

Compare & Contrast Sample Essay 1: Augustine and Lamott Essay III

The Writing Center at North Park University (Internal Version)

-September 15 2005

NOTE: You should see colored comment boxes on the side of the essay. If these do not appear, go to the **toolbar**, click **view** and then **comment**.

The best way to read commentary on essays is to begin at the end, because the last comment seeks to sum up the most important strengths and weaknesses of the paper. It gives you a perspective from which to read the more specific comments in the margins.

Augustine and Lamott Essay III

St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies* have shown me that there is always something that binds all of us together, and that is yearning to know the answers to who we are, why we are here, and what our purpose will be. When I was reading these two books I was struck by the fact that both Augustine and Lamott felt it to hard to commit to the Christian religion because of their love of rationality. Augustine would study the Christian religion, and believe that the precepts it held were true, but could not quite commit himself fully to a life of Christianity. Anne Lamott also struggled with this. She came to know some of the principles of the religion as truth, but struggled with fully immersing herself in their beliefs. Even though there is a huge time and cultural gap, Augustine and Lamott go through quite similar struggles. It was amazing to me the fact that even as humanity continues to evolve, humans still wrestle with the same problems and questions.

At Augustine tells us of his life in his autobiography *Confessions*. He takes us through the journey of his experiences growing up, from adolescence to manhood. He tells us of his parents and friends, and how they shaped him while he was growing up.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: You might consider re-developing the title to reflect the specific content you're writing about.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: These ideas are really interesting, though they'd increase in interest if you could be more specific in what precise "beliefs" your interested in. Why not make these points the focus of your essay? The rest of your paper backs off into more general reflections; the specific focus of these ideas is what gives them their energy. Oh—and you might edit this section for clarity.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Is this a comparison and contrast essay? After a few paragraphs it seems as though it is intended to be, but this conclusion is vague in this respect – make sure you let your reader know, clearly, what your intent is. And don't wimp out—stick with the more specific, more incisive insights you've got. The phrases "quite similar struggles" and "the same problems and questions" don't help readers to know what similarities in particular you're going to investigate.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: This seems to indicate the conclusion of your introduction – is this line your thesis? If so, remember that you are writing a thesis, it must make a claim that will be supported by your evidence, not a personal statement.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Your style is weak here as you are writing a vague topic sentence – make it vibrant by being clear and succinct.

He then goes on to recount his thoughts and feelings of philosophy and religion, and his desire to come to life's ultimate truth.

Anne Lamott's biography tells of her experiences with her family and especially her friends that she made over her lifetime. She tells us about her battles with substance addiction and depression, and how she, over a long process, came to overcome them. She recalls events in her life that eventually made up the place in her life where she is now, in her life and faith.

Augustine grew up in a household of parents who shared different beliefs. His father was a town councilman, very concerned with Augustine's success. He wanted Augustine to be very culturally and intellectually educated, and thought that the more informed and verbal he was about it, the more successful his son would become. His mother wanted those things for Augustine too, but she was also a Christian, and wanted more than anything to Augustine to come to salvation. Augustine recounts his promiscuity and trouble-making as a youth. He tells us of how he was wrapped up in wanting to fulfill his fleshly desires; stealing and having sexual experiences to compete with his peers, whom he wanted to impress. He then goes on to tell us of how he became interested in discovering the ultimate truth.

Lamott grew up in a household that also placed importance on being as cultured and intellectual as one could be. Her parents did not have any particular belief system, she says, "We were raised to believe in books and music and nature." (Lamott 9) Lamott shares with us her addiction to drugs and alcohol, along with her experiences with all her friends and family's friends, and how they influenced her. She guides us through all the beliefs that she dabbled in, and describes her coming to her faith as similar to that of

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: While you are making important points, it would be helpful to add a little sentence variety.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Actually, the book isn't a full autobiography—it's just a set of autobiographical personal essays. Question: Why is all of this general background needed? Wouldn't most people who have read the books know all of this already?

