1. Self-Assessment Essay

Through the many papers I have written over the course of high school, I have made use of many writing skills and methods. In the English classroom, I have learned how to express myself and my ideas in a professional and coherent manner. To accomplish this, I have learned various methods to advance my writing. I am now able to recognize purpose and rhetorical situations, which allows me to properly analyze works. Additionally, I have become comfortable paraphrasing and synthesizing a variety of sources and accessing digital tools. I have also learned that not all sources are the same and that some achieve different goals than others. While crafting these papers, I have also grown substantially as a writer as I have learned how to revise my work effectively. All of these skills have greatly benefited me as a writer and I believe show in the quality of my work.

I have found that the most effective first steps to writing a paper are to decide what the purpose is and then examine the rhetorical situation and acknowledge the audience. When assigned to write a research paper, I chose a topic of interest to me that I had a basic understanding of, with a slightly controversial side to draw interest from readers. My purpose was ultimately to inform my audience about the controversy surrounding the possibility of establishing English as the official language of the United States and to persuade them to see the potential benefits of designating English as the official language of the United States. I was aware that my audience had little background on the issue, so I chose to sympathize with them by acknowledging that many people do not fully understand the issue. One way I did this was by making remarks such as the following: “Many people are confused by exactly what making English the official language of the United States of America would mean.” I proceeded to explain the issues in simplistic terms and later elaborated with historical context and current
controversies. This was also in part to ease the audience into the idea with minimal bias so that they might be open to my stance later, rather than forcing them to take a stance immediately. By acknowledging my audience and allowing my purpose to dictate my writing, I believe that my paper makes a compelling argument.

Through the process of writing various papers, I have learned how to effectively analyze large amounts of information and how to pull out the most important ideas of a text through paraphrasing and synthesizing sources. An example of a time I have made use of this skill is when I wrote a theology paper on the document *Gaudium et Spes*. The document was fairly lengthy and I had to determine which main idea expressed was the most important and explain why the Catholic Church believes it to be worthy of importance. After a fair amount of time scanning the document for viable supports for my topic, I believe that I have successful crafted a paper that reflects *Gaudium et Spes* and its teachings, but without constantly citing the document. I have determined constant quotes and citations to be unnecessary and confusing to readers. The point of a paper is to analyze main ideas, not to copy or re-word the original work. I put the document’s ideas into plainer, simpler terms for the benefit of the audience. I drew upon citations only when it was more effective to quote the document than to summarize. An example of this method is when I wrote “The Church admits that it can be ‘very difficult if sexual loving is ended in order to prevent conception and can endanger the bond as well as the quality of family life,’ but it wholeheartedly rejects abortion and infanticide as solutions (165).” Another example of a time I have made use of large amounts of information was with my research paper on the potential of English as the official language of the United States. With this paper, I accessed numerous sources, including interviews, websites, and databases. I utilized a variety of sources in each paragraph and drew from different opinions on the same topics to get a full
picture of the issue. I was aware that some of the sources I was using were heavily biased, such as quotes from attorney Marta Jiminez of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and chairman of U.S. English Inc., Mauro Mujica. Because of this, I was certain to draw from both extremes and also found more neutral sources to balance the paper. Skills such as these have enabled me to process large amounts of information and to communicate ideas more effectively to my audience.

I now find that a variety of sources and information best provides an accurate and whole picture of a situation, hence more effective writing. In my research paper on English as a possible official language for the United States, I used websites, databases, studies, interviews, and mission statements. All of these different types of sources provided a different kind of useful information for my paper. One of the databases I used, Points of View, provided me with basic, easy-to-understand definitions and topic overviews. Interviews added straightforward answers to controversy, while mission statements for organizations dedicated to extreme positions of the issue provided solid core beliefs. Through this variety of sources, I was easily able to see the true potential and impact of my subject. With such a variety, I was able to determine what information was most reliable. After reading more neutral sources, I was able to determine what was radical and what to label as radical. When introducing sources, I carefully introduced each writer or speaker so that my audience was aware of their potential bias, such as when I wrote, “As current chairman of U.S. English Inc., Mauro Mujica defends his organization’s beliefs as he states...” Using numerous types sources has challenged me to use the most accurate and trustworthy information to provide a full picture of my topic.

Throughout my writing experiences, I have learned to use a variety of technology tools for all phases of the writing process. When writing my research paper on English as a possible
official language for the United States, I used many methods to access information and to craft my work. While I used a pencil and paper to outline preliminary ideas, I composed my paper on Microsoft Word. As I researched, I organized information and sources with One Note. Another useful organizing tool for me was to placing information from my sources on Powerpoint slides, and dragging them in order to where they made sense. I later used email and Google Docs to share my work with my family and friends to assist me with proofreading. All of these tools have provided me greater flexibility and ease with my writing process.

