



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ESSAY SNIGLETS: IMPROVING ESSAYS THROUGH WORD MANIPULATION

I encourage my Composition I students to write definition essays that reflect their knowledge of both the denotation and the connotation of words using essay sniglets. Prior to my introducing this new activity, students submitted definition essays that failed to incorporate their word's connotation, which was the foundation of the essay assignment. Also, peer review sessions were less than exciting because the essays read more like encyclopedia entries rather than colorful snapshots of the students' lives. Despite numerous lessons explaining the concepts of denotation and connotation, this essay assignment failed to reiterate the students' understanding of writing definition essays.

After reading comedian Rich Hall's 1984 book, *Sniglets (Snig'lit: Any Word That Doesn't Appear in the Dictionary, But Should)*, which is a compilation of humorous, invented words to reflect the absurdity of everyday life, I was compelled to alter my original essay assignment. Hall's clever combination of words made me laugh, and I immediately wanted to incorporate the "sniglet" concept into my composition class.

I first introduced sniglets by reading some of my favorite words, including (1) arachnidiot—when a person wanders into an invisible spider web and begins flailing wildly, and (2) hangle—a cluster of coat hangers. The students loved the sniglets. Based on their positive reaction, I revised the definition essay assignment, and asked students to invent their own sniglet and write a definition essay about their invented word. My hope was that students would invent their own word, engage in creative thinking, and spark an interest in essay writing.

Activity Objectives

First, though the students define their word denotatively. This activity prompts them to write more connotatively. Second, by encouraging students to reflect on their lives, be creative, and demonstrate knowledge of the different patterns of essay development, the activity requires that they analyze the essay lesson care-

fully. Last, as a reward for their well-written essays, the students add their new words to our own *Freshman Composition Sniglet Dictionary*. The students experience a greater sense of class community when they share their invented words in our dictionary. Though the primary objective of the activity is to teach students how to identify and write denotations and connotations correctly, the activity consequently teaches students how to manipulate words, work together, and be proud of their finished essays.

Activity Results

Students now submit definition essays that are more reflective and entertaining. Instead of only defining their words denotatively, the students submit essays that clearly reflect personal experiences associated with their words, demonstrating knowledge of the connotation of words. The students are proud of their invented words, and peer review sessions are lively and beneficial. In addition, by adding their words to our own sniglet dictionary, students earn a greater sense of accomplishment, knowing their words will be a part of Composition I forever. Sniglet dictionary entries include:

- **Alarmaphobia** – waking up one hour before the alarm is set to go off
- **Fizz Flood** – sucking the soda fizz off the top of glass before it runs down the side
- **Minutes Mismanagement** – accidentally calling someone from your cell phone when it is stored in your purse
- **Mcfrytastic** – finding one lone fry at the bottom of a McDonald's sack
- **Rush Delay** – always getting behind the slow driver when you are in a hurry
- **Shower Shock** – stepping into the shower, not expecting cold water

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WRITING AN INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

NISOD's flagship teaching and learning publication, *Innovation Abstracts*, is written by practitioners, for practitioners, in community colleges, colleges and universities around the world. Issues are mailed weekly during the academic year to more than 100,000 readers via U.S. Postal Service and electronically to considerably more at NISOD-member colleges electing to access current and past issues via the members-only section of the NISOD website (www.nisod.org).

In any year, a full academic year's collection of *Abstracts* features a wide array of topics. Fortunately, we have discovered that each issue of *Innovation Abstracts* has something for everyone. Although individual issues are written from the perspective of a specific discipline or program, authors often include some flavor of the versatility of the strategies they describe.

Past issues of *Innovation Abstracts* are a potential author's best examples of format, language (avoiding jargon), and specifics of style and tone. However, some additional information may be helpful and is included here.

Innovation Abstracts are:

- Basic introductions to an innovation (a definition or description with practical suggestions for use);
- Descriptions of an innovative model program or project (a description of the program, identification of key elements in the model, and suggestions of variations on the model);
- Practical suggestions for managing use of an innovation (intended as a vehicle by which long-term users share techniques for transition from old practice to innovation with new users);
- Innovative variations on existing programs or concepts (a description of the variation; an explanation of how others can implement this improvement);
- Research-based analyses of innovations and their effectiveness in improving instruction (a discussion of the problem researched, the methodology and results);
- Issue-focus papers (usually speculative; factors affecting the teaching/learning process which are not innovations, per se: e.g., strategies for encouraging use of an innovation).
- Each abstract should include a description of the innovation and a discussion of practical applications and/or implications. Additional guidelines include:

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- Applicability—Innovations should have potential for application in a number of areas and, preferably, be implemented easily and inexpensively.
- Publication—Authors are identified by name, academic title/position, and discipline/program area. A "for further information" byline invites readers to contact the author. Provide college name, physical address, city, state, and zip code. The author's e-mail address, if available, should be included for easy access.

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