

Institutional Effectiveness Report Academic Year 2013-2014 English Composition

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Program Mission and Goals

The mission and rationale for the writing sequence is based primarily upon two related concepts. The first is the notion of decentering, which holds that developing writers find it easiest to write about themselves and the things that are most important to them. As their writing skills develop, they become more adept at writing to people and about subjects that are beyond their own personal perceptual sphere. The second basic concept underlying the sequence of courses is the idea (from James Kinneavy) that a basic communications triangle (addresser-message-addressee) can become a heuristic for identifying distinct types of discourse depending upon the emphasis of each type.

Generally speaking, the emphasis in English 111 is on addresser (expressive discourse), in English 112 on addressee (transactional discourse and argument), and in English 200 on message (referential). The progression of composition courses moves students from I-centered writing into writing that is focused on creating arguments appropriate for academic and professional audiences; and the final course in the sequence is largely oriented around writing in various academic disciplines.

Given the above sequence, there are four primary goals for student performance in the composition courses:

1. The ability to use language conventions appropriately.
2. The ability to develop ideas interesting to the audience and appropriate to the context.
3. The ability to organize ideas for clarity and logic.
4. The ability to use information from external sources appropriately.

The following report includes various types of information regarding student performance. As in past years, the report includes responses from the student attitude survey administered in the fall of each academic year and comparisons of SAT scores and grades.

Revision of Program Description, Goals, and Assessment

In the Fall of 2013 the department approved a new description of the program, keywords that help to define the program, goals for both the program and the three courses within the sequence. Since the program assessment will need to address the new outcomes for each course and the program overall, we sought permission from the Director of Institutional Effectiveness to suspend our usual direct assessment of student writing to pilot a new approach.

We began our pilot last year with English 112; in the 2013-2014 academic year, we revised the pilot exam and our assessment methodology. This revised version of the final exam was piloted in five sections of English 112 in the fall of 2013. This student sample was then read and evaluated at an assessment meeting of seven composition instructors in April 2014. The results of the pilot are included in this report.

Assessment Activities

1. Student Writing Assessment

We collected writing samples from students who had completed English 112. These 49 papers, collected from five sections of English 112, were read and scored twice using the new outcomes developed for the course by FWAC.

The scoring involved a blind system: readers did not know the names of students or their instructors. Furthermore, second readers did not have access to first reader's scores.

2. Writing Attitude Survey

The Composition Program conducted a writing attitude survey among all students taking a composition course in fall 2013. This survey was completed by 92 students or about 65% of fall composition students. The responses to key items were compared with survey results from past years.

3. Performance Comparison of Students Starting in Different Composition Courses

Performance of students starting the composition sequence in English 111 and English 112 was compared through spring and fall 2013. Areas of comparison were average SAT verbal scores as well as composition grade point averages. All students taking English 111 and/or 112 in spring or fall 2013 were included.

Results and Evaluation

1. Student Writing Assessment

INDIVIDUAL COURSE ASSESSMENT

In addition to charting the four programmatic goals, the Composition Program now charts the goals that are specific to each course. We believe that this information will give us a more detailed picture of what students are learning in individual courses and will also inform programmatic decisions regarding professional development workshops and curriculum changes.

This year, we focused on assessing English 112, revising the outcomes for the course and mapping how each outcome could be measured through either indirect (student attitude survey) or direct (assessment of student writing) means. Below are the outcomes that students should demonstrate by the end of English 112 (this includes the outcomes for English 111, as the course goals are cumulative). The bolded outcomes are those we attempted to measure using the final exam writing sample.

By the time students complete English 112, they should be able to demonstrate the ability to

- **Develop ideas**
- **Understand the writing of others**
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others in writing
- Use comments of others to revise their writing
- **Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling**
- Write about the strengths and weakness of their own reading and writing processes
- **Create reasoned and well-supported arguments for specific audiences**
- **Read and analyze arguments with an awareness of rhetorical situations and persuasive strategies**
- **Use multiple methods to find and evaluate information and ideas from a variety of media**
- Document sources appropriately

For this direct assessment, each instructor read approximately 14 student exams and assessed each paper using a common rubric.

The exam consisted of two parts. In Part I, students were asked to read a short article and respond to several questions about the argument and the strategies used by the author.

In Part II, they were asked to write a short essay in which they described the research methods they would use to collect additional information on the topic discussed in the article.

