Writing sample: Baseline document + Reflection

This assignment consists of two parts: a problem set and a reflection note. First, as a way of establishing a baseline, in the problem set, you will solve four puzzles requiring **no prior knowledge of linguistics**, relying on logic, common sense, and problem-solving skills. These puzzles are designed to sharpen your analytical abilities and enhance your academic communication.

In academic work, focusing solely on the correct answer—such as brief responses or margin notes—often misses the mark for formal submissions. Professors and TAs need to see not just your answers but also the reasoning behind them. This assignment challenges you to communicate your thought process clearly and logically.

Approach this as if you are a University of Pennsylvania student submitting a formal problem set. Your goal is not just to solve the puzzles but also to guide your audience through your reasoning step by step. Consider it both a test of critical thinking and a practice in effective academic writing.

Guidelines for Completing the Problem Set

1. **Set the Context:** Begin by explaining the big picture—what is the problem about, and what story does the data tell?

2. **Explain Your Process:** Clearly describe each step, including the reasoning behind your choices and assumptions.

3. **Write Clearly:** Use full sentences to articulate your thoughts. Avoid shorthand or fragmented notes.

4. **Organize Your Work:** Structure your responses with headings, bullet points, or numbered lists to enhance readability.

5. **Emphasize Key Insights:** Highlight critical steps, observations, or patterns. Use formatting like bold or underlining sparingly to focus attention.

6. **Address Alternatives:** If relevant, briefly discuss other approaches you considered and why you chose your final method.

7. **Summarize Your Conclusion:** End with a concise summary that links your reasoning to your final answer.

8. **Consider Your Audience:** Write for a professor or TA who is unfamiliar with your reasoning. Make your explanation clear and logical.

9. **Review Your Work:** Proofread for clarity, completeness, and professionalism. Include all steps, even those that seem obvious.

By adhering to these guidelines, you will not only solve the problems but also practice crafting polished, professional academic writing—a skill that will serve you well in both academic and professional contexts.

Problem 1: English

In England, shepherds have historically used unique numeral systems for counting sheep. These systems, dating back to the medieval period, were essential for keeping accurate records, monitoring births and deaths, and identifying strays. Shepherds would count their sheep regularly, especially when moving them between pastures or after tasks like shearing, tagging, or foot-trimming.

Historically, fell rights—grants allowing farms to graze sheep on common land—required precise head-counts to prevent overgrazing. Although fell rights are now mostly obsolete, accurate counts remain important, as modern farms are often taxed or subsidized based on the size of their flocks.

Below are the representations of prime numbers not exceeding 20 in the numeral system of shepherds from a specific English county, listed alphabetically:

(1)   a. scathera-clen-a-spil
       b. brithera
       c. brithera-spil
       d. tarn
       e. tarn-a-clen
       f. tarn-a-clen-a-spil
       g. clen
       h. bin-a-spil

Question 1   Determine the numerical values of all the given numerals.

Question 2   Identify the numerical values of the following words:

(2)   a. brithera-clen
       b. scathera-spil
       c. clen-a-spil

Question 3   Using the shepherds' numeral system, write the representations for all perfect squares not exceeding 20.

Problem 2: East African

Provided below is an alphabetical list of select countries:

Bangladesh, Estonia, Fiji, Gabon, Kazakhstan, Laos, Latvia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malta, Moldova, Nepal, Panama, Peru, (El) Salvador, Togo, and Uzbekistan.

   The names of some of these countries have been translated into an East African language written in Script B, as displayed in (3). To reiterate, the set in (3) is a subset of the country names previously mentioned.

(3)   Country names in Script B:

Question 1   Match the words in (3) with the English place names on the list.

Problem 3: Sepik

In the Sepik language, certain body parts have numerical values. Below is a table with Sepik words (in Latin transcription), their numerical values, and the corresponding body parts. Some entries are missing:

(4)

Sepik Word	Number	Body Part
lumana	2	index finger of the left hand
kile	5	little finger of the left hand
guat	7	?
aluene	8	left elbow
oluk	?	?
opey	12	left ear
?	1	?
aley	10	?
wali	11	left side of the neck
falawo	3	middle finger of the left hand
yak-maluene	22	wrist of the right hand
?	?	part of the right arm from the wrist to the elbow
ni	?	left eye
?	24	index finger of the right hand
?	6	?
yak-mane	23	?
yak-oluk	26	?
yak-kile	?	?
patapa	?	bridge of the nose

Question 1 Fill in the missing cells.

Problem 4: Sulawesi

An ethnographist came to Sulawesi to study a local language. He visited various hamlets of Sulawesi (5) and asked local residents: **Ur keshtas?** 'Where are you going?'