Learning to properly revise has also been an extremely beneficial tool to my writing success. I now know to not only proofread for spelling and grammar errors, but to look for weak textual supports and failure of consistency with the purpose of a paper. A paper that I spent a good deal of time revising was my textual analysis of *Waiting for Godot*. I often fall into the passive voice without noticing, so when I re-read the paper and noticed the sentence “As their conversation proceeds, it is learned…” I changed the phrase to “As their conversation proceeds, both reveal…” because passive voice restricts the work as a whole. In this piece in particular, I noticed that I was often not specific enough. I referred to characters as “they” or “the men” too frequently, rather than using their actual names, Vladimir and Estragon. In a different sentence, I referred to existentialism as “the principle,” which I later regarded as confusing to the reader, so I replaced “the principle” with “existentialism.” I also started a sentence saying “This sets the stage nicely…” but later updated it to “This barren scene sets the stage nicely” so that the sentence would be clearer and more descriptive. These revisions have helped my paper to be more effective for the audience, hence making my point come across with more ease.

The following papers that you will read have challenged me in many ways, but have also provided me with many opportunities for growth. By revising my own work and identifying my
strengths and weaknesses, I have immensely grown as a writer and my capacity for analyzing various works has increased. I have learned to put purpose into my writing and to keep an audience in mind. This allows me to focus my writing and truly analyze a topic. By using a variety of mediums to craft my papers and numerous sources to support my arguments, I have found my writing to be much more effective.
2. Analysis Paper: Undeniable Faith

The tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett has puzzled scholars and students alike for decades, and for good reason. Despite varying interpretations, the play ultimately deals with the question of human existence — no small topic by any means. Although the general atmosphere of the play is bleak, attributed by dull setting and lack of action, the principles of hope and faith endure. Given the existential nature of the play and how existentialism denies purpose and hope, it can only be concluded that faith and hope are intrinsic attributes to humanity whether or not Beckett wants them to be.

The entirety of *Waiting for Godot* takes place in the middle of nowhere with scarce scenery. This barren scene sets the stage nicely, as the play is as exciting as the setting, as far as action is concerned. Existentialists believe that words have little consequence and that actions are the only aspects of life that hold any real bearing. Beckett demonstrates this principle through his absent-minded characters who forget nearly everything they speak about each day. Yet, Estragon recalls being kicked in the shin and being given bones. In this play, actions tend to speak louder than words. In the beginning, Vladimir and Estragon bumble about without any real objective. As their conversation proceeds, both reveal that they are waiting for Godot, yet neither man knows much of anything about him or what will happen when he arrives. But when the name Godot is mentioned, suddenly everything makes sense. Vladimir and Estragon do not question why they are waiting; it is their only purpose in life. This scenario could be similar to a person telling someone that his or her main objective in life is to be happy, to make it to heaven, to get rich, or really anything, and no one would question him or her. What the characters do question, however, is what they should do with themselves while they wait. This is apparent in the following exchange: “What do we do now?” “Wait.” “Yes, but while waiting?” “What about
hanging ourselves?” (12; Act I). With nothing to truly live for, Vladimir and Estragon find no real meaning in their lives and therefore, are open to the idea of hanging themselves. Suicide can be a casual thought for many, as it is easy to feel far from ever achieving goals or happiness. Yet, something stops Vladimir and Estragon from carrying out their suicides — Godot. Truly, Godot represents the hope that all search for in their mundane lives. Additionally, Godot is what or who the men keep their faith in. Each day they know that they must, and will, wait for Godot. They are waiting for something greater and better to save them from the plain world they live in. These ideas become evident as the two converse, “We’ll hang ourselves to-morrow. Unless Godot comes.” “And if he comes?” “We’ll be saved.” (61; Act II). In these ways, Beckett demonstrates, perhaps unintentionally, the embedded faith and hope held in each individual.