Both the exam and the rubric are attached to this report.

RESULTS OF PART I:

Identify a claim

Students scored fairly very well in this area, with 54% accurately identifying and/or paraphrasing the claim of the author and 17% correctly identifying the general claim.

Identify reasons that support the author's claim

Students scored well in this area with 50% able to identify reasons and explain how they support the author's claim and another 22% identifying reasons but not connecting them to the claim.

Evaluate effectiveness of rhetorical appeals (persuasiveness)

Students did not fare well in this area—less than half were able to identify specific examples of appeals and explain their effectiveness (40%). Others were scored as “imprecise” (21%), unable to “connect example” to a “logical explanation of its effectiveness” (25%), and 14% had answers that were “missing, wrong, or incoherent.”

Identify use of rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos)

It appears as though students are more adept at identifying their appeals than evaluating their effectiveness—while only 11% of students demonstrated “clear and consistent understanding” of appeals, 50% identified appeals but were either imprecise or somewhat inaccurate.

Effective use of textual material/examples to support ideas.

Students were able to use examples to support ideas, with 38% using “specific and relevant examples from text to effectively support ideas,” and 51% using examples but not articulating how the examples support ideas.

Discuss how textual choices influence audiences.

47% of students correctly identified “how specific textual features have the potential to influence audiences,” and another 17% could generally discuss the “appeals to audience” but did not give specific examples.

Demonstrate an understanding of the reading selection.

Students scored very well on this aspect of the exam: 41% demonstrated a “clear and thorough understanding of the text's meaning,” and another 42% demonstrated understanding but missed some “minor points or nuances in meaning.”

RESULTS OF PART II:

Essay is organized in logical and well-developed paragraphs

Students scored very high on this aspect of their essays—63% demonstrated effective organization and a logical train of thought. Another 29% had “somewhat developed or organized” essays that lacked some “coherence.”

Essay demonstrates awareness and control of language conventions

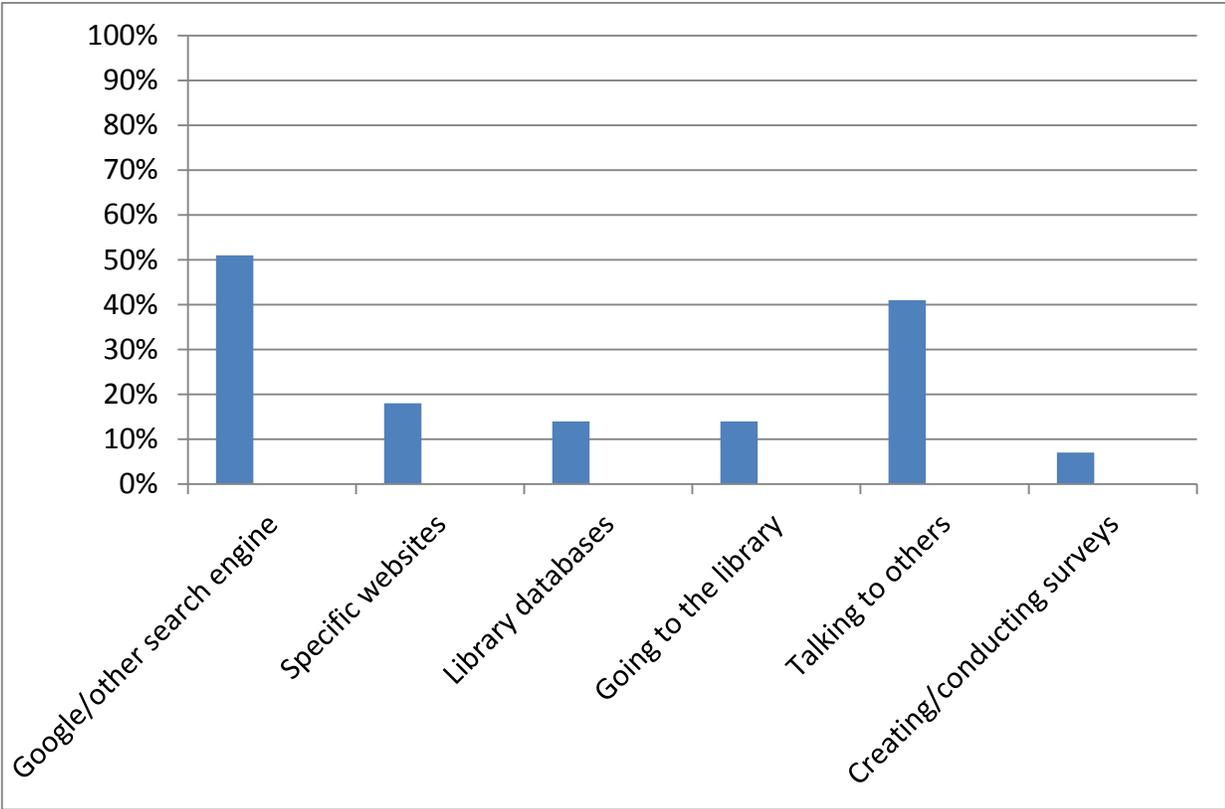
There is little cause for concern in this area, as students’ writing was either “generally free” from errors (49%), or the writing contained a few errors while remaining coherent (42%).

