

# Intellectual Introduction and Self-Description

English 125-64  
Rafe Kinsey

Wednesday, September 4, 2013

Email me with a short introduction and description of yourself intellectually. Some of the things you might discuss are these<sup>1</sup>: What courses are you taking? What are you interested in studying? (Of course, it's fine if you're not sure!) What *excites you* intellectually? What did you like to read? (What did you read over the summer?) Did you write anything over the summer? Why are you taking the course? What is your background in math? What about writing? Take a look at your DSP (directed self-placement), which I'll read too: do you have any thoughts on that experience? How do you like to learn things? Why did you sign up for this course? Do you have any questions for me? Feel free, also, to express any worries or concerns you might have about this course, or about college in general.

Your self-description should be written in the form of an email to me. We'll be talking a lot about tone and level of formality in this course, since one of the crucial skills in writing is learning to adjust your writing based on your audience. For this assignment, try to figure out what an appropriate tone, length, and level of formality would be. Remember: I'm your instructor, and this is in an academic/professional context, so you should definitely have carefully proofread your prose. (After all, this is a chance to influence my first impressions of you, so you don't want me to read a sloppily written email.) But this is an email, and you can (hopefully!) tell from the first day that I run a relatively informal seminar, so it's good for your email to sound conversational. When in doubt: remember it's always better to err on the side of caution. I would definitely recommend writing a draft first,<sup>2</sup> looking it over, editing it—and only then emailing me. (You might want to compose the email in a text or word editor, rather than trying to write it in your email program, to force yourself to write it carefully.)

As you do this, think about how your writing would change in the following scenarios:

- Writing an email to one of your best friends, describing what you're studying in college.
- Writing an email to the head of Human Resources at an employer you want to hire you, introducing yourself.
- Writing an email to a friend-of-a-friend who works at a company you want to work for, hoping that they can refer you for a job.

---

<sup>1</sup>I've been warned that if I give a list of questions to address, students will in their responses make sure to answer those questions in precisely that order. Don't feel that obligation! Indeed, that probably wouldn't lead to a flowing narrative. (Also, you don't necessarily need to answer every single question, either.)

<sup>2</sup>We'll talk a lot this semester about the writing process: brainstorming, outlining, etc. For this assignment, see what works best for you. Do you want to make an outline first, and then write? Is it easier just to start free-writing, and then revise it into something more polished?

- Writing a paper for to a very old-fashioned, 70-year old professor, with a similar prompt to this assignment, at the beginning of the course.
- Writing a letter to an older relative about the courses you're taking at college.
- Writing a message to a new friend or potential romantic interest who you don't know well but want to know better.
- Writing a self-description that would be posted on your Facebook News Feed to your friends only.
- Writing a biography that would be on a blog that was the first thing anyone found when they Googled you.
- Writing a self-description in a private journal that no one would ever see except you. (What about if it were to be read by historians a century from now? Would that change things?)

I'll also send you a short self-description myself, but I'll send it after you've sent me yours, since I don't want to prime you to write in any particular way. I might respond to your email, with further questions. You should definitely reply to those questions—and your responses will be part of the assignment, too! (Think about what the appropriate etiquette and tone is for these responses. If I have just a short question, feel free to answer briefly; if it's a longer question, I might want a longer answer. Since I want your prose to be sufficiently polished, it's certainly fine for you to take a day or two to respond, especially if you have a lot to say in your follow-up. What if you're out of town for a weekend and have to take a few extra days to respond? What would be an appropriate way of handling that?)

We'll be doing a lot of *self-reflection* throughout the semester, since it's an important part of being a writer and a thinker. In many of the other assignments, we'll be doing peer revision, but for these self-reflection assignments I want you to feel comfortable being honest, so I promise you we *won't* be sharing any self-reflective assignments. (Feel free, of course, to share them as you wish!) Of course, there might be self-reflections you have that you don't even want to share with me. That's fine; I'd encourage you to keep a private notebook where you keep such thoughts.

**Length:** For this assignment, I'm going to leave it open-ended. What do you think a reasonable length would be? This is a class about ideas, and I'm interested in what sorts of things you think about, so it would certainly make sense for you to write more than a few sentences. (Compare this with some of the other situations above, where you might be emailing someone who's very pressed for time, like the HR representative; in those cases, you'd want to be very concise.) If you have lots to say, that's great—but you certainly shouldn't (here or pretty much anywhere else in life) write just to fill up space. Instead of aiming for a specific word count, just try writing what you think would be appropriate. If you end up with several paragraphs, that's fine; if you get really excited about some part of your intellectual biography and write more extensively, that's fine, too.

**Due Date:** Emailed to me (rkinsey@umich.edu) by Tuesday, September 10, at 8pm. Please use "English 125: Intellectual Self-Description" as your subject, and send the email from your official umich email address. Your writing should be included just in the text of the email.