

FYC  
SUGGESTIONS  
for  
TEST CASES

Compiled from Instructor  
Responses, Fall 2003

Name: Ben Fischer

Test Case: *Triumph of Evil* – PBS Frontline documentary on Kwandan genocide

Essays: Nussbaum  
bell hooks in CCR  
Gary Haugen “The Anatomy of Injustice” from *Good News about Injustice*

Rating: 9

Why? The documentary dealt with such emotionally charging material, as well as conveying a strong argument that students had to respond with critical thought. Also, it was such a complex event that it could give rise to multiple issues.

Changes? I will use this test case again. I will emphasize the rhetorical approach taken by the producers because none of the students responded to that aspect.

Topics: Probably about 5 topics among the 17 students.

Name: April Lidinsky  
 Test Case: Advance students – chose their own test case – an “artifact” of free time  
 Examples: Euchre (as reinforcement of Midwest values)  
 Instant messaging  
 A range of video games  
 Many chose films that culturally reinforce specific attitudes/assumptions about gender, race, technology, etc (topics drawn from Jenkins, Selfe)

Essays: Adorno  
 Scholes  
 Jenkins  
 Selfe

Rating: 9 – I was *pleased*.

Why? The texts offered specific framing terms to employ as tools (Adorno did not, but he was a great first essay to lay the groundwork: why examine free time at all?)

Changes? I would use this same test case again.

Topics: Much range, though gender was a hot topic (esp. masculinity) because of Jenkins and Selfe.

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Name: Connie Mick  
 Test Case: *The Matrix*

Essays: Selfe  
 Teare  
 Scholes  
 Jenkins

Rating: 9

Why? The movie’s theme works well – it’s easy to follow and most students already have some cultural knowledge of it. Movies, however, are so long that that’s a drawback.

Changes? Not sure. . . .

Topics: Varying.

Name: Misty Schieberle

Test Case: *Fight Club* (movie)

Essays: Lessing (first reading begun in class to model critical reading)  
Jenkins  
Kaufman  
Scholes

Rating: 9 or better

Why? The essays were not directly related to the test case but concerned general (Lessing and Scholes) and more specific themes the movie could be read as negotiating. I urged students to pick a theme shown in the movie or a problem in society that occurs in the movie and use their essays to talk about those problems, using theories of our authors to apply to *Fight Club* as an arena to test these theories. During drafting stages if students were actually proposing a reading of the film, we would then re-focus the essay as a reading of the film, but I wanted them to primarily think about an issue in society and the film rather than just the way the film interprets certain issues.

Changes? I will use this test case again. No significant changes. I thought about showing the movie first, but then it seems like it is useful for them to have read the articles and have certain themes in mind to look for when they watch the movie. And ultimately it's up to their schedules when they are able to all get together one evening for a group viewing.

Topics: Varying – gender, space, “group minds,” violence, materialism/social critique, homosociality, incorporating variously gendered behaviors into one stable personality (like the yin yang coffee table in the narrator's apartment) rather than keeping them separate or allowing one to dominate.

- Name: Scott Smith
- Test Case: An article by Jackson Katz called "Constructions of Violent White Male Masculinity in Popular Advertising." It sounds dry, but it covers so much ground (rap music, action films, sports culture, rebellion as commodity, cultural separations of masculine and feminine, issues of race) that I thought my students could consider a range of possible issues.
- Essays: Scholes, West and Zimmerman, and Adorno (in that order). I would have been better off with Lessing instead of Adorno with this particular class; many of them simply shut down when they tried reading Adorno. Alas.
- Rating: N/A (e-mail submission) – successful
- Why? The aspect of the assignment that worked well was that my students wrote papers in which their own voices and ideas had more presence than their sources. Last year, I read a pile of Hirsch-clones and Scholes advocates. I also think using two sample Unit One papers from Fresh Writing helped them see different options for framing--we went through these essays and analyzed organization, construction of framing, explanation of sources, connections between sources, etc.
- Changes? N/A (e-mail submission)
- Topics: I did have several students who had trouble formulating their own argument on their selected issue, but I also had a wide range of issues in the papers. Some of them wrote on the media as a form of social control, others on constructions of gender, some on Eminem and his ability to use different persona in his music and performances, some on beer commercials promoting a certain model of masculine behavior. One of my students wrote a cool paper on "girl power" movies like Charlie's Angels and Tomb Raider. She argued that they offered protagonists which combined the model of the violent male action hero with the traditional woman as eye-candy; in doing so, they reinforce traditional stereotypes under the guise of "strong women" characters. She suggested that woman can only be protagonists in these films when they act like men and serve as a sexualized object.

