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What follows is a set of materials developed for dialogue assignments, including general instructions and some sample assignments. We have also appended a set of rubrics for grading dialogue assignments, developed by John Immerwahr, Villanova University

General suggestions for writing a dialogue / dramatic scene

The following suggestions may help anyone who opts to write a dialogue or dramatic scene for their assignment. These suggestions are generic, and they have been formulated without any particular course or assignment in mind. If there is anything inconsistent between these suggestions and the assignment instructions, please abide by the assignment instructions. The suggestions offered below presuppose that there will be two principal figures in your scene (and given the length of the assignment, it is probably inadvisable for you to include more than two).

You should be aware that both drama and the dialogue form are among the oldest literary forms in the Western tradition, and that either one is a respectable forum for exploring conceptual issues of the sort studied in this course. Most of the criteria for a good essay apply to dialogue and drama. Key terms must be defined. Arguments must be developed logically. Evidence must be relevant. Proper punctuation and good grammar are required, etc.

1. Because of the nature of the course, your dialogue must be a *debate*, not a mere discussion of the issues. That is, your interlocutors must disagree on a contentious question, and most (if not absolutely all) of their exchange should be argumentative. As in an essay, the arguments must collect and organize evidence that either proves or refutes a controversial point. In a debate, the interlocutors use arguments to arrive at the truth of the matter. A discussion, on the other hand, merely identifies what each interlocutor happens to believe without anyone attempting to convince the other(s) that their position is true.

2. In structuring your debate, bear in mind some generic *patterns* that it may follow. (a) Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> is arguing that Interlocutor<sub>2</sub> ought to adopt the position of Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> on the issue in question. (b) Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> is trying to refute the position that Interlocutor<sub>2</sub> has already adopted on the issue. (c) Both interlocutors are arguing that their own position on the issue is stronger than the other's position. Being clear about the pattern will help

3. While your interlocutors are goal-directed in one of the ways specified in (2), they need not reach a *resolution* in their debate. That is, they may not come to any agreement by the end of the scene you write. Whether they come to a resolution will depend on the main issue on which they are debating, what they focus on in the debate, the fundamental commitments with which each one begins, and a variety of other factors. (Another factor is the size of the assignment - a shorter dialogue is less likely to yield a conclusive resolution in a debate.) There are numerous options for you to end debate, including the following: (a) Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> succeeds completely in convincing (or refuting) Interlocutor<sub>2</sub>; (b) Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> is partially successful in convincing (or

refuting) Interlocutor<sub>2</sub> by gaining a concession on one significant point; (c) Interlocutor<sub>1</sub> and Interlocutor<sub>2</sub> identify the crucial point on which they disagree fundamentally (or at least need to consider further in order to settle their disagreement conclusively); (d) one of the interlocutors gives up on the other because a resolution appears to be hopelessly beyond reach; (e) both interlocutors give up on each other because a resolution appears to be hopelessly beyond reach.

4. Your interlocutors should be portrayed realistically, but their conduct should be governed by their role as debaters. It's fine if they speak in an informal tone and use contractions. But they must also use the kind of *terminology* and display the kind of *logical sophistication* that difficult theoretical issues demand. You have some space to be creative when writing a dialogue or dramatic scene, but you must not forget that this is still an academic exercise.

Value: 40%

Due: August 11, *in class at 6:30 p.m.*

Length: 1000-1200 words

For the major assignment, you will write a dialogue. The dialogue will be a debate between two or three of the *authors* studied in this course. The subject of this debate must be a controversial contemporary social or political issue (municipal, provincial, national or international).

**Alternative version:** Do everything according to the instructions found below, except write a compare and contrast essay on the issue instead of a dialogue.

Imagine two or three of our authors were to meet and debate over a controversial issue described in a current newspaper article. At the beginning of the dialogue specify the setting (think of an appropriate time and place for these figures to meet) and who the characters are. It might be a good idea to state the question at issue in this preface, although it may be more natural to incorporate the question into the dialogue itself; in any case, a concise, meaningful question should be found very early in your assignment. On the front of your assignment, staple a copy of a newspaper article (or a photocopy of a newspaper article).

