advice I should give to this group of bright, young and impressionable individuals.

The Propositio is a statement of another's point of view and your own. (1st sentence of 2nd paragraph)

Summer
2006

Review of
Azar CD-
ROM

Profile:
Valerie
Whiteson

Profile: Sonia
Nieto

Profile:
Virginia
LoCastro

Remembering
LIOJ

Why I Write
Lesson Plans

The Role of
Textbooks in
the ESOL
Classroom

Title tk

Title tk

Semantic,
Lexical, and
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Sets

Summer
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The Partitio outlines the arguments for the other view and your own. (the rest of the 2nd paragraph)

Although in a class poll the students of 1B English agreed that the best way to spend summer vacation is to work hard and play hard, I think that it is really best for them to relax and meditate. These students have given three main reasons to support their idea. First, working is a good experience. Second, people cannot play without money. And third, they need to experience many things. I also would like to present three reasons in favor of my opinion. First, when a person relaxes, his or her muscles have a chance to recover and grow. Second, when a person relaxes, his or her mind opens up to allow him or her to perceive everything around him or her more clearly. And third, when a young person meditates, he or she is able to gain a deeper understanding of life.

The Reprehensio is where you contradict or at least raise serious doubts regarding each of the reasons that seem to support the opposing view, thereby creating an "opinion-vacuum" in the reader's mind and a greater propensity for him or her to embrace your argument. (This is usually several paragraphs, one for each reason from the opposing side)

The first reason which the students of 1B give to support their opinion is that working is a good experience. I agree that working is a good experience and I myself enjoy working very much, but I think it depends a lot on the kind of work a person is doing. The jobs available for young people to do in Japan often require repetitive actions and a subservient attitude towards employers; this kind of work prepares a person to become a quiet, dull inconsequential worker in a boring job, such as tightening bolts on a machine in an assembly line, serving tea to superiors in an office or counting dollars and yen in a bank. There are many kinds of work which, little by little, put the human mind to sleep, and these are precisely the types of jobs which young people can usually find in the summertime. Far from being a good experience, these jobs give workers a vacuous feeling which discourages them from using their imaginations later on. Such summer jobs can have a harmful effect on young minds.

Another reason which the 1B students give in support of their opinion is that it is impossible to play without money. This is just plain wrong. There are an infinite number of games which require only time, not money. For example, many people enjoy playing hopscotch, a game which requires nothing except a small rock or stone and a flat cement surface such as a sidewalk. In this game, you use the rock to draw a line of boxes on the sidewalk: usually two or three single boxes, then a

double box, and another one or two single boxes. Then one person tosses the rock from one end of the drawing so that it lands inside a box, and that person must jump on one foot in the single boxes and two feet in the double boxes, from one end to the other, stopping to pick up the rock (and not landing in that box) and returning to the starting point. This is just one example of a wonderful game which requires no money. Playing does not necessarily mean spending money. In fact, the best games and activities in life are perfectly free. I am sure everyone can think of many more examples.

The third reason given by these great students is that they need to experience many things. I completely agree with this idea. But there is one problem: deciding which things to experience and which things not to experience. There are a number of things which it is not necessary to experience: for example, being hit by a car, burning your hand, having a heart attack, drowning or drinking too much alcohol. There are others which it is necessary to experience, such as falling in love, building something great, enjoying friendship, listening to beautiful music and thinking about new ideas. There is no guarantee that by working hard and playing hard during the summer vacation students will experience more of the things they need to experience now. It is quite possible that by concentrating so intently on working and playing, without considering carefully enough the type of work they do and the kinds of games they play, these students will actually fail to notice opportunities they might have to experience really important things that can make a positive difference in their lives.

The Confirmatio is where you give examples and logic to strengthen each of the reasons supporting your view. (One paragraph for each mini-proof)

Now I would like to present an argument in favor of my opinion, that the best way for college students to spend the summer vacation is just relaxing and meditating. My first reason is that when a person relaxes, his or her muscles are able to recover and grow. There is a lot of muscular activity involved in being a student. Students use their eyes all the time, reading books in the library, writing papers, taking notes and looking at each other every day. This is hard work for the muscles that control eye movements. That is why near the end of the semester we see so many students with swollen eyes, red eyes and twitching eyelids. It is important to rest those eyes properly so that the eye muscles become strong and healthy again and students can focus clearly on the new challenges of the next semester. The biceps and triceps, which control arm movements, also do a lot of intense labor while classes are in session. Students carry books or book bags and in class they constantly raise their

hands to ask questions, so their arm muscles are stretched and tightened all the time. During the summer, in the heat, it is helpful to shake your arms until they feel loose, and just let them hang there for a while to regain their strength and vigor. Back and neck muscles also need to relax after so many days of sitting in stiff chairs. Lying down in the grass on a hot summer day is very good for all these muscles.

The second reason I would like to submit in support of my opinion is that when the body is relaxed the mind opens up and a person can see, hear and sense everything in the environment more clearly. For example, if you are driving a car in the middle of heavy traffic on your way to work, your mind closes itself to keep out the cars and noise around you, and your focus is very narrow. But, if you are walking slowly in the woods near a stream of water, holding the hand of someone you love, your body tells your mind to relax and suddenly you can see the intense green colors of the plants, hear the water rushing by and sense the intricate yet simple beauty of the natural world. When your mind works in this way, you are able to perceive the nuances which so often are ignored by busy people. This is the kind of an experience which can make a strong impression on your mind and give you hope and a strong desire to live well.

The final reason which I would like to ask you to consider carefully is that when you meditate you gain a deeper understanding of life. To meditate is to think, with no urgency, with no pressure, with no particular purpose. All that is required is an object to meditate on: maybe a work of art, a song, a poem, a word you remember, your future, a piece of advice someone gave you, a distant memory, a face or any such thing. As you think about this thing, you become absorbed in it and, for as long as you can keep your attention on it, you are able to stop dwelling on your own ego, your self, your pride, your desires, your needs or your appetite. This is a special time, an opportunity to travel without moving, a chance to experience without doing, a magical moment in your life when you gain insight to help you understand what it means to be alive, connected to other living things. On the basis of the experience of meditation, it is possible to bring new energy to your daily activities, face your challenges with a calm mind and develop in a direction you choose.

The Peroratio is where you extend on your argument and give advice or make predictions based on your view. (One paragraph)

Perhaps you are now convinced. Please do not waste this great opportunity, your first summer vacation as a college student. You will be happy now and happier later if you take advantage of this time to kick

back and take it easy, at home with your family, somewhere else with your friends or even by yourself. This way you can come back in October refreshed and ready to learn more and more. Your minds are young and full of energy: this is the best time to relax and meditate! Do it often and do it well, and a long, healthy, satisfying life will be your reward. I hope you all have a fantastic summer vacation and stupendously successful lives. Good luck now and forever.

Note: This sample essay does not include a "digressio," but it is good to be aware of that option. A "digressio" is a point at which the writer consciously leaves the main line of argument to introduce an interesting anecdote that ends up indirectly serving as evidence for his or her view.

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2006 ESL MiniConference Online



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