**Writing Questions…………..**

**Finding the Right Words: The Need for Precision**

A. Students should understand that a failure to use precise language often leads to confusion and misunderstanding.

B. Student should understand the concept of **Vagueness** and be able to identify instances of vague words. To this end, students should understand that . . .

1. A word (or group of words) is vague when its meaning is fuzzy or inexact;

2. Vague words typically divide things into three classes including:

a. Those things to which the word clearly applies;

b. Those things to which the word clearly does not apply;

c. Those things to which the word may or may not apply (i.e. **borderline cases**)

3. Vagueness admits of degrees. Though nearly all words are vague, some are more so than others.

4. Though vague words are not always inappropriate, vague words should generally be avoided.

C. Students should understand the concept of **overgenerality** and be able to identify instances of overgeneral words. To this end, students should learn to . . .

1. distinguish overgenerality from vagueness and understand that . . .

a. words are overgeneral if they are not specific enough in a given context.

D. Students should understand the concept of **ambiguity** and be able to identify instances of ambiguous words and expressions. To this end, students should . . .

1. understand that word or expression is ambiguous when it has two or more distinct meanings and where the context does not make clear which meaning is intended;

2. understand how the use of ambiguous terms and expressions can contribute to misunderstanding and destroy the effectiveness of arguments;

3. be able to distinguish ambiguity from vagueness and overgenerality;

4. understand the distinction between a **semantic ambiguity** and a **syntactical ambiguity** or **amphiboly**.

5. understand how ambiguity can lead to a **verbal dispute** and be able to distinguish such a case from a **factual dispute**.