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Meredith Aden

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CREAC Scramble: An Active Self-Assessment Exercise



Meredith Aden
Director of Legal Writing
Mississippi College School of Law
aden@mc.edu

When I started teaching legal writing, one of my primary learning objectives for students was using and applying the CREAC paradigm to organize and develop their legal analysis. I taught CREAC in class, gave the students a short CREAC assignment early in the semester, and provided written feedback. But when I received the drafts of the students' next assignment, I quickly realized that despite my best efforts, many students did not understand CREAC or struggled to translate the feedback to more complicated memorandum drafts.

I needed a new approach to stress the importance CREAC, to engage the students in the learning process, and to help them understand the fundamentals of CREAC as a transferrable formula. I wanted to shift the focus from teaching to learning, and I wanted to expand the opportunities for assessment early in the semester. So, in the fall of 2008, I developed a new strategy to help the students learn how to use CREAC.

The process involves several stages of assessment and evaluation of student work during the first few weeks of the semester. First, I teach the CREAC paradigm in class. Next, the students complete a short CREAC analysis assignment on a simple issue using a fact pattern and one or two short, simple cases. The analysis assignment is a largely formative assessment. Although it is graded, it is an extremely small portion of the grade (3-5%). I have found that the students take the assignment more seriously and give a better effort when the assignment is graded. However, I emphasize that the real learning objective of the assignment is for the students to practice using CREAC before undertaking the more heavily weighted memorandum assignments. The students

gain a better appreciation for using and understanding CREAC after trying it for themselves and receiving feedback on their papers.

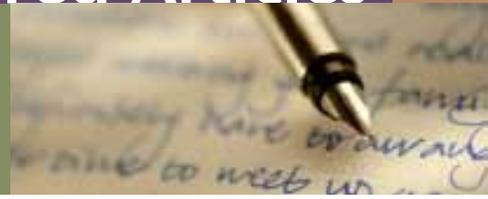
To reinforce CREAC and to help the students internalize the feedback on their assignments, the students next complete an assessment exercise I call the CREAC Scramble. I take a well-developed CREAC section from a longer, multi-issue memo with clearly demarcated CREAC sections, and I scramble the sentences from each part of the memorandum into a random order. I number them and place them into a three-column table with the scrambled, numbered sentences in the center column. I label the left column "reordered sentence" and the right column "component? of CREAC."

Reordered Sentence	Sentence	Component of CREAC
	1. The information in the e-mails was not about private court proceedings or domestic disputes like the information in Taylor and Bennett.	

I distribute the CREAC Scramble during class, and the students first work individually to label each sentence as a "C," an "R," an "E," an "A," or a "C." Then the students renumber the sentences to put the CREAC back together in a logical order following the CREAC paradigm.

After the students work individually on the CREAC Scramble, they move into groups of three to four students to compare their renumbered, labeled sentences and to agree on the correct label and number for each sentence. As the students are working in the small groups, I observe the groups and listen to the various discussions about the correct label and order for each sentence.

Toward the end of class, I bring everyone back together to discuss the assignment and to reach an agreement on the answers to the assignment. Afterward, I give students the opportunity to ask questions, and I pass out two different answer keys. The first is a chart in which each sentence is correctly reordered and labeled. The second is the CREAC in its original paragraph form, so the students can see how the CREAC would appear in a real office memorandum. The answer keys enable students to self-assess their progress in using and understanding the CREAC paradigm.



This assignment is an excellent tool that compels the students to contemplate what makes each part of CREAC different. To advocate for their positions about each sentence, the students have to articulate to each other why they believe a sentence should be labeled with a certain letter, and why the numbering should be in a certain order. And, it provides another opportunity for self-assessment. When a student advocates that a sentence should be labeled incorrectly, another student often teaches the mistaken student about the different parts of CREAC and how to distinguish them. Peer teaching reinforces CREAC and provides the students with an active learning experience that helps them assess their progress using the CREAC paradigm. Armed with information from multiple assessments, the students are more confident and more successful at using CREAC.

A copy of the CREAC Scramble assignment is available in the 2010 Legal Writing Institute Idea Bank.

¹This assignment could easily be adapted to other paradigms, such as IRAC, CRAC, etc.

²This assignment does not necessarily have only one correct answer. Many of the sentences, particularly in the “E” and “A” may have slightly different ordering of sentences, which is fine. The most important part of the assignment is for the students to correctly label each part of CREAC and to have each section progress in a logical order.

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