

Writing and the Environment

Recommended Process
for the development of
Essay #2

Read carefully the two (or three) argument-driven articles. Read one or two background articles from news sources.

Take notes that focus on the key arguments and underlying assumptions. What are the writer's priorities? What aspects of the controversy does the writer overlook or shy away from? Are there gaps or inconsistencies in the writer's argument? What insight have you derived from your reading that might intrigue or enlighten your readers? What would you like your readers to think about? While you will inevitably "compare and contrast" your articles to arrive at your insight, the essay that you write is not a "compare and contrast" essay.

You are not expected to be an expert in this field, but you can often assess the clarity, consistency, and completeness of an argument without any outside expertise. Your authority in this essay depends upon your skill as a reader and thinker. Your readers will respond well to your essay if they see evidence of your attentiveness as a reader and your balance and clarity as a thinker. You will need to demonstrate your skills in the detailed analysis of passages as well as in the coherent exploration of concepts.

Most of you will not feel equipped to propose a solution to the controversy you have chosen to examine, but you may well be able to identify clearly the problem that stands in the way of a solution. Or you might see an enlightening parallel between this controversy and others about which you know more. Or you might want to examine the implicit assumptions that shape the debate you see played out in your articles.

Once you have any idea that you would like to write about, you need to create an essay structure that will allow you to develop and explore your idea. Frequently, it makes sense to lead your readers through the examination of an article that disturbs you toward one that you find more satisfying. If you want to investigate an idea that emerges from the combination of two articles, choose a sequence that will provide a logical framework for your discussion. Only rarely does it make sense to switch back and forth repeatedly between two articles.