(5) Map of the hamlets:
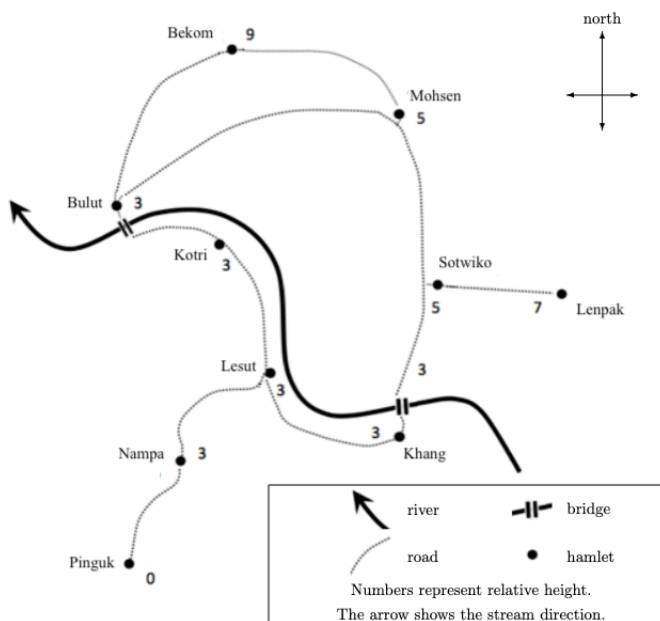
Question 1 Below are the answers they got. There are gaps in some of them. Fill in the gaps. Explain.

1. In Khang hamlet:

   - Keshtom atuk di Bulut.
   - Keshtom topu di Lesut.
   - Keshtom _____ di Lenpak.

2. In Bulut hamlet:

   - Keshtom ari di Sotwiko.
   - Keshtom ari di Nampa.
   - Keshtom _____ di Lesut.
   - Keshtom _____ di Pinguk.

3. In Bekom hamlet:

   - Keshtom ari di Sotwiko.
   - Keshtom reta di Kotri.
   - Keshtom semo di Mohsen.
   - Keshtom _____ di Lenpak.

4. In Nampa hamlet:

   - Keshtom reta di Khang.
   - Keshtom ari di Mohsen.
   - Keshtom _____ di Lesut.

5. In Lesut hamlet:

   - Keshtom ksa di Bekom.
   - Keshtom ksa di Lenpak.
   - Keshtom semo di Pinguk.
   - Keshtom _____ di Bulut.
   - Keshtom _____ di Kotri.

6. In Pinguk hamlet:

   - Keshtom ari di Lesut.
   - Keshtom ksa di Sotwiko.
   - Keshtom topu di Kotri.
   - Keshtom _____ di Bulut.
   - Keshtom _____ di Khang.
   - Keshtom _____ di Nampa.

7. In Lenpak hamlet:

   - Keshtom atuk di Khang.
   - Keshtom ksa di Bekom.
   - Keshtom ari di Nampa.
   - Keshtom topu di Kotri.
   - Keshtom _____ di Bulut.

- Keshtom _____ di Lesut.
- Keshtom _____ di Sotwiko.

8. In Kotri hamlet:

   - Keshtom atuk di Bulut.
   - Keshtom reta di Khang.
   - Keshtom reta di Lesut.
   - Keshtom ksa di Sotwiko.

9. In Sotwiko hamlet:

   - Keshtom semo di Bulut.
   - Keshtom semo di Pinguk.

10. In Mohsen hamlet:

    - Keshtom ari di Sotwiko.
    - Keshtom ari di Nampa.
    - Keshtom _____ di Khang.
    - Keshtom _____ di Lenpak.

Reflection

This reflection assignment helps me better understand your experiences with academic reading and writing, as well as your challenges and strengths. Your responses will guide me in shaping the course to meet the needs of all students. Please take your time and answer the prompts thoughtfully.

1. Reflect on how you approached the problem set. Did you start by writing everything you had in mind, or did you first create an outline or plan to organize your thoughts? How did you ensure your reasoning was clear and your steps were logical? What challenges did you face while working through the problems—such as understanding the prompts, deciding on the best method of presentation, or articulating your solutions? Finally, what do you see as the strengths of your submission, and where might it benefit from further refinement?

2. Moving now from your baseline document to your broader experiences with academic writing: How do you feel about academic writing? Have you had much experience with it? What kinds of academic writing have you done in high school or college classes? Please know that there is no judgment here. I'm just trying to get a sense of how to shape this semester's class to meet the needs of all of my students.

3. How would you characterize yourself as a reader. Do you like to read? Have you read anything by scholars in academic journals (as opposed to novels, poems, articles in newspapers and magazines, or textbooks)? And do you consider yourself a slow reader, a fast reader? Again, no judgment: This just helps me to understand how to prepare everyone for the dense scholarly reading we will in part be doing in this class.

   Finally, do you have any particular challenges as a reader or writer that you'd like to share? For example, Penn students may struggle with procrastination, time management, forgetfulness, anxiety, perfectionism, self-confidence, visual or auditory challenges, or visual or aural processing speed–the pace at which we absorb and process something visual or written, or someone speaking. Other challenges can include lack of preparation–for example, coming from a school at which you didn't have the opportunity to get much practice as a reader or writer. If American English is not your first or home language, that can also pose challenges in an academic writing course. In turn, you may feel uncomfortable working in groups or alternately do far better when you have a "study buddy" or study group. All of these challenges can be addressed through a

range of strategies and adjustments. Humans are neurodiverse, and having a better sense of the particular challenges each of us has in a given class makes it easier for me to organize my approach and find ways to embrace the varied learning styles and needs of everyone in the course so that you can be supported as you advance your understanding of academic listening, reading, and writing.

Thank you for taking the time to write this reflection. I look forward to working with you!