Essay demonstrates awareness of specific research strategies

44% of students could describe specific research strategies they would use to accomplish the assignment and why they would use those strategies; 38% generally described strategies but did not fully explain why these would be appropriate.

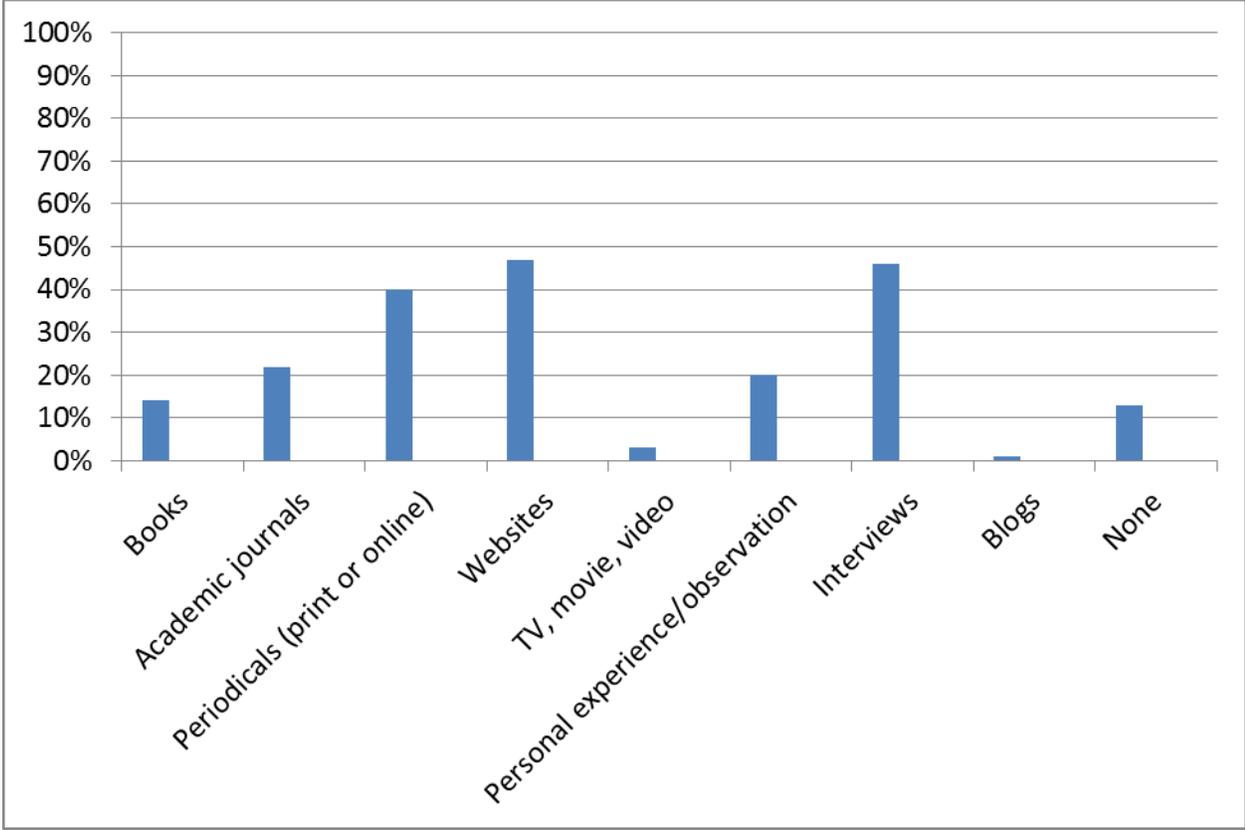
Research strategies identified

In order to better understand which research strategies students are comfortable with, we charted the ones that students mentioned in their essays:



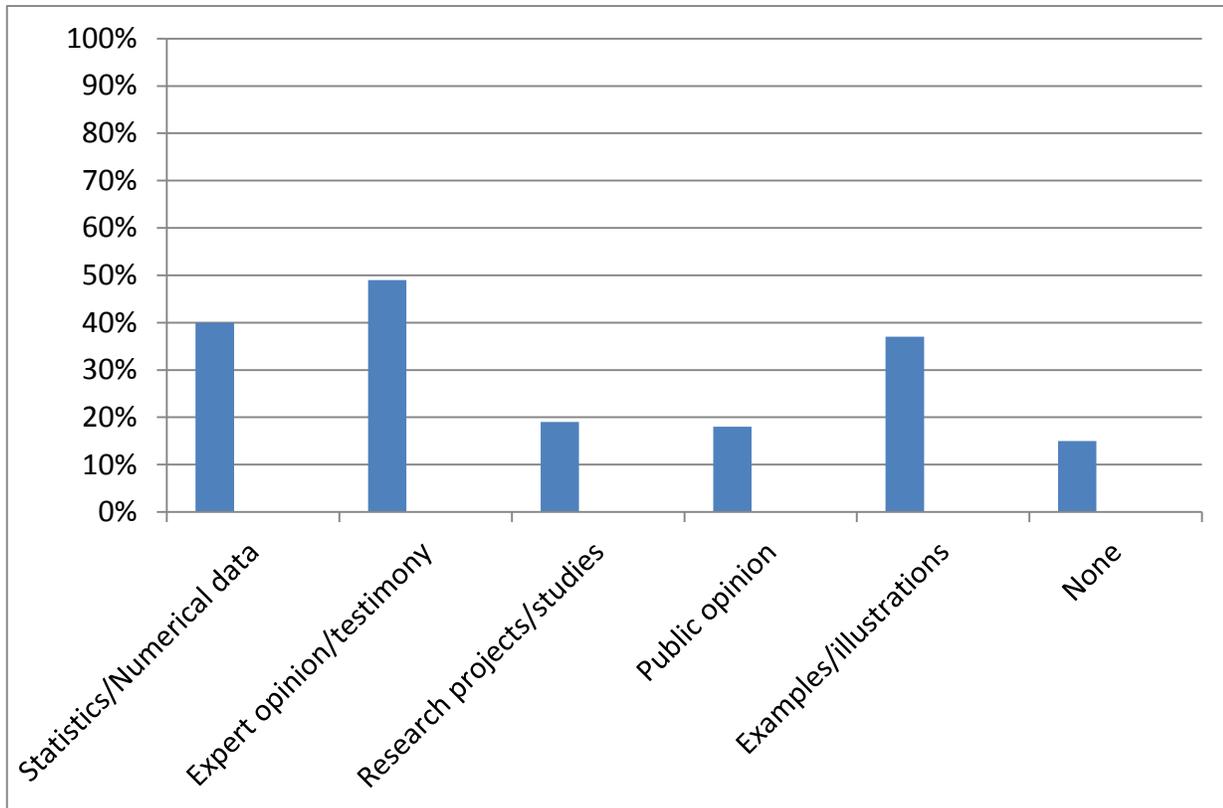
Types of sources identified

In order to better understand which sources students were likely to use, we charted the ones that students mentioned in their essays:



Types of evidence mentioned

In order to better understand the types of evidence that students are likely to draw from, we charted the ones that students mentioned in their essays:



ANALYSIS OF DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH 112:

- Students can identify components of an argument such as claims, reasons, and examples; however, they struggle with articulating their effectiveness or relationship to other elements of an argument.
- The mechanics of student writing are adequate, with solid organization and few errors.
- Students seem to be reading for meaning but cannot articulate a deeper rhetorical understanding of texts. This might be a result of the test being a timed reading and writing assignment; perhaps students need more time to read and reread an argument before coming to a deeper understanding of strategies.
- Students are using a variety of methods and types of sources in their research and are not relying solely on digital methods and materials.
- Since students do seem to rely heavily on Internet search engines to answer their research questions, it is important that English 112 address effective online research methods so that students can be efficient researchers who are able to both find information and identify credible information.