Name: Chris Gerben

Test Case: various print/video ads

Essays: Edmundson  
Scholes  
Selfe

Rating: 9

Why? It gave students the option to choose something they were interested in while staying within the set context of the 3 essays and the test case.

Changes? I would probably use this test case again. Though I may use a singular movie so that everyone has the same test case but with different takes.

Topics: different essays though general themes (e.g. consumerism) kept popping up.

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Name: Teresa Huffman

Test Case: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (movie, but they had the option to use the novel)

Essays: Jenkins  
Scholes  
Teare

The students had to use at least two of the three; some of them chose to use all three. I found this worked MUCH better than making them use all three articles, because it was less likely that they would lose focus while trying to fit a third, really unrelated source into the argument.

Rating: 8.5

Why? The usual difficulties understanding framing as opposed to summary or compare/contrast.

I think it was productive, and in some ways more successful than the past, when all they had to draw on was their own personal experience.

Changes? I will use this test case again. I don't plan on making any major changes; I *do* think this worked better than last year's Unit I assignment.

Topics: A bit of both. There were a couple of recurring topics, but there were also a number of original – some very original – ones. Some students thought of what I consider exceptionally unique arguments (one talked about the way the media portrays athletes such as Kobe Bryant, for instance) but there were a number of recurring themes amongst the majority of the papers. Still, even where the students were dealing with common aspects, I felt they were able to put unique spins on them. Overall, I felt the similar topic problem wasn't any worse than the past.

I told them that they should have their own argument, which did not have to be ABOUT Harry Potter, that they should use the test case for examples and illustrations, and that they should use the sources for support, or to supply critical terms they could use as "tools of writing."

Some of them wrote specifically about Harry Potter, but some of them used it more the way I wanted, by drawing examples from it for their own argument, which wasn't really "about" the movie.

Further Comments: One thing that concerns me is that I hear about instructors using the test case in rather different ways than I did, or couching it in different terms than I did, and I'm not really sure what the "right" way to do it is. Of course, there may not NEED to be a right way, but I wonder if there are going to be a number of different KINDS of papers (not just different paper topics) coming out of FYC this year. This isn't really related to the assignment, per se, but might call for more clarification about what is desired from the Unit One paper.

As usual I was frustrated with trying to convey the concept of "framing" to the students, mostly because it still seems vague to me, and I think I need more emphasis on counter-argument. Maybe specific exercises dedicated towards building counter-arguments would help, but I haven't thought of any yet.

Name: John Witek

Test Case: *Bowling for Columbine*

Essays: Orwell  
McChesney  
Scholes

Rating: 8

Why? It is broad-based topic enough, i.e. it raises enough questions to provide for a wide range of essays.

Changes? I would use this test case again.

Topics: There was a fairly wide range of topics though most worked on a media angle.

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Name: Stephanie Reidy

Test Case: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (book)

Essays: Teare  
Schlosser  
Edmundson

Rating: 8

Why? Harry Potter is accessible and the students were able to focus on framing strategies rather than on understanding the text itself. Also, HP is full of fruitful issues.

Changes? I will use this test case again. No changes in test case or readings, but I will do more intro and practice on framing. It is a TOUGH concept for them.

Topics: Same 3-4 topics.