While life often can seem pointless and one might feel irrelevant in the grand scheme of the universe, humans will never stop forming desires and hoping for their manifestation. This hope is a fundamental aspect of every human that not even Beckett can ignore. In hopelessness, hope is found. While death may seem easy and freeing, humans cling to life no matter how hellish it may be. Faith, a promise of a better tomorrow, is stitched into humanity’s very soul. It is natural to hope and dream. Even in the little things, Vladimir and Estragon find entertainment and enough to make it through to the next day. Living life each day continues the universal quest for fulfillment and demonstrates humanity’s truly enduring nature. Vladimir and Estragon remain true to human nature by waiting for Godot each day, despite not knowing if they will ever meet him.
Work Cited

3. Documented, Research-Based Project:

   English as the Official Language of the United States

   Language is deeply ingrained in each person, as it can define where one comes from and his or her culture. It is an active part of every moment of one’s life since it is how one expresses oneself through thought, speech, and pen. English has long been associated with the United States of America and its people, as some of its first residents came from England and brought their native language, English, with them. Some are surprised to learn, though, that the United States of America does not have, and never has had, an official language, which is defined as the language used by the government. In recent decades, movements have begun to declare English as the official language of the United States of America. Much controversy exists, though, with an increasing population of immigrants from all across the globe, more specifically, Latin American countries. Some believe that America should become bilingual rather than adopting one official language. However, proponents for English as an official language believe that establishing English as the United States’ official language would strengthen the nation. Despite concerns, adopting English as the official language of the United States of America would unite the nation as well as improve its social and economic standings.

   Many people are confused by exactly what making English the official language of the United States of America would mean. Some use the words “national language” and “official language” interchangeably, but there is a difference. A national language is known as the language in a country that is the most dominant or generally accepted. In 2006, the U.S. Senate voted in favor of establishing English as the national language. This was seen as a somewhat symbolic gesture, however. An official language is, by law, the government’s official language (Rich and Vance 3). Mauro Mujica, chief executive officer and chairman of U.S. English Inc.,
explains what English becoming the United States’ official language would mean as he informs, “Specifically this step would require that all laws, public proceedings, regulations, publications, orders, actions, programs, and policies are conducted in the English language” (7). By no means does this mean that everything would be in English, or be “English-Only.” The government cannot control what languages citizens speak in public, hallways in schools, at home, or how businesses decide to conduct their service to customers. K.C. McAlpin, executive director of the organization ProEnglish, clarifies, “The law would apply only when the government acts officially, but nothing in this prohibits a business, a hospital, or the government from using bilingual staff where it provides a benefit or there is a compelling public interest. That’s just good business practice” (qtd. in Engstrom 3). Businesses would most likely still hire bilingual workers for convenience to customers and so forth. As Oklahoma U.S. Senator James Inhofe’s 2006 proposal explains, if English were to become the official language of the United States, no part of the government would have any right to provide service of any kind in languages other than English (Hulse 3). In short, if English were to become the United States’ official language, other languages could still be practiced, but the government would simply hold no obligation to provide services in other languages.

The United States of America has been without an official language throughout the entire expanse of its existence, despite various efforts over the years aiming to establish one. Some argue that there is no official language stated in the U.S. Constitution simply because the founding fathers never had to worry about as much lingual diversity as there is today (Crawford 1). At the time of the United States’ founding, nearly all Americans spoke English because most were from England. America had not yet experienced its largest wave of immigrants. However, in the 1750s, immigrants living in Pennsylvania constructed street signs in both German and
English. Because of such strong German influence, Congress later did consider publishing laws in German and English. These laws were never passed, though. Few efforts to select an official language policy arose again until the 1900s. In 1923, U.S. Representative Washington J. McCormick of Montana drafted a bill to designate “American” as the United States’ national language. This was the first proposition made for a national language in the United States. The “American” notion was mainly proposed to distinguish the American form of English from England’s, and also to further separate America from England. While the bill was not passed by Congress, Illinois did adopt it as part of its state constitution (Rich and Vance 4). Although the United States continues to lack an official language, there have been many passionate attempts to establish one.

In spite of previous efforts to adopt an official language, many Americans simply see no value in their nation having an official language. Some believe that establishing English as the official language would be a waste of time and effort as 84% of Americans already consider English to be the official language of the United States (Engstrom 3). As Nevada U.S. Senator Harry Reid voices, “Everybody who speaks with an accent knows that they need to learn English just as fast as they can” (qtd. in Hulse 2). It is believed that the United States is distinguishable from other countries as immigrants coming to America arrive with the realization that they should learn English (Jacobs and McMahon 2). Still, there is a fear that if legislation were passed to make English the official language of the United States, discrimination and racism would arise against non-English speakers and that bilingual efforts would decrease. Some, such as attorney Marta Jiminez of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, view English as a “tool of oppression” that has historically been a burden for immigrants as they try to begin their new lives (Mujica 3). In this sense, immigrants could possibly feel unwelcomed if English were
to become the United States’ official language. Immigrants come to the United States seeking freedom of speech and a land of opportunity. Their possibilities of finding work and acceptance could be complicated by laws that would designate English as the official language of the United States. The proposals to establish English as the United States’ official language doubtlessly seem to threaten those who are not proficient in English; 21.3 million Americans fall into this category. More than five million of these people are natural-born United States citizens (Mujica 3). Furthermore, opposition groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), believe that if put into effect, English-Only laws would violate the constitution in its protection of due process, equal protection in situations such as multilingual ballots, or if no translations or translators were offered in court (Mount 3). Overall, many Americans view the notion of establishing English as the official language of the United States as fruitless or unwelcoming.