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Good comparison contrast – but can you say this in a less complicated way? It's important to sound knowledgeable about your topic, but unneeded words cloud your meaning.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: This sentence leaves a reader unclear of where to go – it doesn't transition into the next paragraph, nor does it answer any of the statements posed in the topic sentence. The misspelled word doesn't help, either—a reader needs to stop thinking about your argument and figure out what the sentence means.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: You're building good parallels/contrasts with Augustine.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Semicolon after "system" H34a

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: In-text citation, of less than 4 lines; the period FOLLOWS the parentheses H54

jumping from one lily pad to the next. She overcame her addictions, and then eventually found a rock in her faith. Along with the joy that is her son Sam, she tells us of her experiences with life's temptations, and her underlying need to come to an absolute truth.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Hm. Isn't she very deliberate about NOT using this traditional image of a rock to describe her faith? Her faith is a "verdant pad" (3)—green, growing, living-on water, engaged with the sun.

One of the first things that Augustine and Lamott recount as something that made them look to worldly things was the need for love and acceptance. Augustine tells us,

"the single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and be loved,"

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Good use of text—and your point raises an interesting position

(Augustine 24) and Lamott is continually telling us of her intense desire to please and

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Nice. You've combined the two writers in an interesting way, and you've incorporated both texts well into your own sentence.

gain acceptance from her father, "I lived for him. He was my first god," (Lamott 8). The

desire to be loved unconditionally is undeniably human. We are all searching and

wanting and, if we already have some form of it, reveling in being loved. It is purely

human nature, and eventually both Augustine and Lamott found the answer to their

question in the form of a Christian God.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Helpful point, this does help the argument I think you're trying to make.

Another aspect of human nature is the habit to always put our needs and wants

above others. Before Augustine came to be converted, when he believed that God existed

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Is it clear where this paragraph is going from the topic sentence?

and the precepts of the Christian religion and Bible, he talked about how he could not

commit to giving his life over to Christ, "my two wills...one carnal, one spiritual were in

conflict with one another," (Augustine 140). Augustine's telling of this story reminds me

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: This illustration doesn't appear to fit your topic sentence exactly. Isn't the struggle of Augustine and the rich (young) man one of divided will rather than simple selfishness—of putting an inferior or secondary want of our own above a superior or primary want no less our own—but ours because given to us by God? See Augustine viii.v.; 140.

of another, in the book of Matthew, chapter 19, where a rich man is asking Jesus what he

must do to get eternal life, and Jesus tells him that he needs to follow all the

commandments, and the man said that he has done all of them, and Jesus replies, "If you

want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have

treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." "When the young man heard this he went

away sad because he had great wealth." This struck me as similar to Augustine's struggle

to fully commit himself to Christ. Augustine didn't want to give up the "carnal" way of life. It also shows us how hard it is for us as humans to deny ourselves; and for Augustine, to deny himself and follow God, which is what he was trying to accomplish.

Both Augustine and Lamott were trying to discover the reason why they were put on this earth, but I think they were going about it in different ways. In Augustine we can see that he is very forthright in his search to know why he was pu on earth, whereas with Lamott she never outright asks this question of herself or others. We are able to see her asking this question interpersonally by all the different things that she is sought comfort in. Lamott was constantly becoming the new addition to some various family, in an attempt to feel loved and accepted. She also succumbed to a lot of life's temptations for the same reasons. She was hoping to find something that satisfied her desire for acceptance.

Augustine asks himself life's fundamental questions all the time, "Who then are you, my God?" (Augustine 4). He is upfront with the reader about his need to know who he is, who God is, and the relation between the two. Augustine studied all of the things he could to come to the ultimate truth, and struggled with it even when he believed it to be true.

I believe Augustine and Lamott found their true purpose after their conversion. They realized what they believe was true, and that was that the Christian God was real, He was their creator and in control of their lives, and they needed to turn over their lives to him.

I have come to the conclusion that in Augustine and Lamott's cases, as well as many others, it is easy to say that we can't, won't or don't believe in Christianity because

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: No doubt this passage from Matthew struck Augustine the same way. How interesting to think we have the same texts in our hands as he did and are struggling with their meaning as he did. In this I echo your opening paragraph—the sure sign of effective writing!

