

PLA Essay Format

Title of Essay

NAME

EMAIL

Course Description, Credits, College Name, Internet address

Present the entire course description at the top of the essay, set it off from your text with italics. Include the college name, number of credits the course is worth, and the precise internet address where you found the description.

Text

INTRODUCTION

Begin with a clear introduction that states the purpose of your essay. Aim for at least two or three sentences, and include a thesis that makes your credit request and argument clear. For example, "Through my extensive experiences as an apprentice instructor, I have already fulfilled the learning requirements of the NLC course Teaching Techniques I, and I request three credits."

BODY

Build each paragraph with a clear topic sentence that connects your learning to the course learning requirements. Offer examples of your experiences and develop them with details, then reflect on what you learned from the experience. Make it clear to the evaluators what you have learned, not just what you have done. Add call outs in the text as needed to point to specific documentation, for example, "See Exhibit A for a copy of the syllabus I developed that shows my understanding of adult education techniques."

Although most essays you will write at the NLC will be double spaced, PLA essays are single spaced to help students and evaluators see when an essay meets the minimum length requirements. For each credit, present AT LEAST one solid single-space page (500 words). Essays that do not meet this requirement will not earn the credits requested. Use a 12-point font like Times or Garamond.

CONCLUSION

End by restating your thesis. Your conclusion should tie up the essay and emphasize that you have learned what the course required through your experiences.

References

Not all PLA essays will have references, but if yours does, follow American Psychological Association style, which is covered in the *Bedford Handbook* or the *Pocket Style Manual*, texts recommended for this workshop.

Documentation

Each essay should have at least one, preferably two, documents that verify your learning. Label these clearly for your final presentation, so evaluators can quickly and easily locate your document and immediately understand how it supports your essay. If you can't think of a good document, don't skip this step! Ask for help. Credits cannot be evaluated without appropriate documentation.

Sample PLA Essay

Credit Request for Union Administration – 3 credits by William A. Worsham

I found the following course description in the 2007-2008 NLC course catalog:

LBUA 4900: Union Administration

This course will provide a comprehensive understanding of virtually all aspects of the administration of unions. Students will be exposed to a wide variety of situations and problems encountered by union officials carrying out their duties.

I have already satisfied the course requirements for this class in as much I will demonstrate that I have developed a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the administration and day-to-day operation of a local union. Therefore, I request three credits.

I was appointed in 1980 as the business manager of a local union affiliated with the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA). Local union business managers are required to run for office every three years to keep their jobs. I was elected without opposition nine successive times over my career with the local union spanning twenty-five years (King letter, Exhibit A). In addition to serving as a local union business manager, I was elected as the Recording Secretary/Secretary-Treasurer of the North and Central Florida Laborers' District Council, a position that I held for fourteen years between 1991 and 2005. In 1997 I was appointed as a special international representative for LIUNA, an international staff position that I still serve in today. I served in all three of these positions until the Southeast Laborers' District Council (SELDC) offered me a job in 2005. I accepted the offer and moved to Nashville, Tennessee in October 2005. Currently, I am employed by the district council in the position of assistant business manager (Farner letter, Exhibit B).

As I reflect on the start of my career as a local union business manager after all of these years, it seems unbelievable to me that I entered a job with very little knowledge of what the job of a business manager entailed. I was virtually unprepared for the challenges which lay ahead of me. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to work in the same office with an older and wiser construction business manager who had experience representing public employees and managing the affairs of a local union. I honestly don't know how I would have managed without his mentoring and assistance. As time passed, I improved the skills I had learned while performing the duties of a steward. At the same time, I learned new skills which I applied to the many problems I encountered on a daily basis managing a local union. I expanded what I had learned in the areas of grievance handling, collective bargaining and leadership, while I developed new skills training stewards and managing the day-to-day operation of a local union. Prior to my election as business manager, I served as chief steward and as a member of the union's negotiating team. It was not until I went to work for the union full time as business manager that I fully developed expertise in the field of union administration. I will discuss and explore the administrative skills I developed in the areas of grievance handling, collective bargaining, leadership and training, which I believe were critical to my development and success as a business manager of a local union.

Grievance Resolution

Grievance resolution and solving problems before they become grievances is a necessary part of representing workers, who more often than not, do not possess the requisite training and knowledge necessary to adequately prepare and reduce grievances to writing. Most workers are unaware that a grievance must be filed within a specific period of time, or that a written grievance must provide certain information, such as the date of the alleged violation, the article alleged to

have been violated, an explanation of how the contract or policy was violated, and the remedy the employee is seeking.

