

*To the student—Below is a sample of the kind of cover letter you must write as the introduction to your Senior Portfolio Assessment. It has been adapted from actual cover letters submitted in previous years. Note that the letter provides a summary of each work in the portfolio and appraises its strong points and weak points, and then goes on to briefly address the writer's overall achievements and growth while here at ASC. Names and other details have been changed.*

April 4, 2007

Dear ETCFL Faculty:

Please accept the enclosed essays and résumé as my Senior Portfolio.

The first essay, "Everyday Abuse," was written for Ethnic and Minority Lit. I analyzed Alice Walker's story "Everyday Use" and tried to show that Walker was criticizing a particular aspect of the Black Pride movement of the late sixties and early seventies. She was concerned that people like Dee (or rather, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo) and Hakim-al-Barber were constructing an "African" identity that was false and, even worse, disrespectful to their real Southern roots as represented by Mama and Maggie. It was a good paper, even though, as the instructor's comments indicate, I certainly could have done a better job using quotations from the story.

The second essay, "Sedgwick vs. Cooper," was written for American Literature 1492-1865. It compares and contrasts Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novel Hope Leslie with James Fenimore Cooper's Last of the Mohicans. I tried to show that, while neither novel is a masterpiece, Hope Leslie is far better in terms of plot and characterization, as well as in terms of its egalitarian social vision. The big question I failed to address is why, if Sedgwick's is such an obviously superior literary work, Cooper's novel became so much more famous and influential. As the instructor's comments suggest, I focused on evaluation but ignored the arguably more interesting question of canonicity.

I wrote the third essay, "Pounding Ezra," for Modern Poetry. I have to admit I still have a lot of trouble "getting" poets like Eliot and Pound, and I have no idea why I chose to write a paper on the critical reception of the Cantos. Still, I thought I made a good attempt, and I have included it as an example of how even when an essay doesn't turn out that well, you can learn a lot just from writing it. In a weird way, I'm more proud of this paper than I am of others that were easier for me to write, just because I struggled with it so much.

I loved reading Pride and Prejudice, and I think that love is reflected in "Not So Universally Acknowledged," the paper I wrote for English Lit. I began by noting that Austen's opening statement about "a truth universally acknowledged" was meant to be ironic. However, even though readers are obviously not supposed to agree that rich bachelors must be "in want of a wife," Austen does assume that her readers consider many other equally questionable truths to be "universally acknowledged." It was a complex thesis, and I think I handled it reasonably well. On the other hand, I missed several opportunities to show how Austen's text itself supported my argument.

I have also included some of the work done in my grammar and linguistics classes, as well as a short story and three poems I wrote in Intro to Creative Writing. While I do not consider myself a great poet or fiction writer and probably will never become very fond of grammar, I do feel these courses have strengthened my expository writing. I certainly have a much better appreciation for writing that manages to get complex ideas across clearly and understandably.

As I look back over the work I did as a freshman and sophomore, I think my biggest growth has been as a researcher and writer. I have learned a lot during my years here at ASC, about a lot of different subjects, but I think I have best prepared myself to work in the arena of finding and synthesizing information, and then using that information to address the kinds of questions I'm interested in.

Thank you for accepting my portfolio. I hope you enjoy reading it and are able to learn something about the department's strengths and weaknesses from it.

Sincerely,

Jean S. Enior