Name: Jason Maki

Test Case: Selection from Evitar Zerubael's "Social Mindscapes"

Essays: Lessing  
Selection from Czikmahalyi's "The Meaning of Things"

Rating: 8

Why? The students were able to choose a social space of their own interest/preference, thus were familiar and invested in their writing and analysis.

Changes? N/A

Topics: All different topics.

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Name: Andy Poker

Test Case: A short video text chosen by each student.

Essays: Scholes  
Kaufman  
hooks

Rating: 8

Why? Students were interested in their own cases and in the issues of gender and class.

Changes? I will use this test case again; I will emphasize Scholes' terms "cultural reinforcement" and "ideological critique" more at the beginning – students had forgotten them before reading Kaufman and hooks, and they were necessary to frame the video texts.

Topics: N/A

Name: Darren Dochuk

Test Case: Robert Putnam – “Bowling Alone” – Question whether “social capital” (community) is on decline in modern America frames the text.

Essays: Nicholas Lenan (Leman?) “Kicking in Groups”  
Edmundson  
Heim

Rating: 7.5

Why? Nicely contained debate raised a number of issues – political participation, technology, education, etc. Struggle for some students (particularly the more advanced) to stay within boundaries of the texts – they wanted to be more creative than the assignment allowed which resulted in a lack of enthusiasm among some.

Changes? No response. (presumably because a fellow)

Topics: Majority were the same

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Name: Jackie Casper

Test Case: Rodolfo Gonzales “I am Joaquin”

Essays: Pratt  
Anzaldua  
Guinier and Torres (which my students hated)

Rating: 7

Why? It worked well in terms of teaching close reading and analysis of a text, but students had a hard time constructing argument from it.

Changes? I’d pick a new test case, but I’m not sure what.

Topics: similar essays

Name: Brooke Cameron

Test Case: “This Page is under Construction” by Selfe and DeVoss

Essays: Heim  
Selfe  
Scholes

Rating: 7

Why? I think that the essay worked well with all of the readings and students really got into it. However, as an essay topic, the essay didn’t work so well. In future, I think I will choose an item that doesn’t have an argument already within it.

Changes? I would not teach the same test case again. I think I will pick a story or a poem or a movie. I’m not sure yet.

Topics: The students managed to write on a variety of topics.

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Name: Miranda Wilcox

Test Case: Mission Statements of ND, Harvard, and BYU

Essays: Newman – a chapter from *The Idea of a University*  
Schillebeeckx – “Problems and Promise”  
Marsden in *Crafting Cultural Rhetorics*

Rating: 7

Why? The main problem was a tendency to summarize the essays and the test cases one after another instead of analyzing the collective whole by issue.

Changes? I think next semester I will have the students write on only one mission statement instead of trying to balance all three. This semester I gave them the option of writing on one, two, or three, and most wrote on three.

Topics: N/A

Name: Christina DiGangi

Test Case: Simone Weil “School Studies” from *Waiting for God*, though what framing exercise I made each student do varied based on my sense of level/ability.

Essays: bell hooks “Teaching to Transgress” (*Shaping Discourses*)  
Parker Palmer (essay from *Shaping Discourses*)

Rating: at most, 7. I think that each student is at a different level framing-wise, coming in and that you have to work with this.

Why? The essays were beautifully matched, but figuring this out might have required students to read my mind. That’s why I didn’t end up making all students use the test case in the same way.

Changes? I would not teach the same test case again – they liked the readings, but I think I’d choose something literary/cinematic so the framing exercise was a little clearer.

Topics: They did have similar topics but I think that this was because I encouraged them to use their own experience as a source. Also, just because it’s not distinctive for me doesn’t mean it’s not a distinct and fascinating topic for them.

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Name: Matt Brown

Test Case: 2 articles on the Jessica Lynch news story and how it was distorted

Essays: Scholes  
Orwell  
Selfe

Rating: 6

Why? I think the articles got the students interested and they seemed to like talking about the story. But the articles I chose made too many of the same or similar criticisms of the media that I would have wanted the students to make, so they all sounded the same.

