Ideas for Classification/Division Essays

GETTING STARTED Ideas (from *Moves Writers Make* by James C. Raymond.)

1. Life is full of misunderstandings. Think of some situations in which you have witnessed misunderstandings. They may have occurred at work, at home, or in some extra curricular activity. See if you can devise categories for these misunderstandings. Try to explain each category by analyzing (picking apart) what happened in one or two incidents. (136)

2. Have you ever encountered a stereotype—a statement that treats a wide variety of individuals as if they were all alike? You may have heard, for example, that all New Yorkers are rude, all Westerners love the great outdoors, all Newfoundlanders tell funny stories. If you happen to be from any of these places, you know for a fact that the people come in dozens of varieties. Choose a group of people that is often reduced to a single stereotype and write an essay classifying individual types within that group. (131)

3. Think of a group of people or things you happen to know well: your friends, perhaps, or your relatives, or musical instruments, or varieties of poetry. Then classify the individuals in the group into categories that make sense. Remember, though, that not just any classification will result in an interesting paper. You will have to discover a division that reveals something that would otherwise be obscure to your readers, or a classification that somehow makes sense of what would otherwise seem random and vaguely related individual instances. (120)

Other Ideas (from *The Macmillan Reader* by Judith Nadell et al.)

Maybe you would like to choose one of the following topics. Start by determining the purpose of your essay: do you want to inform, persuade, or maybe entertain? Be sure that the types or categories you create are as complete and mutually exclusive as possible.

1. People in a waiting room
2. Holidays
3. Closets
4. Roommates
5. Dates
6. Divorces
7. Beds
8. Students in a class
9. Teachers
10. Bosses
11. Neighbors
12. Shoes
13. Summer movies
14. TV watchers
15. Mothers or fathers
16. Commercials
17. Vacations
18. Trash
19. Relatives
20. Homes (330-31)

DRAFTING--A Recipe for Writing Classification (from *Moves Writers Make* by James C. Raymond)

Two things are essential to making a classification essay interesting: First, you have to find a classification you care about—one that reveals something interesting about the subject matter. The second is to do something with each classification—for example, to define it, or describe it, or tell a story about it.

Here is a recipe for writing a classification essay:

1. If you subject is one that can be best understood by examining its parts (e.g., the parts of a flower or the parts of an engine), you are writing a "division" paper. If your subject is best understood by placing it in the context of other, related subjects (e.g., twelve types of roses or seven kinds of optical illusions), you are writing a classification paper.
2. Once you choose a topic, see if you can say something general about it in a sentence that includes a plural noun, preferably one with a number in front of it—for example, "There are nine kinds of friends," or "Nuclear reactors have three major components."
3. Write the parts or categories on separate pieces of paper and arrange the pieces in the sequence that will work best for the topic: either a logical sequence, a spatial sequence, or perhaps a sequence in which you group similar observations together, saving the best for last to maintain the interest of your readers.
4. Develop each part or category by describing, narrating, exemplifying, or using any other strategies (covered in Chapter 5 of the *Holt Handbook*).
5. After you've selected and arranged your details, add an introduction and an ending. (*Holt Handbook*, Chapter 6f).
6. Show a draft to fellow students in a formal or informal workshop, and see if your strategies are having the effects you want them to have. Use the checklist [below] to focus your discussion. (142-43)

REVISING

So What and the Seven Common Moves (from *Moves Writers Make* by James C. Raymond)

The So-What Factor. What does the writer want you to know, understand, feel, or believe after reading the essay? Does the writer's interpretation of the subject earn your interest?
- **Beginning.** What moves does the writer make to create interest at the beginning?
- **Ending.** What moves does the writer make to give the essay a sense of an ending?
- **Detail.** Look for examples of the writer's eye and the writer's ear at work. Look for examples of showing and telling. Look for generalizations that are not supported by specific evidence. Would the essay be improved by adding details, stories, examples, or explanations at those points?
- **Organization/Plot.** Are the various parts of the essay arranged in a sequence that makes sense? Does the writer sustain a sense of unfinished business until the end?
- **Style.** Name or describe the writer's best moves.
- **Voice/Attitude.** How would you characterize the writer's attitude (angry, serious, detached, playful)? What sort of person do you imagine the writer to be? Is the voice too formal or not formal enough for the purposes of this particular essay?
- **Economy.** Test for economy by looking for words, phrases, or details that could be omitted without being missed.

SOURCES:
- Nadell, Judith, et al. *The Macmillan Reader*. 4th ed. Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1996.
- Raymond, James C. *Moves Writers Make*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.