Introductions: Some Samples

Example 1: From a humorous essay in favor of sloppy people.

I've finally figured out the difference between neat people and sloppy people. The distinction is, as always, moral. Neat people are lazier and meaner than sloppy people.

Sloppy people, you see, are not really sloppy. Their sloppiness is merely the unfortunate consequence of their extreme moral rectitude. Sloppy people carry in their mind's eye a heavenly vision, a precise plan, that is so stupendous, so perfect, it can't be achieved in this world or the next.

(Britt, Suzanne. "Neat People vs. Sloppy People." *A Pocketful of Essays, Volume I.* David Madden, ed. New York: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001. 63-64.)

Example 2: From an essay contrasting the cruelty of Moslem legal punishment to the supposedly humane American methods, which concludes that American punishment is not much more humane.

One of the amusements of life in the modern West is the opportunity to observe the barbaric rituals of countries that are attached to the customs of the dark ages. Take Pakistan, for example, our newest ally and client state in Asia. Last October President Zia, in harmony with the Islamic fervor that is sweeping his part of the world, revived the traditional Moslem practice of flogging lawbreakers in public. In Pakistan, this qualified as mass entertainment, and no fewer than 10,000 law-abiding Pakistanis turned out to see justice done to 26 convicts. To Western sensibilities the spectacle seemed barbaric,-- both in the sense of cruel and in the sense of pre-civilized. In keeping with Islamic custom each of the unfortunates – who had been caught in prostitution raids the previous night and summarily convicted and sentenced – was stripped down to a pair of white shorts, which were painted with a red stripe across the buttocks (the target). Then he was shackled against an easel, with pads thoughtfully placed over the kidneys to prevent injury. The floggers were muscular, fierce-looking sorts – convicted murderers, as it happens – who paraded around the flogging platform in colorful loincloths. When the time for the ceremony began, one of the floggers took a running start and brought a five-foot stave down across the first victim's buttocks, eliciting screams from the convict and murmurs from the audience. Each of the 26 received from five to 15 lashes. One had to be carried from the stage unconscious.

(Chapman, Stephen. "The Prisoner's Dilemma." *Writing with a Thesis: A Rhetoric Reader.* David Skwire and Sarah Skwire, eds. New York: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001. 183-189.)

Example 3: From an essay that advocates torture as "an acceptable measure for preventing future evils."

It is generally assumed that torture is impermissible, a throwback to a more brutal age. Enlightened societies reject it outright, and regimes suspected of using it risk the wrath of the United States.

I believe this attitude is unwise. There are situations in which torture is not merely permissible but morally mandatory. Moreover, these situations are moving from the realm of imagination to fact.

(Levin, Michael. "The Case for Torture." *Writing with a Thesis: A Rhetoric Reader.* David Skwire and Sarah Skwire, eds. New York: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001. 297-300.

Example 4: From an essay that discusses how individuals are responsible for the success or failure of their marriages.

These days so many marriages end in divorce that our most sacred vows no longer ring with truth. "Happily ever after" and "Till death do us part" are expressions that seem on the way to becoming obsolete. Why has it become so hard for couples to stay together? What goes wrong? What has happened to us that close to one-half of all marriages are destined for the divorce courts? How could we have created a society in which 42 percent of our children will grow up in single-parent homes? If statistics could only measure loneliness, regret, pain, loss of self-confidence and fear of the future, the numbers would be beyond quantifying.

Even though each broken marriage is unique, we can still find the common perils, the common causes for marital despair. Each marriage has crisis points and each marriage tests endurance, the capacity for both intimacy and change. Outside pressures such as job loss, illness, infertility, trouble with a child, care of aging parents and all the other plagues of life hit marriage the way hurricanes blast our shores. Some marriages survive these storms and others don't. Marriages fail, however, not simply because of the outside weather but because the inner climate becomes too hot or too cold, too turbulent or too stupefying.

(Roiphe, Anne. "Why Marriages Fail." *The Student Writer: Editor and Critic.* Barbara Fine Clouse, ed. New York, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1996. 253-256.)

Example 5: From an essay on craftsmanship in the writing of history.

Exploring American history has been a very absorbing and exciting business now for three quarters of a century. Thousands of graduate students have produced thousands of monographs on every aspect of the history of the Americas. But the American reading public for the most part is blissfully ignorant of this vast output. When John Citizen feels the urge to read history, he goes to the novels of Kenneth Roberts or Margaret Mitchell, not to the histories of Professor this or Doctor that. Why?

Because American historians, in their eagerness to present facts and their laudable anxiety to tell the truth, have neglected the literary aspects of their craft. They have forgotten that there is an art of writing history.

(Morison, Samuel Eliot. "History as a Literary Art." *Effective Writing for the College Curriculum. Robert Atwan and William Vesterman Eds*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1987. 71-79.)