PARODY/STYLE EXERCISE
Instructor: Brian O'Sullivan

1. Brief description of in-class writing exercise:

Each student translated an idea from an argumentative paper she had just written into a parody in the style of a particular literary work. (Specifically, they took an argument about imitation and originality in student writing, and rewrote it in the form of a long, strange sentence from Mrs. Dalloway.) Students then posted the parody to the class discussion board, and some volunteered to have the class discuss the form and content of their parodies.

2. Context for the Exercise:

This exercise was a change of pace at a point when I felt students were a little tired of a standard argumentative essay on a difficult academic essay. Also, we were moving to a point on the syllabus that was going to be pretty packed with literary readings, and I wanted to make sure to keep integrating writing with subject matter.

3. Goal(s) of the Exercise:

There were three major goals, all of which straddled "course content" and "writing skills": 1.) Gain a new perspective on conventions of argumentative writing by consciously violating them; 2.) Engage in parody as way of making an argumentative point; 3.) Use imitative writing to gain a better understanding of a certain literary style.

4. Common results of the exercise:

Because we discussed the style of the "target" sentence in some detail before the exercise, students were able to match it pretty closely. Some of them also had new insights into their own arguments as a result of rephrasing them this way; one student converted her parody into a new introduction for a revision of the student's paper.

5. Student responses to the exercise:

A few students were slow to warm up to the assignment, but once they got started, most had fun with it and saw the point. Many were impressed with each others' parodies, and referred back to them in subsequent classes as examples of how parody can satirize something other than the imitated work.