

---

Composition

---

The Formal Meditation

---

**Readings:** Russel Nye, "On the Reading of Essays," in *College Prep Reader*, pp. 11-28, particularly the paragraph on the formal essay, page 13, ¶4.

Meditations by John Donne; "Meditation XVII" in *College Prep Reader*, pp. 184-88, handout.

**Form** The requirements of the meditation were specified in the sixteenth century by St. Ignatius Loyola. The formal meditation consists of three parts:

1. **THE COMPOSITION OF PLACE.** A short descriptive essay in which the writer uses memory to reconstruct a specific time from the past, amassing concrete detail using all five senses. The writer must imagine the events of the past as occurring now and must be able to once again see, hear, smell, feel, and taste those events.
2. **THE APPLICATION OF UNDERSTANDING.** In this long section of analysis, the writer poses and analyzes questions about the scene described in the Composition of Place. Here the writer applies skills of understanding in the attempt to bring order to the more random sensory description of the first section of the theme, to search for the causes and for the meanings of the events.
3. **THE APPLICATION OF THE WILL.** Often taking the form of a colloquy, ("A conversation or dialogue, especially when it is in the nature of a formal discussion or a conference"<sup>1</sup>) the final section literally resolves the question as the writer makes a resolution concerning behavior in the future. The resolution must follow with some logic from the application of understanding.

**Some Topics:** These are suggestions only. The formal meditation is a highly personal type of writing, and the best papers will be those that come most directly from personal experience.

|              |             |                |
|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| loneliness   | uncertainty | error          |
| frustration  | ignorance   | disappointment |
| faith        | expectation | expedience     |
| intelligence | fear        | cooperation    |
| foresight    | victory     | restraint      |
| health       | failure     | regret         |
| discord      | pain        | beauty         |
| excitement   | rejection   | courage        |
| dejection    | hope        | vanity         |
| simplicity   | pride       |                |
| indifference | neglect     |                |
| curiosity    | incredulity |                |

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (Indianapolis: Odyssey/Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 106.