- Looking ahead, students may need more guidance reading research projects and studies in English 200 in order to prepare them for reading and writing in other disciplines.

2. Writing Attitude Survey

Below are results for responses to key items on the Writing Attitude Survey, which is administered each fall to all composition students.

Has this course helped you to improve your writing? (Percentages refer to those answering “yes.”)

	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
English 111	88%	89%	93%	94%	91%	94%
English 112	91%	91%	85%	86%	90%	90%
English 200	90%	74%	88%	78%	82%	87%
Average	90%	85%	89%	86%	88%	90%

How would you rate your general attitude towards this course? (Percentages refer to those answering “very” or “mostly satisfied.”)

	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
English 111	85%	83%	84%	80%	81%	84%
English 112	77%	83%	80%	82%	81%	87%
English 200	81%	59%	77%	67%	76%	76%
Average	85%	75%	80%	76%	79%	82%

How would you rate your general attitude towards the English 111 Lab? (Percentages refer to those answering “very” or “mostly satisfied.”)

Fall 2007	84%
Fall 2008	82%
Fall 2009	97%
Fall 2010	87%
Fall 2011	83%
Fall 2012	87%
Fall 2013	86%

If you took English 111, to what extent do you feel that English 111 prepared you for English 112? (Percentages refer to those answering “very well” or “somewhat.”)

Fall 2007	92%
Fall 2008	85%
Fall 2009	91%
Fall 2010	98%
Fall 2011	91%
Fall 2012	95%
Fall 2013	91%

If you took English 200, to what extent do you feel that English 112 prepared you for English 200? (Percentages refer to those answering “very well” or “somewhat.”)

Fall 2007	89%
Fall 2008	91%
Fall 2009	86%
Fall 2010	92%
Fall 2011	90%
Fall 2012	92%
Fall 2013	92%

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES: These numbers tell us that students are having a positive experience in their composition courses and in the English 111 Lab, and that they believe that these courses help them to become better writers. We are also pleased that an overwhelming majority of students feel as though each course in the composition sequence prepares them for the next.

3. Performance Comparison of Students Starting in Different Composition Courses:

Comparison of 112 performance of students who completed 111 before taking 112 to students who did not take 111.

	S08	F08	S09	F09	S10	F10	S11	F11	S12	F12	S13	F13
Avg. SAT Verbal of 111-starters:	458	439	467	453	455	457	458	431	418	431	401	431
Avg. SAT Verbal 112-starters:	492	522	514	522	534	527	485	531	502	542	564	539
Avg. 112 grade of 111-starters	NA	NA	NA	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.7	NA	2.16	2.8	NA	NA
111-starters with C or better in 112	NA	NA	NA	88%	85%	86%	85%	NA	93%	90%	NA	NA
Avg. 112 grade of 112-starters	2.0	2.8	2.1	2.9	2.2	3.0	2.6	2.9	2.4	3.1	2.2	3.0
112-starters with C or better in 112	63%	88%	73%	89%	69%	88%	86%	85%	76%	91%	36%	81%

ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE COMPARISON: The data needed to assess the success of English 111 starters in English 112 was unavailable from the Registrar’s Office. (It would be beneficial if the program coordinators could sort data and run their own reports.) The other numbers look comparable to previous years, for the most part. However, the grades from Spring 2013 112-starters are unusually low and do not seem to coincide with the SAT score for that group. The coordinators will investigate this further.

Improvements in Place

1. The department approved new programmatic goals, course outcomes, and keywords for the composition program.
2. The program coordinators updated the Orientation Guide for Composition Instructors to provide additional resources for instructors.
3. FWAC revised and conducted another pilot of the English 112 final exam for use in the assessment of the course.
4. We continued to use optional supplemental texts in composition classes. In the fall, the supplemental text was *Wench* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez. The author met with our composition students during the Pee Dee Fiction and Poetry Festival. In the spring, the supplemental text was *Cop in the Hood* by Peter Moskas who met students on his visit to FMU as the Hunter Fund Series speaker.
5. We reviewed textbooks for English 111 and updated the recommended textbook list to include more books with an explicit focus on writing in the disciplines.
6. We were able to offer \$250 to the McCrimmon Award winner and three additional awards of \$50 each for the best papers in English 111, 112, and 200. We held an awards ceremony and reception to honor these outstanding writers.

