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Document Title: Using Examples to Illustrate Concepts

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Course: PHIL 1112

Course Title: Justifying Political Power

Year of Award: Spring 2021

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Spring 2021 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed by graduate student instructors to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing.) **No undergraduate student's writing will ever be published in this archive.)**

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The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due by Tuesday, May 25.

Spring 2021 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

Instr name: Elizabeth (Libby) Southgate

Form of Address (circle): Mr. **Ms.** Mx. Other _____

Dept & Course # PHIL 1112-104

Course title: Justifying Political Power

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Using Examples to Illustrate Concepts

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature: Elizabeth Southgate

Date: May 25th 2021

"Using Examples to Illustrate Concepts"

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Abstract

This writing exercise helps students develop the ability to develop and deploy examples to illustrate concepts or ideas. The exercise is in three parts. In the first, the whole class reads and then discusses examples of writing where an author has used an example to illustrate a concept/idea (passages taken from texts used in class). In the second, the students work in groups to develop their own example, which is then work-shopped as a whole class. Lastly, the students write their example out in prose. This exercise was completed on zoom using interactive google slides in lieu of a physical worksheet, but it would work just as well as a physical worksheet.

Keywords

Examples, Expository Writing, Clarity, Signaling Words.

Explanation of Exercise for Future Instructors

Motivation?

I had found that my students often struggled with the mechanics of developing and deploying examples in a way that was helpful to the reader. This exercise helped my students develop this skill.

Timing?

We completed this exercise the week before I assigned them a graded piece of writing in which (among other things) they were expected to explain to the reader the concept of "tacit consent" -- which we had been reading about. These exercises helped them develop an example that they could then use in their paper.

Logistics?

The class in which we completed these exercises was on zoom so I used google slides to structure the class. For some of the class I shared my screen and we either discussed the example on the screen, or I talked them through an idea. For the rest of the class they worked in groups to directly edit slides as if they were a worksheet. If the class was in person, I would have made a physical worksheet containing (a) the example examples [so they could annotate], (b) the group work activity [as on the slides], and (c) space to complete the individual writing task.

How did this exercise work in practice?

I started by sharing my screen and introducing the topic.

PART 1 | For each of the the "example example" slides on this page, I asked the class to read the example with the following questions in mind: (a) What is the concept or idea being illustrated? (b) Where does the example start? (c) Is this example a good illustration of this concept? Why/why not? When everyone was done reading, I asked the students about (a) and (b) [above] to set the discussion. We then had a whole class discussion of the example in front of us -- how was it is useful? What (if anything) was unhelpful? (For the later example slides) how does the example differ from the ones others we've discussed? [There was also downloadable version of this available in case they wanted to write on the text (as per a physical worksheet)]

I then outlined some "tips" for choosing an example in writing and answered any questions.

PART 2 | Next, I introduced the second activity which asks the students to work in groups to develop an example of their own that illustrates the concept of "tacit consent" (which we were learning about in our readings and would be a part of the next writing assignment.) The task would be completed on "worksheets" in breakout rooms so I went over the worksheet and gave them some tips for how to approach the task. The students then worked on this activity in breakout rooms. In groups, they developed their example by editing the collaborative/editable slideshow slides above like a worksheet. Making a collaborative slideshow like this, allows the groups to have their own "worksheet" to work on (unlike a google doc). It also allows me (as the instructor) to monitor how the groups in the breakout rooms are doing, how much more time they need, and whether they need help.

When the groups were done with the task, I closed the breakout rooms and asked each group to both describe their example to the class and explain why they'd chosen it. We then talked about/work-shopped each group's example as a whole class -- highlighting was useful/good about the one they'd chosen, as well as highlighting what could be improved and how it could be improved.

I then outlined some tips for deploying examples in writing and introduced the last part of this exercise.

PART 3 | Finally, I asked the students to take what they'd developed and learned and write a version of their group's example in prose.

"Using Examples to Illustrate Concepts"


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Abstract

This writing exercise helps students develop the ability to develop and deploy examples to illustrate concepts or ideas. The exercise is in three parts. In the first, the whole class reads and then discusses examples of writing where an author has used an example to illustrate a concept/idea (passages taken from texts used in class). In the second, the students work in groups to develop their own example, which is then work-shopped as a whole class. Lastly, the students write their example out in prose. This exercise was completed on zoom using interactive google slides in lieu of a physical worksheet, but it would work just as well as a physical worksheet.

Keywords

Examples, Expository Writing, Clarity, Signaling Words.



Using Examples to Illustrate Concepts

Part 1 [whole class]

We're going to read and think about some actual uses of examples from one of our texts. For each, read the passage carefully, determine what concept/idea is being illustrated, and think about whether the example is a good illustration of the concept. When everyone is done reading, we'll talk about it as a class!

