

Culminating Writing Task Directions

In "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell asserts, "A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?" Orwell believes these four questions focus a writer's attention on his or her central idea, purpose, word choice, and rhetoric. Consider Orwell's questions and evaluate his essay: How is Orwell's purpose in "Politics and the English Language" conveyed through his use of rhetoric, word choice, and structure?

Write a literary analysis to support your claims in answer to the question. Be sure to use appropriate transitions and varied syntax, grade-appropriate language and a formal style, including proper grammar, conventions, and spelling. Provide strong and thorough textual evidence that is integrated while maintaining the flow of ideas and including proper citation.

Activity One: Read the prompt and consider the following elements to analyze the prompt.

Purpose: Why are you writing? What is the goal of the writing? Look for strong verbs.	
Audience: Who is your audience? What level of formality will the audience expect?	
Subject: What are you writing about? What is the topic?	
Type: What type of writing will you be doing? Is it expository, narrative, argument, or analysis? What kind of structure will best fulfill the requirements of the writing?	

Activity Two: The writing prompt asks you to evaluate how well Orwell achieves his purpose through his style choices. First, let's determine Orwell's purpose for writing "Politics and the English Language".

What is Orwell's purpose for writing?	
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Activity Three: Analyze the text for evidence of word choice, rhetoric, and structure. Consider Orwell's questions when evaluating evidence.

Textual Evidence	How does this convey Orwell's purpose?	How does this evidence stand up to Orwell's questions: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?
Word Choice: What words does Orwell use to describe the problems with language?		
Rhetoric		
Structure		

Activity Four: Outlining the Essay

I. Introduction: Explaining Orwell's Questions.

A.

B. Thesis sentences that answer the question: Does Orwell effectively convey his purpose in "Politics and the English Language" through his use of rhetoric, word choice, and structure?

II. Topic Sentence about word choice:

A. Evidence

B. Commentary

III. Topic Sentence about rhetoric:

A. Evidence

B. Commentary

IV. Topic Sentence about structure:

A. Evidence

B. Commentary

Conclusion:

V.

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To answer this question:

- Determine Orwell’s purpose in writing “Politics and the English Language.”
- Trace patterns in the key words and phrases and evaluate how Orwell uses them to convey his purpose.
- Examine the rhetorical devices Orwell uses to support his claims.
- Examine Orwell’s structure and evaluate how it supports his purpose.

Write a literary analysis to support your claims in answer to the question. Be sure to use appropriate transitions and varied syntax, grade-appropriate language and a formal style, including proper grammar, conventions, and spelling. Provide strong and thorough textual evidence that is integrated while maintaining the flow of ideas and including proper citation.

Culminating Writing Task Exemplar Student Response

The purpose of writing is to communicate, whether it be a political opinion or a list for the grocery store, and that purpose is all for naught if writers don't write clearly. Some writers see it as a chance to show off or to hide their true meaning, but these are at the least deceptive tricks and at worst abhorrent. George Orwell in his essay "Politics and the English Language" sets out to describe the problems with the modern language and offers concise solutions to that problem. He fulfills his purpose by convincing readers that not only is there a problem, but there is also a solution. He presents that solution by asking writers to consider four questions in every sentence they write: "1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect. In presenting the list, it is incumbent upon the reader to consider these questions in Orwell's own writing" (5). When they apply this list to Orwell's essay, the reader will find that Orwell does fulfill his questions. His use of parallelism makes points clear, and, for the most part, his images are fresh. The word choice that he use aptly describes the problem he lays out and affects the reader aptly. Finally, the structure that he chooses, a problem-solution is a clear choice to lay out his argument.

First, consider his choice of words. Orwell uses a number of strong, opinionated words to outline the problems he sees with the language. He describes the problem of "vague" writing as "slovenliness" and "decay" that has caused a "debasement" of language and could lead to the "general collapse" of society (1-8). This strong choice of words convey Orwell's argument clearly; the English language has a serious problem. Orwell's further purpose is to present his argument that this "collapse" of language is leading to political consequences that leave a public accepting rhetoric that leads to the murder of innocents (7). His description of language is highly opinionated, which supports his purpose, because it calls attention to his claim that language must be clarified. The use of these words, some would say, may break use rule for fresh images; however, they follow the following six rules in that the descriptions are straight-forward and clear enough to establish his purpose.

To further punctuate this problem with language, Orwell uses punchy parallel construction and fresh metaphors. For example, he states that “the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers” (1). Orwell’s purpose is to convince the reader that action is necessary, and in his use of parallelism he consistently drives home his point that language is in “a bad way” and must be fought by “everyone” (1). Although Orwell’s parallelism does use unnecessary words, it does so with a purpose. He wants to make himself clear and the rhythm of parallelism does just that. He further punctuates his point with the use of figurative language showing the reader just how deep and wide the problem has spread. Consider the similes “like cavalry horses answering the bugle” that he uses to explain how easily lazy writing creeps in (6) and metaphors such as “one need not swallow such absurdities” (8) that show how a reader need not stand for such vagueness. While some could argue that some of his figures of speech are as tired as those he deplores, Orwell makes a gallant attempt at providing his reader with fresh images to elicit thought.

Lastly, Orwell uses structure to make his points clear. He chooses a problem-solution structure, emphasized with numbered lists, numerous examples, and subheadings that clearly answer the question: “What am I trying to say?” (5). In outlining the problem with language, Orwell does not merely describe it with rhetoric, he offers examples, first in examples from writing and secondly by creating a list of the worst offenders, including dead metaphors, verbal false limbs, meaningless words, and pretentious diction (2-4). There can be no mistaking Orwell’s point. The problem is widespread. Further, to prove just how clear he can be on the matter of a solution, Orwell presents two lists for the readers that explain what must be done to purify modern language. Orwell’s masterful use of text structure and text features lays out plans better than a set of blueprints.

Orwell’s message is just as true today as it was when he wrote it. The timeliness cannot just be attributed to content; however, the essay still speaks to writing and writers today because of the clarity with which it was first composed. No matter, politicians continue to gloss over murder and atrocities with euphemisms and double-talk. Academics still use inflated language for the sake of sounding intelligent and at

the risk of shoving leaving to the side. The solution is still there, as simple as boiling an egg, but most writers have yet to put Orwell's advice in their recipe box.