Yet, on the other hand, a large number of Americans believe that making English the official language of the United States would greatly benefit the country. In recent years, studies have shown that more and more Americans are coming to desire the establishment of English as the United States’ official language. In a survey conducted by the Nation Opinion Research Center, results show that 86% of Americans believed that speaking and comprehending English should be an obligation for all Americans (“Facts & Figures” 3). Many feel that since English is such a dominating force in the United States, the government should finally declare it as the United States’ official language. After all, 92% of the world’s countries have at least one official language. Furthermore, English is used as the official language in thirty-one nations worldwide and is classified as a secondary official language in twenty more countries (“Facts & Figures” 1). In the United States, due to large populations of gangs and growing racial and ethnic tensions, many Americans believe that declaring English the United States’ official language would unite
the nation. W.E. Jacobs and Maureen McMahon theorize, “Making English the official language of America conveys a message similar to that of cheering for U.S. athletes at the Olympics: We are all on the same team. We don’t all do the same things when we are at home or at school or at work, but inherently, we are linked by the tradition of the home field advantage” (3). Some believe that such an intense level of disharmony exists because not all immigrants are learning English and native English speakers are feeling threatened, while those who don’t know English are feeling threatened in return. If everyone knew English, not because it is a superior language, but because it is a widely spoken language in the United States, there would be fewer reasons to discriminate against one other. In predominantly French-speaking Quebec, the disharmony that occurs when different languages are spoken within the same country is seen as the province is constantly voting on whether or not the province should secede from Canada (Mujica 6). In the end, Americans do not want their country fall apart due to language barriers and many believe that English would unite and benefit the nation.

Some proponents of English as the United States’ official language disapprove of current bilingual efforts as they believe they will further divide the nation as well as increase its debt. Besides uniting the United States, many Americans are positive that establishing English as the official language would save the nation money and help eliminate our debt crisis. By instituting bilingual policies, the United States would be spending money by re-constructing road signs along with various other government-approved public necessities. Already, there are many expenses throughout the country providing bilingual and multilingual services. Los Angeles County spends $265 for each of its 420 full-time court interpreters, everyday (Mujica 5). These expenses exist because there is no official language, hence translators are required. Also, another large expense caused by America’s lack of an official language came when Executive Order
13166 was established. This order states that in clinics and hospitals of every kind, translators of any language spoken by a patient are required. The cost of a translator can cost doctors up to $500 at their own expense (Mujica 5). Logically, doctors do not desire patients who require translators due to the extra cost and hassle; this can cause discrimination in the medical field. But these required services are not only costing Americans money; there is a larger problem at hand. By providing bilingual and multilingual services, the government is making it appear that immigrants do not need to learn English (Mujica 3). But the government knows the truth after investigating the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual policies. After paying over $100 million solely in studies on bilingual education and its effectiveness, the government has only found that English immersion programs are more effective in comparison (Mujica 5). If the United States were to adopt a bilingual policy, and if the nation were to spend the same amount of its budget as Canada does proportionally, the policy would require more than $4 billion annually (Mujica 6). And even if the United States delved into bilingual efforts, Americans question whether it would be fair to make Spanish and English the two acceptable languages since there are more than two hundred other languages spoken in the country (Schlaflly 3). Ultimately, bilingual policies would cost America large sums of money and further divide the nation.

Due to recent ethnic and racial tensions throughout the nation there have been many somewhat successful movements to make English the official language of the United States. In 1981, U.S. Senator S.I. Hayakawa of Hawaii proposed an amendment that aimed to establish English as the United States’ national language and prohibit the official use of other languages, especially Spanish. Although the proposal was denied quickly, Senator Hayakawa went on to found U.S. English Inc. (Rich and Vance 4). Since then, many other English conservation groups
and organizations have arisen. As current chairman of U.S. English Inc., Mauro Mujica defends his organization’s beliefs as he states, “We are simply saying that official documents should be in English and money saved on translations could go to help the people to learn English. We’re saying you could still take a driver’s test in another language, but we suggest it to be temporary until you learn English” (Headden 4). These groups have obviously had some successful influence, as by 1990, seventeen states had officially declared English its official language. In 2006 the U.S. Senate voted on another proposal to make English the official language, though it was rejected (Hulse 4). At this time Arizona, even with its diverse population, became the 28th state to adopt English as its official language (Rich and Vance 5). As of 2011, thirty-one states have official English policies. The United States still has no declared official language, but legislation and various movements continue to establish one.