An example example:



"A different, and perhaps complementary, variety of indirect utilitarianism proposes that we evaluate actions in terms of the motives, dispositions or traits of character they exemplify, for example, praising a person who is honest or criticizing one who is mean. In this case the utilitarian will consider which qualities of character are likely to induce those who exhibit them to act in ways that lead to the maximization of well-being." (Knowles, Political Philosophy, 25)

Another example example:



"The second conception of rules identifies them as useful rules of thumb. A better example here than Mill's Nautical Almanac (which we should treat as infallible!) is a rule for hillwalkers such as 'If you cannot see the point to which you are heading, take a compass bearing and follow it'. Accepting such a rule will lead you to take a map and compass on your walk and generally help you to escape difficulties in route finding. But it is important to recognize that the rule should not be followed slavishly. It should be quickly broken if the bearing takes you to the top of a cliff. And if the compass veers erratically when you seem to be walking in a straight line, you should consider whether there might be magnetic rocks in the vicinity." (Knowles, Political Philosophy, 29)

A final example example:

"This argument claims that citizens ought to be grateful for what they have received from the state, and, further, the gratitude should be signalled by the citizens' acceptance of their duties. Again, the first step in the argument is a claim that the citizen has received benefits, so to proceed we must assume that this is true. Clearly, if the citizens do not receive benefits from the state, there is nothing for them to be grateful for. The next step in the argument is the claim that citizens ought to feel grateful to the state. The final step is the claim that acceptance of the duties of citizenship is the appropriate expression of gratitude. We can see the distinctness of steps two and three in the details of a recent immigration case, reported in the newspapers, which captures this structure nicely.

An army officer's life was saved by one of his Gurkha soldiers. Properly, he felt grateful and expressed his gratitude by promising to educate the soldier's son in Britain. As these things go, the son was refused the necessary immigration credentials, so the former officer (a wealthy man) said he would leave the country, too. I think (but am not sure) that the story had a happy ending. In the first place, the officer was right to feel grateful. In the second place he chose to express his gratitude by taking on an obligation to the father, and to the boy, to see to his education. Having taken on board this obligation, the officer judged correctly that he was morally required to fulfil it. One can think of other ways in which the officer could have expressed his gratitude, ways which did not place him under an obligation – indeed, this is a nice example of how acts of gratitude can be as generous as the services that give rise to them." (Knowles, Political Philosophy, 28g)

Part 2 (small groups)

In groups, develop an example that illustrates the concept of **tacit consent**. Make notes under the headings on your assigned collaborative powerpoint page to help you. Don't forget what we've just discussed about choosing examples!

Choosing an example

Your example can be real or hypothetical

Your example should be a **complete** instance of the idea you're trying to illustrate

- Try to choose an example that has *all* of the features of the concept/idea you are illustrating.
- It's a good idea to start by working out the features of the concept and working backwards.

Your example should be a **clear** instance of the idea you're trying to illustrate

- Try to choose an example that **clearly** has *all* the features of the concept/idea you are illustrating but no features that confuse the concept/idea you're trying to illustrate.
- Check: does your example clearly have all of the features of the concept/idea that you want to illustrate? (Yes? Good!)
- Check: is your example a controversial instance of the concept/idea? (Yes? Change!)
- Check: is your example distracting? Does it raise additional questions that you're not trying to raise? (Yes? Change?)

Some tips about how to approach this task

1. What features does an instance of tacit consent have?

As a group, *really think* about tacit consent -- ask yourself what *features* an action needs to have to count as an instance of tacit consent. Remember our **previous work** on **necessary and sufficient conditions**? This question is asking you to (attempt) to outline the necessary and sufficient conditions for an action being an instance of tacit consent.

2. What is an example of an action that has these features (and no/few distracting features)?

Brainstorm this as a group. You might come up with a few and choose the best one. Make sure to fill out your chosen example with enough details to make the features of tacit consent you're trying to illustrate clear.

3. How does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Join it all together! How do the details of your group's example illustrate the necessary/sufficient features of tacit consent? Be specific.

Group 1

1. **What features** does an instance of tacit consent have?
2. **What is an example of an action that has these features** (and no/few other distracting features)?
3. **How** does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Group 2

1. **What features** does an instance of tacit consent have?
2. **What is an example of an action that has these features** (and no/few other distracting features)?
3. **How** does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Students engage with these four slides simultaneously.

Group 3

1. **What features** does an instance of tacit consent have?
2. **What is an example of an action that has these features** (and no/few other distracting features)?
3. **How** does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Group 4

1. **What features** does an instance of tacit consent have?
2. **What is an example of an action that has these features** (and no/few other distracting features)?
3. **How** does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Deploying an example

Don't just dump an example and run!

