

Jacksonville University  
English Department  
**ENGLISH 103 EXIT ESSAY**

The English department at JU requires students enrolled in ENGL 103 to take an exit exam focused on research, writing, and citation/documentation. These skills are emphasized throughout ENGL 103. Students must demonstrate proficiency in the above skills in order to pass the exam and exempt ENGL 214.

YOU MAY USE THIS SHEET FOR NOTES. WRITE YOUR ESSAY ON THE LINED PAPER.

- Select **one** of the following options and read the article carefully. You may wish to spend a few moments organizing your thoughts and writing down some ideas or an outline.
- Using appropriate conventions of organization, structure, and language, write a formal essay in response to the prompt, referring to the attached source article you selected. Your essay should demonstrate:
  - a. an effective introduction that establishes a focus for the essay
  - b. an essay body that is organized, unified, and developed
  - c. that you can properly integrate into the essay a summary, a paraphrase, and a quote (at least one of each should be evident in the essay), and cite each appropriately
  - d. appropriate documentation at the end of the essay
  - e. standard grammar and general mechanics

**Option I--“Mandatory Voting won’t cure dismal turnout/Required voting yields benefits”**

**PROMPT:** After reading the two views on mandatory voting, craft an essay which uses information from both articles to argue whether or not the United States should require citizens to vote.

**Option II--“Acquiring Empathy through Essays”**

**PROMPT:** Using information from the article and your own experiences, craft an argument as to whether or not reading and writing essays enhances our empathy.

# Mandatory voting won't cure dismal turnout: Our view

The Editorial Board, USA Today 9:42 p.m. EDT April 5, 2015 Accessed 4/6/15

Voter turnout in U.S. elections hardly inspires pride. The nation lags far behind most modern democracies in the percentage of its citizens who go to the polls. Even in presidential elections, only about 60% of voters show up; turnout for midterm elections is far lower — just 36% last fall.

Policymakers have tried for years to come up with ways to increase those numbers — early voting, same-day registration and voting by mail — but the impact has been small. President Obama provoked controversy last month when he mused about requiring Americans to vote, as is done in Australia and several other countries. The president was responding to a question about how to offset the effect of big money in politics. "That would counteract money more than anything," the president said.

In Australia, 90% of eligible voters go to the polls despite minimal enforcement. Registered voters who fail to vote get a form letter asking why; almost any excuse will do to get someone off the hook. Those with no valid excuse face a fine of about \$20, which can escalate if someone refuses to pay, though that is rare.

But the idea is a non-starter in the defiantly individualistic U.S., for good reason: A nation predicated on personal freedom rightly forces its citizens to do only a very few things — pay taxes, serve on juries, educate children, be drafted and serve in some wars, and lately, buy health insurance.

There's a compelling reason for each of those, but not to require people to vote. Low turnout, troubling as it is, doesn't pose an existential threat in a nation that has succeeded despite it, nor would forcing disinterested voters to the polls have much value.

If there is an exception, it's in local elections, for which turnout is generally dismal despite the high impact of local government.

Ferguson, Mo., is a prominent example. After a white police officer shot and killed an unarmed black teenager last summer, igniting angry protests, it came to light that the voter turnout in Ferguson's local elections is about 12%, which

explains why a city that is two-thirds black has only one black city council member and a nearly all-white police force.

Ferguson's voters go to the polls again Tuesday with a chance to elect as many as three black council members, but turnout remains in doubt.

Instead of forcing people to vote, though, government should be educating them — particularly as children — about the power of democratic choice, and it should be removing obstacles that make it hard for interested voters to cast a ballot, especially would-be voters whose long working days make voting difficult.

Lately, though, politicians have been doing the opposite. Ostensibly to save money and combat fraud, state officials, almost exclusively Republicans, have been pursuing a thinly veiled campaign to make voting harder. Methods include cutting back on early voting and instituting voter ID laws while making it difficult for many voters to get the required ID. Those most likely to be deterred are lower-income people, minorities and younger voters who tend not to vote Republican.

The last thing a nation with a turnout problem needs are policies that make it harder to vote. Deliberately keeping people away from the polls is just as bad as forcing them to go.

*USA TODAY's editorial opinions are decided by its Editorial Board, separate from the news staff. Most editorials are coupled with an opposing view — a unique USA TODAY feature.*

## **Required voting yields benefits: Opposing view**

Thomas E. Mann, USA Today guest columnist 9:39 p.m. EDT April 5, 2015

Accessed April 6, 2015

Mandatory voting seems downright un-American. We rightly value our individual freedom and don't like to be told what to do by a paternalistic government. Indeed, the cynics amongst us resonate to the old line against voting at all: "It only encourages them."

But American federal, state and local governments tell us what to do and not do all the time. Paying taxes — the price of a civilized society — is compulsory. Abiding by traffic regulations restricts our freedom but helps

secure our physical safety and that of our fellow citizens. Though now replaced by an all-volunteer army, conscription has been used throughout our history to secure the military personnel needed to defeat our enemies and secure our liberty. In every case, it comes down to the costs of public requirements of citizens relative to their benefits.

