

Juxtapositions: Ideas for College Writers

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Juxtapositions is an interdisciplinary text designed to help students develop critical reading, writing, thinking, and speaking skills. It fits into traditional composition programs as well as interdisciplinary programs, while heading a trend in composition studies away from personal, subjective writing oriented around current events and toward the kind of traditional academic writing considered a prerequisitite skill in upper-level courses.

The units in the text pair a variety of canonical readings in the humanities with an equally wide array of autobiographical essays and short stories. One disciplinary essay representing an important insight in the history of ideas — as well as a basic type of argument — is grouped with two shorter selections: a short story and a nonfiction essay, usually autobiographical. The lead essay demonstrates a theory, and the two following pieces give a social context for the theory.

The task of the student is to make an argument placing the theory in each unit within a social context by juxtaposing at least two texts from the unit. These pairings of texts help student writers learn to move between the abstract and the concrete — a necessary component of successful college writing. In this way, Juxtapositions works surprisingly well with both underprepared urban students and students in the Ivy League, which also now has writing programs.

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