7. We again worked with Pearson Publishing to design *Final Draft*, our collection of student writing and guide to the Composition Program, which includes the updates to our program.

Planned Improvements

1. The Composition Coordinators will encourage faculty to complete the fall surveys, as it is certainly possible to collect responses from more than 65% of students taking composition each fall.
2. In response to the direct assessment, we will have a workshop focused on teaching critical reading. We hope to move more students from reading exclusively for meaning to reading for rhetorical understanding.
3. FWAC will refine the English 112 assessment and present it to the department for adoption in Fall 2014.
4. FWAC will work with the department to develop and pilot an end-of-program assessment for English 200.
5. FWAC will present revised course descriptions to the department and university committees to update the university catalog.
6. In late August 2014, the Composition Program will host a workshop for all faculty on creating effective writing assignments.
7. We will host a colloquium in Fall 2014 for our common text, *Dare Me*, during the Pee Dee Fiction and Poetry Festival.
8. We will form a committee to examine new English 112 textbooks for adoption. We will focus on matching our new English 112 course outcomes with the textbooks.

Modifications in General Education Courses

All courses covered in this report are general education courses. Thus, all modifications noted above apply to the general education program.

English 112 Final Exam—OPTION 1

Mike Kelly is a columnist for *The Record*, a newspaper in Bergen County, New Jersey. This article was originally published in 2006 in *The Record*.

Part A: Read Kelly's article and respond to the following questions. Please use the back if you need more room, and be sure to use complete sentences.

- In your own words, what is the primary claim of the article?
- In 3-4 complete sentences, summarize at least two different reasons that Kelly provides to defend his primary claim.
- In your own opinion, which of Kelly's reasons is least persuasive. Explain why.
- How and where do you see the author using *logos*?
- Describe how and where you see the author utilizing *ethos* or *pathos* appeals.
- This article might appeal to students, school administrators, and parents, in particular. Choose ONE of these possible audiences, and, in a short paragraph of at least three sentences, explain what techniques the author uses to connect with and appeal to this group. Use specific examples from the article.

Part B: Short essay

Your instructor has asked you to do additional research on school uniforms, particularly South Carolina school policies on school uniforms and the success or failure of such policies. He/She wants you to write an editorial to be published in the Florence *Morning News* where you recommend that Florence School District One should or should not require students to wear uniforms.

As you can see, you need more information than this short article given here can provide.

Write an organized, short essay of at least three paragraphs, narrating how you would complete this research assignment. Be SPECIFIC about how would you go about finding information on this topic for this particular audience. Be SPECIFIC about what resources you would use to get the information, what types of sources you would include in your letter, and why you would include these sources for this specific audience.

English 112 Final Exam—OPTION 2

Kate Harding is the coauthor of two books and the founder of the blog *Shapely Prose*. She is also a regular contributor to *Salon.com* where this article was originally published in 2009.

Part A: Read Harding's article and respond to the following questions. Please use the back if you need more room, and be sure to use complete sentences.

- In your own words, what is the primary claim of the article?
- In 3-4 complete sentences, summarize at least two different reasons that Harding provides to defend her primary claim.
- In your own opinion, which of Harding's reasons is least persuasive. Explain why.
- How and where do you see the author using *logos*?
- Describe how and where you see the author utilizing *ethos* or *pathos* appeals.
- This article might appeal to students, school administrators, and parents, in particular. Choose ONE of these possible audiences, and, in a short paragraph of at least three sentences, explain what techniques the author uses to connect with and appeal to this group. Use specific examples from the article.

Part B: Short essay

Your instructor has asked you to do additional research on the relationship between bullying and social media. He/She wants you to write a “Parents Guide to Social Media and Bullying” that will be published on public school websites. This guide should take into account the points that Harding makes but should also include other facts about bullying and expert opinion on the issues.

As you can see, you need more information than this short article given here can provide.

Write an organized, short essay of at least three paragraphs, narrating how you would complete this research assignment. Be SPECIFIC about how would you go about finding information on this topic for this particular audience. Be SPECIFIC about what resources you would use to get the information, what types of sources you would include in your guide, and why you would include these sources for this specific audience.