*Instructions:*

1. Find an article in a newspaper (see 2) about a controversial social or political issue on which it would be appropriate for two or three of our authors to comment. +-This article will be stapled to the front of the assignment. **Be sure to find an issue that is appropriate for this course and our readings; you will be assessed for the judgement you exercise on this choice.**
2. Do not use a magazine article or an article from a source that publishes exclusively online. Online editions of ordinary newspapers (Brantford Expositor, Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, etc) are fine. **N.b., the article must be dated *after* July 2, 2008.** No exceptions.
3. At the beginning of the assignment specify the authors from our course who would have something interesting and worthwhile to say about this issue. Imagine an appropriate place and time for them to discuss the issue. **Be sure to use appropriate authors and set their debate appropriately; in part you will be assessed for your judgement on these points as well.**
4. To make the dialogue an authentic representation of these authors, you must use the special terminology that each author uses or formulates. Dispense with wordy references to their work, such as "... as I argue in my book, *Summa Theologiae*, ..."; instead, simply insert the correct page reference from our text in brackets immediately after the dialogue passage that relies on the text.
5. Ignore historical differences, either between the characters themselves or between the characters and the contemporary issue.
6. Restrictions: (1) You may use either Plato or Sophocles as one of the characters in this

dialogue, but not both; (2) use only *authors* from our readings, not characters such as Socrates.

**Bonus:** Bring 2-3 appropriate newspaper articles to the Week 8 tutorial (Oct 31, Nov 2) for **1** bonus mark. For each article you must identify at least 1 author who would be an appropriate commentator. Make a note of appropriate name(s) and be prepared to explain your choice(s).

Value: 20%

Due: Wednesday, July 23, *in class at 6:30 p.m.*

Length: 600-800 words

For this term's first assignment, you will write a dialogue. The dialogue will be a debate between Antigone and Socrates on the following question: "Can a citizen defy his/her state in good conscience?"

Imagine these two characters meet and get into a debate over this issue. It might be natural to incorporate our question (or a paraphrase of it) into the dialogue itself (e.g., as Socrates and Crito move towards general questions over the course of Plato's *Crito*), or you may feel more comfortable having your characters launch into the discussion from the start (e.g. the beginning of *Apology*).

You may think of this assignment as a Plato-style dialogue (e.g., *Crito*) or as a scene in a play (e.g., *Antigone*).

*Instructions:*

1. In one sentence identify the setting for this imagined dialogue. Set it in an appropriate place/time, but be brief in describing it. Don't bother explaining why this is the setting; don't be constrained by concerns about "realism" or historical accuracy, either.
2. Do not waste space by having your characters engage in a great deal of idle chatter or small talk. This is a short assignment, and you will earn your grades by dealing appropriately with questions of principle and theoretical issues. If Socrates and Antigone discuss the weather for half of the allotted length, your grade will suffer.
3. Your characters, Socrates and Antigone, should be faithful to the depictions in our readings from Plato and Sophocles, but do not include quotations of our readings. You must correctly use the terminology found in *The Trial and Death of Socrates* and *Antigone*, but don't reiterate entire sentences. I want to see how well you understand the readings and how well you have processed the ideas. You will best be able to reveal your comprehension by paraphrasing, analyzing, reconstructing, and expanding on the material in these readings.
4. In the space provided, you may not be able to have your characters resolve their dispute. (Given the personalities involved, a fully satisfactory resolution may not be possible even in a very *long* dialogue between them.) But your dialogue must come to a natural, dramatic close. They must either resolve one part of the dispute (e.g., they may agree that a particular concept needs to be defined, or that it can be defined in one way or another, or that they have identified the nub of their disagreement precisely, etc.).

5. Have fun with this assignment, but remember that the standards of acceptable punctuation, grammar, spelling, diction, paragraphing, clarity, etc. apply here as much as in an essay.

Due: Thursday, April 3; to be submitted in class, *at the beginning of class* (10:30 am)

Value: 40 marks; 40% of the final grade

Length: 1500 words *maximum*

*Assignment:*

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Neil Postman characterizes situation comedies and other television shows that offer light entertainment as “junk” (e.g., *M.A.S.H.*, *The A-Team*, *Dynasty*, *The Tonight Show*, etc.). Because “junk” television does not pretend to be edifying, informative or illuminating, it does not threaten to corrupt public discourse - unlike tv news or televangelism, which does. Postman is not criticising the shows that he calls “junk”, but he does suggest that they are unsophisticated or simple-minded. The contributors to *The Simpsons and Philosophy*, however, suggest that *The Simpsons* is theoretically and culturally sophisticated in many and various ways; presumably, these same authors do *not* believe that *The Simpsons* is a threat to public discourse.

For your assignment, imagine one or two of the authors in *The Simpsons and Philosophy* text trying to convince Postman that he ought to modify the implicit conception of “junk” television in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. What might they say about *The Simpsons* to convince Postman that this show is sophisticated, that it makes a positive contribution to the Western cultural tradition which Postman clearly respects, that something is wrong with Postman’s understanding of cultural junk, etc. Imagine, also, how Postman might respond to these authors.

