WRITING THE FIRST-YEAR ESSAY

GATHER: Collect the basics about your coursework, co-curricular work (anything outside of your courses that relates to your studies), and FWT information to begin.
List your areas of study so far:

List your favorite ideas, things, and/or figures in your work so far (authors, artists, creators, scientists, historical figures, inventors, movements, organizations, etc.):

OBSERVE: Fill in these sentences.
I'm curious about...

I want to learn more about...

I see parallels and connections between...

I wish to develop my skills in...

I want to create/make/examine/test/explore...

I have engaged with these people/sources/things/groups...

CONSIDER: Fill in this sentence.
I thought that I understood..., but I discovered that I...
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1. Introduction:
   a. You can begin the essay in a number of ways—with an anecdote, a memory, a fact, an observation, a quote, an idea, a question.
   b. Your audience is your Faculty Advisor and the Provost and Dean’s office, so the tone can be academic and personal.
   c. You can organize your reflection in several ways: by answering each of the prompts in the Dean’s letter; by discussing your work thematically; by addressing the capacities; or by writing about courses, co-curricular work, and your FWT experience separately.
   d. Do you have a main interest, question, or idea? For example: “My work at Bennington so far has focused on American poetry, but I’m also deeply drawn to contemporary painting and representations of nature.” A focus may emerge from a question, a problem, an enthusiasm.

2. Body Paragraphs:
   a. Try to address each of the questions in the Dean’s letter. Most importantly, include specifics for each answer; include quotes from texts you read; ideas, images, or facts; anecdotes from class discussion; details and evidence from your projects, research, or creations. Communicate to the reader a vivid picture of what your first-term and FWT experiences have been like for you.
   b. You can address any of these things: what you have discovered, created, and accomplished so far; the inquiries you have made and the problems you have encountered; which skills you want to develop; what you wish to learn more about or research; what risks you have taken; what you want to make, test, examine; whom and what you want to engage with more deeply; which courses you would like to take; and, how your Field Work Terms and co-curricular work connect to your studies. (All of these details relate to the capacities.)

3. Conclusion:
   a. What else do you want to add to reflect upon your experiences thus far?
b. What do you want to pursue in the coming years at Bennington? How might your Plan reveal itself through your studies?

c. How can you end on a powerful note? As in your introduction, you might include an anecdote, a memory, a fact, an observation, a quote, an idea, a question.

4. **Writing Tips:**

a. The essay should be 3-5 pages long; it should be double-spaced and include a header with your name, advisor, and a title.

b. Make time to write a first draft. Often you will discover your best idea at the end of the first draft. Take that idea or argument, and put it in the first paragraph of your next draft. Then, take time to edit and proofread.

c. Share your essay with a friend. One of the best ways to edit your writing is to read it out loud; usually, you will hear your mistakes and be able to generate ideas to fix them.

d. Are your quotations integrated into your sentences or plunked without explanation? Have you indented quotes four lines or longer? Did you introduce those long quotes with a complete sentence and colon?

e. If necessary, have you properly cited your quotations and evidence according to the expectations of your disciplines (MLA, APA, or Chicago styles)?

f. Check your punctuation. Have you accurately used commas, semicolons, quotation marks, colons, dashes, brackets, etc.? 

g. Edit generalities like “Since the dawn of time, people have liked to tell stories.” Always use specifics!

h. You may visit a Peer Writing & Research Tutor or the professional ELL and Writing Tutor to work on your reflection essay; please see the links on the Academic Minute to book a session.