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: What differences do you have in mind? Please clarify.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: VERY GOOD! Welcome to the *ideal* NPD 1.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: You might try to stay away from using the term 'things' whenever you could instead use stronger, more precisely descriptive words; they would lend your style more strength, and your argument would be clearer.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Good—you're pretty specific here.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Augstine's and Lamott's—you're talking about 2 separate cases (H36a)

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Comma after won't (H32c)

of our need for the truth, which we define as having physical evidence. But our version of the truth is biased, because we want it to be something rational, something that we as humans can comprehend. If and when we come to realize that what the Bible says is true sometimes we still don't believe it, and we can't fully understand why. Here we see that Augustine has given us the key to this: "as I deliberated about serving milord God, which I had long been disposed to do, the self which willed to serve was identical with the self which was unwilling. It was I," (Augustine 148). It all comes down to human will. We all want to do what we want to do, and naturally want to be in control of our own lives. This is extremely ironic considering God is the one who gave us our free will to choose him or not. We have to bend our will to His, and only in this can our doubts cease. If we put our trust and faith in God, we will see the fruits of giving ourselves to Him.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: These are great ideas, important points, but they're a bit jumbled together. Can you rewrite them more simply, so that your chief thoughts come out more clearly?
Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Comma after true (H32b)

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Why the empty subject slot? What is "this," and why resort to the blandest verb of all (is)?
heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Descriptive words, again, would add greatly to the clarity of this paper.

Augustine and Lamott had very different views on humanity. Augustine believed that evil stemmed from the perversion of free will, but I also think that he thought free will in and of itself was inherently evil. Whereas Lamott seems to regard humanity as lost, sad people just trying to figure out some way to cope with life. Augustine seems to constantly feel guilty about all his past sins and tries to rectify them by talking about how bad he was, and how depth of which he regrets those actions. Lamott recognizes her wrongs, knows that Jesus takes away those sins, and she can move on.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: These points seem to have been made previously ... consider inserting any of this information you think is necessary in the areas that address this topic specifically. And what evidence are you offering that Augustine thought that free will is itself evil? Wouldn't this contradict what he says about how important it is that we have the power to make choices?

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: TANGLE! (H11)

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: When you're making such a radical shift in focus, it's important to make sure you put in clear transitions, so that your readers can follow the relevance and precision of your new direction.

From second to twelfth grade I attended a Christian school. My view of God was probably most determined by them. For the most part I believed that their view of God was the correct view of God. I didn't need to look for anything beyond that, and I didn't need to discover anything outside of Christianity. My views of the Bible, God, and

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM
Comment: Who are "them" and "their" referring to? (H23)

Christianity all matched up with their views because I was ingratiated so much into their teachings. When I turned seventeen, my cousin came to live with us for my senior year of high school. He had come from a public school, and knew a lot more about the world outside my little bubble. I started to learn that there was more to life than what my teachers were telling me, and that maybe their views of what religion and Christianity were weren't always the right way. I think in the past year I have learned to accept people's view of things, to listen instead of speaking and trying to prove them wrong. I am learning to respect other people's opinions even when I don't necessarily agree with them, and know that the point of a conversation is to listen and learn, not to speak and prove. I want to learn the ultimate truth, which is something I believe in as opposed to everyone having their own truths. I would say that I am in a transition period of discovering what I believe and why.

It is human nature to want to know what the real truth is. But it takes effort to discover what it is. I believe that by learning and seeking out the truth with an open mind, you will come to know what the real truth is. Augustine and Lamott's view of the ultimate truth is the Christian religion, and in that they found out who they were, why they were put on planet earth, and what their purpose was. Those are the things that bind us all together, but it depends on what conclusion we come to when faced with these questions that really determines what our future will be.

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Don't think this is the word you want.

heichler 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: I'm a little lost here—can you word this more precisely?

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: Who? The people, or their opinions?

Administrator 6/28/09 9:07 AM

Comment: This section, while it, again, stirs up thought-provoking possibilities, seems to repeat things which have already been stated throughout your paper, without really drawing them to a point. While it's important to make sure you wrap up your main ideas and reinforce your thesis, unless you have a clear set of ideas and thesis, it is hard to do so.

The paper as a whole has several wonderful observations in it, and they work towards a unification of the three spiritual autobiographies (Augustine's, Lamott's, and yours). Any one of them could make a great thesis for a strong paper. But you can have only one thesis! Adding more and different good ideas doesn't make a paper stronger; too many good ideas just obscure what your main point might be. When you've decided which one you want to concentrate on, we can work together at fleshing out a more detailed exploration of it.

You're working on issues at the heart of this course: rationality and spirituality, mythos and logos, knowledge of self and of God and God's purpose for us, what it means to be human (the desire to know). Keep wrestling with them!