In spite of controversy, establishing English as the United States of America’s official language would improve the nation’s social and economic standings. While some see no need for an official language when there never has been before, others believe that due to an increasing amount of lingual diversity, the United States should adopt a bilingual policy. Still, many Americans believe that English should be declared the official language so that the nation can be united a under common language. Considering all these viewpoints, designating English as the official language of the United States would benefit the nation.
Works Cited


4. Writer’s Choice

Dignity in Families, Marriage, and Society

One of the most fundamental beliefs of the Catholic Church is the dignity of each and every human person. Society, however, has a tendency to degrade the status of those it deems unworthy. As a reaction to changing times, the Second Vatican Council produced the document *Gaudium et Spes* to address societal issues and apply the Church’s fundamental stances to them. In modern times, marriage and family life have been in decline with practices such as divorce and even abortion. Due to the increasing occurrences of these practices, the Church wishes to reemphasize the importance of each individual and families. The Church believes that with renewed importance of the dignity of the human person, personal, familiar, and ultimately, societal, relations will strengthen.

Without a doubt, families seen today are not the same as those seen sixty or seventy years ago. While change is inevitable, the recent changes that have occurred in families have resulted in a high number of single-parent households, divorces, abortions, depressed and anxious individuals, and lives lost to euthanasia. The Church views these tragedies as attributed to the failure to recognize the dignity of the human person. It is not that society has removed emphasis from the human person, but rather that emphasis has been placed on the achievements of humans rather than humans themselves. Furthermore, as society has become lax to traditional values, the idea of love has become distorted. Society’s view of love is not for neighbors, but rather for a single partner, who is loved with a love of physical appearance, not for the dignity he or she holds within. This idea of love is in direct contrast with the Church’s view of all-encompassing love and the appreciation of the dignity of each and every person. Because of these contrasting ideals, divorce, polygamy, “free love,” and birth control have resulted. Divorce can ruin families;
polygamy can breed abuse; “free love” can lead to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies; and birth control can have negative health impacts. Springing forth from these issues are abortion and infanticide — both murder in the eyes of the Church. With this said, it is clear how direly important human dignity and the family are. These afore mentioned issues undoubtedly take their toll on society. Divorce often plagues parents and children alike with anxiety and depression. With more single parents than ever, families are often living in a cycle of poverty. In these cases, people are left with little freedom and few choices. As the document states, “The modern condition is rooted in the nature of human life itself: boundless in ambition yet limited, attracted to many things, but forced to choose among them, often choosing those things known to be harmful” (132). By decisions made without regard to the dignity of each human person, people are later trapped by their imprudent decisions.

Without regard to the dignity of the human person, which is defined as the inherent worth each individual has because he or she is a child of God, significant others do not become spouses, but, rather, sexual objects. This is evident as fewer couples get married these days. Another common situation is couples entering marriage without properly understanding the sacrament and its sanctity. The Church acknowledges that marriage contains many roles, but, “Very important among them is the task of transmitting life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. Parents…must enter into this thoughtfully…considering both the material and spiritual conditions of the times and of their family’s state” (164). Parents who enter unholy marriages often do not properly educate their children as to what true, perfect love is. Contraception is increasingly common and methods of natural family planning are rejected in a society that demands instant gratification. The Church admits that it can be “very difficult if sexual loving is ended in order to prevent conception and can endanger the bond as well as the
quality of family life,” but it wholeheartedly rejects abortion and infanticide as solutions (165). Relationships can crumble due to differences over sexual relations; divorce, abortion, and unwanted pregnancies can result. When the foundations of parents’ relationships are unstable, children’s lives can also become unstable, resulting in difficult cycles to break. The Council says, “Marriage and family life are the bedrock of a healthy human society” (162). When our families are broken, society is broken.

The Church affirms that each and every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Due to this fact, no fetus or sickly elder should be terminated. Because life is so sacred and a gift from God, each child should be welcomed and pregnancy should not be seen as a curse or disease, and no elderly person should feel like a burden. When humans are given dignity, they experience true love, not objectification. Where dignity is lost, death is found. With the image of the Holy Family and the Trinity, God has provided us with a pure and true image of what our families should be. Through the God who created each person, comes true unconditional love that is often lost upon society, but that the Church is trying to restore.
Work Cited