I wrote my first grievance shortly after I was appointed as a union steward. In the beginning, grievances that I wrote often lacked clarity, and did not always convey the information necessary to make a compelling case. As I gained more experience investigating and filing grievances, I learned to gather the evidence and testimony I needed to construct my argument and reduce it to writing. I learned to write in clear and concise terms, organizing my thoughts into logical and compelling arguments, supported by written evidence and oral testimony. I improved my skill at oral argument, which when accompanied by a well written grievance, normally resulted in a favorable decision (Marshall Letter, Exhibit C). I learned early in my career, that not being thoroughly prepared prior to a grievance hearing was a sure way to lose a grievance. I did not keep track of the number of grievances I authored and filed during my career with the local union, but I imagine the number exceeded a thousand grievances over thirty years.

Collective Bargaining and Effective Communication

Negotiating collective bargaining agreements is another facet of union administration which demands a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the collective bargaining process. My first experience with contract negotiations took place early in my career, when I was appointed by the business manager as a member of the union's negotiating committee. My first impression of the process was that it was us against them, a style known as adversarial negotiations. I was unaware that there were different models of negotiations that I could employ to arrive at an amiable settlement. The other model which I learned later in my career is known as interest based or principled negotiations, a style where each party explores its own interests and the interests of the other party, in order to understand what each side needs to reach agreement. Essentially, each party must peel away the layers of the onion, in order to see what motivates and drives the proposals each party puts on the table.

My initial effort at assembling and writing contract proposals for negotiations was not particularly successful. With time and experience, I learned to write contract proposals in clear, concise language. I found that well written language conveyed a clear-cut and immediate understanding of the changes the union was seeking. I strengthened my organizational skills and learned that by going into negotiations fully prepared, I was able to gain a certain advantage resulting in a favorable outcome. This learning provided me with the tools I would need later in my career as assistant business manager of the SELDC in Nashville when I got the assignment to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with Vanderbilt University in June of 2006. These negotiations were a test of my abilities and a confirmation of the learned skills I employed over the next eight months that ultimately resulted in the ratification of a great contract for the workers the Laborers' represented at Vanderbilt (Canak letter, Exhibit D).

Leadership

I believe leaders are born with a certain innate character, which if nurtured over time, will blossom and develop into a talent to lead others in this world. A critical area of my development as a successful business manager involved effectively demonstrating leadership. As a leader I felt it was important that I set an example for the other officers and stewards in my local. I developed the ability to motivate and inspire employees who I represented. Employees joined the union because they wanted to join. In a right-to-work state such as Florida, public employees do not have to join the union, but most of the employees I represented believed in me and supported me. Not all employees I represented joined the union, but a majority of employees did join the union, bolstering my efforts to negotiate better contracts and resolve grievances at the lowest possible level.

Managing the affairs of a local union is a complex undertaking, which requires union officials in smaller locals to spend an inordinate amount of time performing administrative functions for the local. Managing a public sector local union is particularly difficult because unlike business managers in the construction industry, income is limited to monthly dues. Construction locals charge working dues in addition to monthly dues, which generates a majority of the local's income. One secretary and I were the only full-time employees for the local. Our local had all of the tax reporting and payroll obligations of a larger construction local, and only two of us to prepare and file the reports. During this time I also served as the secretary-treasurer of the North and Central Florida Laborers' District Council, for which I received a small monthly salary. In addition to my other duties as a local union business manager, I was responsible to keeping minutes of council meetings, preparing and issuing monthly payroll, making timely deposits and completing and filing tax reports (minutes of council meeting, Exhibit E). I learned that people look to others for leadership and direction. Maybe it is that they are reluctant to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others, or perhaps people just want someone else to take responsibility. Whatever the reason, I found that leadership develops over time with experience. I learned that the workers trusted me to make the right decisions and to have the answers when they had questions.

The basic skills that I developed representing workers as a union steward, and later as business manager, established a solid foundation of learning that I was able to improve upon over time with experience. I reflect on the mistakes I made, and the lessons I learned from those mistakes, and I realize that this is how learning occurs. The important thing to remember is that it's okay to make mistakes, as long as one learns from those mistakes and moves forward to the next challenge, whatever it may be.

Supporting Documentation

Exhibit A, Charles L. King, letter of verification

Exhibit B, Glenn Farner, letter of verification

Exhibit C, Bill Marshall, letter of verification

Exhibit D, William Canak, Ph.D., letter of verification

Exhibit E, Recorded minutes from meeting of the North and Central Florida District Council and the North and Central Florida District Council PAC.

Note that documentation could not be shared in this format.