*Assignment Instructions:*

1. The assignment can be written either as an essay or as a dialogue/dramatic scene.
- 2a. If you write an essay, please follow the usual conventions regarding the introductory paragraph, thesis statement, etc. See “Writing Instructions” below for more details.
- 2b. If you write a dialogue/dramatic scene, please begin by briefly indicating the setting of the discussion, and follow the usual conventions of a dramatic script.
3. You are welcome to use the readings placed on reserve for this course or any other outside sources that you wish, but do not turn this into a research assignment. I want to see how well you handle the debate between Postman and the other authors, not how well you are able to root out new participants for this debate.

Length: 1000-1200 words

Due Friday, February 15, 11:30 am.

Value: 30 marks

### *General Instructions*

For the first assignment you will focus on the traditional theoretical debate between Natural Law theory and Legal Positivism. While we are reading contemporary contributions to this debate, for this assignment you must concentrate on Aquinas and Hobbes.

In discussing *Antigone* in class we have seen how Antigone anticipates Natural Law theory and how Creon anticipates Legal Positivism. But, of course, neither Antigone nor Creon elaborates at length on the principles that they adhere to so strenuously, and their positions are polarized by the personal nature of the clash between them. For this assignment, I want you to imagine how Aquinas and Hobbes would take up the debate and attempt to resolve the dispute.

Your assignment may take either of the following forms:

1) You may write an essay that provides a focused, analytical treatment of the Aquinas and Hobbes readings and speculates on what each of these theorists would say about the dramatic conflict between Antigone and Creon.

Or

2) You may write a dramatic scene (or dialogue) that depicts Aquinas and Hobbes discussing in a focused and analytical way the theoretical problems that drive a wedge between Antigone and Creon. Imagine that Aquinas and Hobbes have been to the theatre together to see a performance of *Antigone* and afterwards they strike up a conversation about the play.

### *Specific Instructions*

1. The standards of writing and the expectations upon you will be the same whether you choose to write an essay or a dramatic scene, even if the forms are quite different. Sentences must be grammatically correct, diction must be precise, paragraphs well formed, punctuation correct, etc. But if you write an essay, be sure to write a good introduction. And if you choose to write a dramatic scene, do not waste space by having your characters engage in a great deal of idle chatter or small talk.

2. In the space provided, you will not be able to resolve many of the fundamental matters in dispute, but you should aim to define it as precisely as possible.

3. For an essay, please abide by the standard conventions for academic writing. Double-space, use a plain font, leave one inch margins, provide a descriptive title, etc. For a dramatic scene you may use the conventions found in Sophocles' *Antigone*. But be sure to double-space, leave one



inch margins, etc.

4. This is not a research assignment. I am looking for analysis and interpretation of our readings. If you refer to a specific passage in the readings, cite the page number in brackets. Footnotes aren't necessary.

Rubrics for Evaluating Dialogues

	Strong work <sup>1</sup>	Needs development	Unsatisfactory
Choice of question for debate	Question leads to interesting debate and strong insights	Question has some interesting implications, but also is somewhat obvious, trivial or misleading	Question is trivial or obvious, does not lead to interesting debate
Accuracy of understanding	Dialogue represents accurate understand of both positions, correctly adapting and applying the ideas to the context of the dialogue	Some parts of dialogue are not raccurate, given the positions that the interlocutors are supposed to represent	Positions taken in the dialogue are inaccurate and reflect little understanding of the texts
Depth of understanding	Dialogue is not only accurate but also reflects thoughtful understanding of texts, relying on in-depth reading, not only on ideas covered in class	Dialogue reflects some depth but other parts are based on class discussion or superficial reading	Dialogue could have been written entirely from lectures and class discussion, reflects no deep reading of the text
Faithfulness to dialogue conventions	Choice of characters and setting help advance points being made. Dialogue presents competing philosophical positions in dramatic fashion, and leads to interesting conclusion	Use of dialogue form only partially successful in delivering the author's main points.	Characters and setting have little relationship to points made. Use of dialogue form does not really help advance the ideas
Insights	Helps readers (such as a member of this class) gain significant insights into the material	Some insights, but other parts of dialogue would be obvious to anyone who had read assigned material carefully	Very little insight added to material, dialogue does not give evidence of deep thought about the material
Mechanics	Nearly flawless grammar, spelling, and word choice; sentences read smoothly and are clear without being wordy	Grammar, spelling, word choice, sentence structure and/or word economy need attention	Serious problems with grammar, spelling, word choice, sentence structure and/or word economy

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<sup>1</sup> An A-level paper will be strong in most categories; B papers will be strong in some but need development in others; C papers need significant development; D papers are typically unsatisfactory in most categories; most people who get F's haven't read these criteria.