Changes? I would not teach the same test case again, but I have not decided what to do.

Topics: mostly the same.

Name: Diane Persin  
 Test Case: Hara Marano – The New Sex Scorecard (online article)  
 Essays: Lessing  
 Faludi  
 Kaufman

Rating: 6

Why? Students were confused by the written explanation of the Unit I essay, and I plan to explain the assignment in a different way next semester. Also, the test case I used, while it worked well, would have worked better as a framing article with a more neutral article as a test case.

Changes? I still plan to use Marano as a Unit I reading, but am thinking about making it a framing reading and using Faludi as my test case.

Topics: I had them make Venn diagrams showing overlapping themes prior to writing, and there was actually a very wide variety of topics discussed.

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Name: Julie Bruneau  
 Test Case: US Census briefs on poverty, race, educational attainment, coming to America.  
 Essays: Fan Shen – Wider Culture  
 Mick Underwood – The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis  
 Doris Lessing – Group Minds

Rating: 5

Why? It was provocative, surprising to the students. It was sometimes contradictory (in ways students noticed). It was significant, problematic, and real (in ways that essays are not).

Changes? Will not use this test case again. Will rework assignment entirely.

Topics: varying topics . . . but only 5/18 students cited test case.

Name: Corey Zwikstra

Test Case: Three pictures from *Adbusters: A Journal of the Mental Environment*

Essays: Sayers  
Lessing  
Edmundson

Rating: 5

Why? See below, re: topics

Changes? I would not teach the same test case again. Not teaching FYC in spring.

Topics: Alas, very similar responses resulted, because the students did not dare to go beyond the superficial.

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Name: Michelle Gibbons

Test Case: *The Breakfast Club*

Essays: Lessing, Pratt, Scholes and an empirical piece by S.E. Asch (the one mentioned by Lessing in her article).

They had to use at least two of the readings to frame their argument about *The Breakfast Club*. They could focus the argument on *The Breakfast Club* or use it as a piece of evidence in a broader argument.

Rating: N/A (e-mail submission)

Why? N/A (e-mail submission)

Changes? In the future, I would encourage the second kind [of essay type mentioned above], though.

Topics: I had a variety of types of essays. Many, though, took the route of relying on Lessing and not doing the more rigorous intellectual work of using the other authors. I don't think I'd use Lessing again. Her essay encouraged the students to think about the topic in a less vigorous way than I would have liked.

Name: Christian Dallavis

Test Case: *The Matrix*

Essays: Scholes  
Selfe  
Heim

Rating: N/A – see printed e-mail response below.

Why? How did students construct essays/use the test case? Not well at first. Most relied on summarizing the film or writing a paper about one of the articles, using the film as proof that Heim or Scholes was "right". In your opinion, overall, was your Unit I assignment productive/successful? In the end they improved but I intend to change my articles and test case next semester. They had such a difficult time figuring out how to treat the film and they couldn't identify an issue or argument without a lot of coaxing - some really had to have their hands held to get anything going. Others jumped right in and loved it and did a decent job - only one or two really wrote a strong paper that addressed the assignment.

Changes? I'd like to use a non-fiction test case next semester with clearer issues at stake.

Topics: Most latched onto the same idea - technological dependence. A few were creative, but most really struggled with identifying the issues and then discussing them in light of the film. Many were inclined to treat the film as non-fiction - as a prediction of how the world will look if we're not careful.

I had trouble teaching the idea of framing. Or rather - I had no trouble teaching it - but when I saw their papers, it wasn't happening. They did show remarkable progress but the 3rd drafts are still in need of major revision, for the most part. I like the concept of the test case and the three articles that inform an argument, but I think I'd do better to stick to a test case where the issues are clearer and the focus of the class could move away from choosing an argument and toward getting into the writing process and organizing your ideas. I just felt that my students got muddled down in developing their own arguments about the film, even into the 2nd and 3rd drafts, when they should have been working on how to organize their thoughts and construct their paragraphs.