Several factors motivate an interest in mandatory voting today: Low turnout, especially in midterm and primary elections, contributes to extreme partisan polarization; modern campaigns reinforce non-negotiable demands by focusing disproportionately on mobilizing (or demobilizing) the base; and politicians have little incentive to respond to those who are not reliable voters. Near universal voting is not a certain remedy for these maladies, but it just might create a virtuous cycle that improves our public life.

Dozens of countries have some form of mandatory voting. Our sister democracy, Australia, has had a particularly positive experience with it and could serve as a model for us. It requires mandatory attendance at the polls (voting for "none of the above" remains an option), with a very modest fine and liberal excuse policy for not voting. Think of it as a "nudge" rather than a punitive command. Newly eligible voters are enrolled on the registration lists and civic education programs in the schools prepare them for their responsibilities as citizens; parties and candidates go looking for their support.

It's not hard to imagine new generations of American citizens benefiting from similar developments and taking their responsibility to vote in stride.

*Thomas E. Mann is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a resident scholar at the University of California, Berkeley.*

# Acquiring Empathy through Essays

by William Bradley, special to *Utne Reader*

I HAVE SEVERAL friends and relatives with whom I sometimes argue on social media. These are all decent people, but I suspect that many of them think I'm the most ridiculous bleeding heart they have ever met. I have been told more than once that my frequent Facebook or Twitter links to articles and opinion pieces concerned with issues like online misogyny, marriage equality, and racial profiling suggest that I'm obsessed with toeing a politically correct line in order to advertise my own sensitivity and enlightenment. I am, after all, a white heterosexual man. These aren't my battles, so why do I seem to take these issues so personally? The glib answer—and the one I employ most often when people ask—is “decency,” but lately I have been wondering how and why my own sense of empathy has developed the way it has. The answer, I think, is related to my interest in essays.

I know, I know. I've probably lost you. Everyone hates essays. Those five-paragraph compositions we were forced to write in school with topics like “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” or “What Flag Day Means to Me.” And truthfully, I never had much use for them myself when I was younger. Essays, we have been raised to believe, are dull, punishing things to read and to write.

It wasn't until college that I learned to love the essay. Not those five-paragraph yawn-inducers, but the truly great personal essays by the likes of Michele de Montaigne, William Hazlitt, and Virginia Woolf. Of course I never had the experience of serving in Her Majesty's Indian Imperial Police, but reading George Orwell's experiences in his essays “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging” gave me some idea of what doing so was like, and why imperialism is such a terrible thing. I'll never be a young woman falling in and out of love with New


York City in the middle of the 20th century, but I have some idea of what such a young woman went through as a result of reading Joan Didion's “Goodbye to All That.”

It's impossible for us to live the lives of others, of course, but essays give us a record of someone else's consciousness—

## Essays give us a record of someone else's consciousness.

the act of reading these essays and interacting with these minds on the page is the closest thing we have to telepathy in the real world. Part of the reason why I care so much about issues pertaining to racial justice is that reading James Baldwin's experiences and thoughts in “Notes of a Native Son” and “Stranger in the Village” made the issue vividly real. It's likewise impossible to believe in homophobic caricatures of gay men's predatory sexuality after reading an account of growing up gay as sensitive and affecting as Bernard Cooper's “A Clack of Tiny Sparks.” The idea that women who have abortions are by nature selfish or unreflective is belied by essays like Debra Marquart's “Some Things About That Day.” Similarly, unlike some of my liberal humanist friends, I know from reading David Griffith's reflections on his Catholic faith in his essay collection *A Good War is Hard to Find* or Patrick Madden's discussions on his own Mormon faith in his collection *Quotidiana* that there is nothing inherently reactionary or intolerant about subscribing to a religious faith.

Successful essayists inspire a sense of empathy in their readers. We may not necessarily agree with the essayist, or even find her likeable, but we at least come to understand her thoughts and point-of-view in a deep and significant way; thus, we come to understand other people in general in a deep and significant way. Those who seemed foreign or “other” to us become familiar, as recognizable as our own reflections in the mirror. And the manufactured divisions perpetuated by pundits and politicians—black and white, red state and blue state, us and them—are revealed as the simple-minded fictions that they are. Of course, reading literature in general has a similar effect, but what I like about essays is the way they immediately connect us to other people who have really lived in this world.

I'm not naive. I'm not trying to argue that we'd live in a utopia if everyone read essays. But I do think we'd be better off if we heeded the essayist's reminder that we can find common ground with other people, if we look hard enough. Michele de Montaigne, the 16th century writer and philosopher who gave this form its name, observed that “Every man has within himself the entirety of the human condition.” Read an essay by the likes of Ira Sukrungruang, Eula Biss, Gayle Pemberton, or Jill Talbott every day or two, and you'll find that idea easy to remember. If you're anything like me, you might wind up becoming a more patient and compassionate person as a result. 

William Bradley's work has appeared in a variety of magazines and journals, and three of his essays have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in New York's North Country, where he teaches at St. Lawrence University. Read his recommended list of sources for essays at [www.utne.com/empathy-essays](http://www.utne.com/empathy-essays).