Remember, you're using the example to help the reader understand a concept/idea. To make sure your example is as clear and helpful as possible, **make sure you do these three things**:

1. **Indicate to your reader that this is an example of concept/idea X.**
One way to do this is to use an indicator word/phrase. Some choices here might be: "To make this clearer, consider..."; "As an example..."; "As an illustration..."; "consider", "for instance", "to take a case in point" etc.
2. **Present the example with enough detail for it to successfully illustrate the concept.**
Make sure your example, as written, contains all the features you need it to.
3. **Explicitly tell the reader what they are supposed to take away from this example.**
Here, think about the purpose of the example. You might (e.g.) relate the parts of the example to the concept/idea you're illustrating. Or, you might (e.g.) tell the reader what they should infer from the example.

Part 3 [Individual]

Everyone open a google doc to write in.
Individually, write out a version of your group's example in prose as you might in a paper.
Incorporate any useful suggestions or ideas from the whole-class discussion of your example if you wish. Don't forget what we just discussed about deploying examples!
(150-200 words)

Examples of Student Work Produced in Response to this Activity

Group 1

1. What features does an instance of tacit consent have?

One feature of tacit consent is that it is given through actions rather than verbal or written statements. Another feature is that one knows that the action they make demonstrates consent. The action must be voluntary, deliberate and one must have the opportunity to dissent.

2. What is an example of an action that has these features (and no distracting features)?

In a restaurant, when choosing to order an item of food, one is tacitly consenting to paying for the item at the end of the meal. The prices are listed on the menu, and you have read them clearly. The restaurant will let you leave at any point.

3. How does this example illustrate the concept of tacit consent?

Because you are aware of how much the item costs, and you voluntarily order it, so you are aware that you will be expected to pay at the end of the meal, demonstrating that you consent to the restaurant. You are free to leave at any point, so you can fully dissent. You consent to this convention.

Group 2

1. What features does an instance of tacit consent have?

Tacit consent is voluntary and the citizen must be aware that their action is generating an obligation to obey the state. Tacit consent involves deliberately and freely performing actions meant to convey your consent toward the state. There is no explicit consent given. You do not sign a contract or verbally consent. Instead, your action(s) communicate consent.

2. What is an example of an action that has these features (and few/no distracting features)?

By entering an professional basketball arena, a fan implicitly agrees to obey the NBA's code of conduct for fans. In other words, your entrance implies that you accept the obligation to obey the rules set forth by the NBA.

3. How does this example illustrate the concept s of tacit consent?

- Your entrance into the stadium is voluntary. You freely choose to enter the arena and follow its rules.
- By entering, you deliberately convey that you will obey the Code of Conduct.
- You did not sign a contract nor verbally state your consent, meaning you never explicitly gave consent to the NBA. Instead, your action (entering the stadium) conveyed your consent.

"A common example of tacit consent is ordering food in a restaurant. In most restaurants, the prices of items are listed on the menu, so you are aware of how much each item costs. Because you are not obligated to order anything in a restaurant, doing so is a voluntary and deliberate action. Ordering food in a restaurant - and paying for it at the end of the meal - is also a well-known social convention, so you are aware that by ordering food you will be expected to pay for it. Therefore, when you order food, even though you never verbally state that you will pay at the end of the meal, you tacitly consent to paying the stated price on the menu for the items you ordered."

"One situation that demonstrates tacit consent is an NBA fan entering a basketball arena. Prior to purchasing a ticket, a fan is informed that by entering an arena, he or she agrees to abide by the NBA's code of conduct for spectators. This situation fulfills the necessary requirements for tacit consent. First, the fan deliberately expresses consent by entering the stadium. Second, the fan does not make an explicit agreement to obey the rules set forth by the NBA. Instead, the fan's action of entering the arena implicitly demonstrates consent. Third, the entrance into the stadium is voluntary, meaning the fan can easily choose not to give his or her consent to the NBA. The fan can also remove consent at any time by exiting the arena. Finally, the fan is aware of the agreement prior to entering the stadium. This means the fan knows what he or she is consenting to when entering the arena."

"One example of tacit consent is the contract one enters when ordering food at a restaurant. When you go out to eat and tell the server your order, you are tacitly consenting to paying for that item at the end of the meal. There are a couple things in play that establish this. The first is convention. The relationship between ordering food and having to pay for it, or even paying for any item you use, is an extremely strong convention that is inherent in our capitalistic society. When you go to a restaurant you are already expected to understand this convention, thus, when you order, you are consenting to paying. The second thing is the prices on the menu. When you order at a restaurant, the food items are clearly listed on the menu. This means that when the bill comes, you already knew how much you were going to have to pay. This is an important part of tacit consent as it is crucial that an individual knows what exactly they are consenting to."