**Expository Writing Program: Self-Diagnostic Reading and Writing Exercise**

In your Expository Writing Program class you will often be asked to read and respond to *evidence*: an image, an object, a written text, or some other piece of evidence presented to you. Reading and responding to a written text can be particularly challenging if you are working in a language other than your home or primary language.

This exercise is designed to help you self-assess your ability to do the kind of reading and responding to a written text you will experience in your EWP first-year writing course(s), and help you choose the writing course that gives you the best opportunities for success in your first semester at NYU.

The exercise asks you to read a passage, then write for twenty minutes, and finally answer some questions about your experience with that reading and writing. This is a self-assessment: your responses will not be recorded, but we welcome any questions you might have for the Writing Survey Team at ewp-writingsurvey@nyu.edu.

**To begin:**

Read the passage without stopping to look up unfamiliar words. After reading, write in response to the prompt (below the passage). After twenty minutes, note where you are in the process. If after twenty minutes you find you need more time, continue reading and writing, but note the amount of time it has taken you. After completing both the reading and writing portion, continue to the discussion section of the self-assessment, further below.

**Reading Passage:**

from "The Art of Description," by Mark Doty (pronouns: he/him/his)

> It sounds like a simple thing, to say what you see. But try to find words for the reflectivity of a bay on an August morning, or the very beginnings of desire stirring in the gaze of someone looking right into your eyes, and it immediately becomes clear that all we see is slippery, nuanced, elusive. As Susan Mitchell says, “The world is wily, and doesn’t want to be caught.”

Perception is simultaneous and layered, and to single out any aspect of it for naming is to turn your attention away from myriad other things, those braiding elements of the *sensorium* – that continuous, complex response to things perpetually delivered by the senses, the encompassing sphere that is such a large part of our subjectivity. All accounts, it seems, or partial; thus all perception might be said to be tentative, an opportunity for interpretation, a guessing game.
Critical theory is full of discussion of the inadequacies of speech, and it's true that words are arbitrary things, assigned to their objects in slippery ways, and that we cannot rely on words to convey to another person what it is like to be ourselves. “What proof do we have,” writes Craig Morgan Teicher, “that / when I say mouse, you do not think / of a stop sign?”

But we have nothing else, and when words are tuned to their highest ability, deployed with the strengths the most accomplished poets bring to bear on the project of saying what's here before us – well, it is possible to feel, at least for a moment, language clicking into place, into a relation with the world world that feels seamless and inevitable. If that is a dream, so be it. At that instant when language seems to match experience, some rift is healed, some rupture momentarily salved in what Hart Crane called the “silken skilled transmemberment of song.”

Writing Prompt:

1) Summarize the passage for a reader who has not read it. This means introducing the text to the reader and explaining its ideas and argument fully and fairly. Your summary may include quoted material from the text, but be sure to indicate clearly when you are quoting directly from the passage.

AND THEN,

2) Relate the ideas in the passage to another piece of evidence familiar to you: another text you have read, or a moment from your own lived experience, or an image, video or podcast, or whatever evidence or example helps you make an interesting and novel connection to the ideas in the passage.

Self-Assessment: Now consider the following questions. After each statement, answer "yes" or "no."

1. Did it take more than 20 minutes for you to read and write a response to the passage that felt mostly satisfying to you?
2. Did you feel the need to work with an English-language translator as you read?
3. Was it difficult to read the passage without stopping because you wanted to look up words and concepts?
4. Whether you did or did not decide to look up words and meanings, do you think that definitions alone would help you to make better sense of the passage?
5. After reading did you want some time to think before beginning to write?
6. Did you feel uncomfortable about the pressure of having to write in a
short time?

7. Did your response summarize the passage using more of the author’s words than your own? That is, did your response contain your own thoughts or reflections about what the passage is saying and not mostly the author’s quotes and phrases?

8. Would you be less comfortable sharing your writing out loud because you needed more time to understand the passage?

9. Or because you are unsure about what you wrote?

10. Or because you are uncertain that a native speaker of English would understand what you wrote?

11. Do you think your passage lacks “Standard English” structure (subjects followed by verbs, complete sentences, clauses, transitional phrases, correct punctuation)?

12. If you are not certain whether you have written in “Standard English,” use a grammar checker tool to highlight grammatical errors in the writing you did. Can you recognize the errors or make the corrections on your own?

If your answers are "yes" more often than "no" to the above situations, you should take the International Writing Workshop sequence of courses. In the International sequence, you would have more time in class and at home to work with difficult passages. Class discussion would include a close reading of the passage, with students sharing thoughts and questions in an environment where understanding is a common goal. If you would have preferred to complete this exercise in a less stressful setting, or if you would have preferred to work at your own pace, you should take the International writing sequence.

If you need more information or advice about which course to take, please contact the EWP Writing Survey Team at ewp-writingsurvey@nyu.edu