

An Illustration of ISAW Student Writing Improvement

The following paragraphs, one that opens Reid Lamson's ISAW pre-test essay and the other that opens his post-test essay, portray how Reid grows in his ability to read and analyze a non-fiction reading passage and create a thoughtful response to the issue identified in the prompt—the reading and writing task posed by the University of California's Analytical Writing Placement Examination. Just these two paragraphs show what can happen when teachers teach analytic writing and critical reading by putting a laser focus on student improvement.

Honest Communication

She describes many different conflicts. She starts out by describing how she's from a small town in Kentucky and is not at all acostume to big city life. She talks about how she's never been on a plane or an escalator, or even a big bus.

In October, Reid's introductory paragraph to his essay illustrates his inability to understand and respond to an author's position. His short, simple sentences convey his confusion with the task. He also ignores his reader's need for orientation to what the author has written.

For the remainder of his essay, Reid writes three more paragraphs, two that restate parts of the passage with no analysis, and a concluding paragraph that mentions some general points of agreement with the author but are completely disconnected from what the writing prompt requires. Reid was tremendously proud of this essay, not realizing then how much he had to work on in his reading and writing.

Trust Your First Instinct

How would you react in an emergency? That is a complicated question for most people because most people haven't been in an emergency situation and don't know exactly how they would react. Most people would like to think that they would act quickly, and help who ever is in need. But according to two professors named Darley and Latané acting quickly or even acting is usually not what happens. In their essay, "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," Darley and Latané give examples, based on their research, of what people usually do in an emergency. Darley and Latané say, "the bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others and all too frequently by their inaction," meaning people don't react on their first instinct and help. They usually sit back and wait for someone else to make a move.

Reid Lamson

In mid-May, Reid demonstrates in his opening paragraph that he understands the reading passage and can identify the author's position. His sentences illustrate his confidence, control, and ability to weave in a quotation from the text. He engages his reader from the outset.

In the second paragraph of this essay, he analyzes one example the authors use to support their position. Reid ends the paragraph with a delayed claim that is in partial disagreement with the authors. He then develops a line of reasoning, using three example paragraphs that support his claim and flesh out his thinking. Reid closes his essay in a way that invites the reader to keep thinking beyond what he has presented.

Reid, by the way, was accepted to the United States Air Force Academy.