

**Assignment #1  
WRITING DIAGNOSTIC**

**A brief essay on “Rebuilding Los Angeles,” using Klosterman’s  
“Arguments for and against planning”**

Essays are one form of writing that allows you to explore broad concepts, theories, and your own ideas. We use essays to learn what you think about the material you are being given. We also use essays to assess your ability to write well and to critically analyze problems of practice using key concepts in planning theory.

This writing assignment will be used to assess your writing skills in order to determine what level of additional guidance in writing, if any, you may need. Given the emphasis we place on clear writing in our subjects (courses), in addition to the thesis, DUSP considers it important to identify early on those who might find individualized levels of writing instruction beneficial in furthering their academic and professional careers. Also, it is our chance to open a dialogue with each of you about your writing strengths and weaknesses and to help you identify strategies that will help you progress while you are here in DUSP.

***Your brief essay will be evaluated primarily on the presence of a clearly defined and presented central idea with a well-organized, persuasive, and coherent structure of support.*** In addition, we will look for well-developed paragraphs with clear topic sentences; smooth transitions; concise, grammatically constructed sentences; use of concrete nouns and active verbs; idiomatic usage; precise word choice; and correct punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.

This assignment is *similar* in form to the essay questions on the Gateway take-home midterm exam in October and very *different* from the professional memoranda you’ll prepare in November and December (we’ll discuss memos later in the semester).

**Here are the questions to address in your essay:**

Rebuild L.A. (RLA) was not a government agency, yet RLA did plan and implement in the public interest. How did RLA’s work reflect or fail to reflect the key arguments for and against planning that Klosterman discusses?

Klosterman is concerned about the legitimacy of planning's means "as currently practiced." Explain whether you think that RLA's approach was legitimate.

### **Specific instructions**

**Write a 500-word essay that responds to the questions. The following is a list of guidelines you should read carefully before you write your essay.**

1. **Writing Essays:** You should use the questions provided above to create a single thesis (overall argument that responds to the questions) for your essay that you will then develop. (It's fine for an essay responding to two related questions to have a two-pronged thesis.) Your thesis should be the primary point you want to make and support in your essay for your reader. In addition to a thesis, your essay should include a series of well-developed paragraphs that explore and support your essay's thesis. Each paragraph should make a single main point, that point should be connected to your broader thesis, and the point should be supported with evidence and examples to help convince your reader of the thesis or explain it to her/him.

Also, in terms of an introduction to your essay, avoid rehashing the case for the reader. S/he knows the material. Instead, just give the reader enough information so that s/he will understand your assumptions and premises and so that your arguments will make sense. For more information on essay writing, you might want to check out the following links:

[Perdue Online Writing Lab](#)

[NYU Student Essays](#)

2. **Don't use footnotes, endnotes, or other extras.** You shouldn't look for extra space to make your arguments—that's what the 500-word essay itself is for—and you need not include formal referencing (citation, bibliography). The reader knows that the Klosterman article and RLA video case are the key sources.
3. **Formatting.** Double-space your essay, and use one-inch margins and a 12-point font. Use your word processor to count the words in the essay itself (i.e., not including the header), and place that count (for example, "Count=498 words") right below the essay. If you find you "need" an extra 25-50 words to make your points, then you've written

too much. Go back and condense your key ideas and cut the non-essentials. Finally, spell check and proofread the work, of course. Prof. Abbanat will be reading about 70 of these quickly and customizing the feedback for each, so please make yours easy to read, meeting professional standards.

4. **Don't do additional research.** Draw only on the video case (which you can re-view on the website), our discussion of it, and any discussion you may have outside of class, such as in your Discussion Section or with classmates or the teaching assistants. No one expects you to do additional research in order to learn more about the events. *You don't need additional background knowledge of Los Angeles, race in America, the structure of local government authority here, or other themes in the case.* You're not offering a plan for someone to act on. You are making arguments in writing about the application of planning theory to a real-world case.

### **Guidelines for scoring: Graduate writing skills**

This first written assignment will not be graded, but you will receive a score to help us assess and communicate to you your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. The score will be for teaching use and your use, not a part of your course grade. In addition, Xav will comment on the substance of the essays (broadly) in class, as part of debriefing the case.

- The essay will receive a score, 1-6 (6 is highest).
- This is an assessment of your writing, not an assessment of whether we think you got "the" answer right based on the content you include in the essay. Clear points that are supported with examples or evidence from the case will add to the strength of your essay, and this is what we will be looking for in your writing. In future essays, the 11.201 teaching team will review and comment directly on range of content in the essays in class—but the content will not be scored as part of this assessment.
- Use of the passive voice is acceptable in planning and technical writing, so long as it does not interfere with, intrude upon, or obscure the meaning of the passage. The active voice tends to read better and be more engaging. Examples: (Passive) "These initiatives were planned by RLA to achieve ..." vs. (Active) "RLA planned these initiatives to achieve ..."

### **4-6 Point essays are considered upper-half**

A six point essay will:

Exhibit clearly organized of ideas.

Display clarity and conciseness at both the sentence and paragraph level.

Lack errors in grammar and usage.

A five point essay will:

Display the features of a 6-point essay, but be slightly weaker in clarity, concision, and organization.

A four point essay will:

Display basic competence in grammar and usage.

Lack the structural and organizational sophistication of a 5 or 6 point essay.

### **1-3 Point essays are considered lower-half**

A three point essay will be:

Overly formulaic in its organization or lack of organization.

Plagued with problems with grammar and usage.

Vague and wordy, often with excessive use of passive voice.

A two point essay will compound the problems of a three point essay, and display:

Consistent flaws in syntax, diction, grammar, or spelling.

Significant flaws in organization and a lack of overall coherence.

Usage of terms without prior definition.

A one point essay will compound the weaknesses of a two point essay.