



*First-Year English Essay Award winner Tara Carroway expresses her feelings about having her essay edited.*

## Carroway, Lashley Win First-Year English Essay Awards

Congratulations to first-place finisher Tara Carroway and runner-up Justin Lashley on their award-winning English essays, “Join the Mediocracy!” and “Determination: How I Survived As a Working Student.”

Judged by professors Bob Bundy, Tracey Craig, and David Roberts in 2011, the First-Year English Essay competition is open to students whose work is nominated by English faculty. This year’s other nominees, whose essays were selected as the strongest received in English 101 and 102 during the preceding academic year, were Nick Cauthen, Karrie Clark, Olivia Gaddy, Falesia Gorski, Caroline Howey, Taylor Martin, and Lyndie Moss. 2010’s winner was Mary Lapsley Daly.

The competition was sponsored by USCL’s Office of Student Affairs, which provided the winners with USCL Bookstore gift cards.

The text of Tara Carroway’s winning essay follows. Mary Lapsley Daly’s 2010 winning essay is below.

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### Join the Mediocracy!

Tara Carroway

Mediocre: Of only ordinary or moderate quality; neither good nor bad; barely adequate.

Everywhere you go, you come across someone amazing: the genius, the hottie, the athlete; or someone not so amazing: the geek, the substance abuser, the “I want attention so I’m gonna wear something ridiculous.” But what if you don’t want to be one of those people? What if you just want to be normal? Average? Mediocre? Well, mediocrity is a fine line to walk, and if not handled carefully you could very easily fall into a “category.” But fear not, for I shall be your guide down the path of normality! By following my lead you will learn the general rules needed to handle any situation while maintaining your status as a “normal-er.”

Now when it comes to being mediocre there is one word you should never forget: **PLAIN**. Naturally this is an acronym with a special meaning behind it (each letter standing for a word or phrase you can use on your quest for a mediocre life). So without further ado, let’s get to the first letter “P,” which coincidentally, stands for “plain,” or more specifically, “plain style.” Let’s face it, the first thing you notice about someone is the way they look, so wearing something with bright colors or bold patterns is likely to attract unwanted attention. On the contrary, dark colors or foreign images may also intrigue people’s interest. So my suggestion to you is to wear dull colors like gray, brown, dark blue, maroon-even pale yellow or purple is acceptable. Just remember that if you wear something too contrasting, even if you follow the color scheme, you run the risk of standing out.

Hairstyle is also an issue that falls under the “P.” Flashy styles like curls or ribbons are a sure-fire way to get attention, and anything besides your natural hair color is an absolute no! Instead try a straight style or maybe a ponytail? When you’ve found your desired hairstyles you should try to swap between them regularly so that it’s not a big deal that you look different from day to day. Okay so I know what you might be thinking, “Since when did this become a fashion magazine?” but worry not, this is all in direct correlation with my next point (letter?) “L”: “Lay low.”

That’s right, the “L” in **PLAIN** is for “Lay low,” meaning don’t stand out. Now is when large amounts of concentration are necessary. If everyone else goes right and you go

left, you might as well be walking into a spotlight (contrariwise, if you find yourself going left without anyone ever noticing, then you don't even need to finish reading this!) You should always be aware of what most people are doing, because in this commoners' game the crowd is your best bet for victory! So remember these rules:

1. Speak only when necessary; people who talk too much draw attention but not talking makes you seem suspicious.
2. Sit near the middle. I can understand if you're confused about this one, but if you sit too close to the ends you're likely to be completely forgotten, and that is not the point; you still want to be able to interact.
3. Don't ask questions—you can just look it up later. Asking questions makes you the focal point for everyone, and well, if you don't know why that is frowned upon then I might as well give up now!

Speaking of not caring anymore, the next key word is "Apathy." If you're wondering what apathy could have to do with being mediocre, then you must have been a pretty awesome person up until now (Or not so awesome, whatever.) In order to become average one must be void of all emotions, or at least be able to fully control them. If you lash out in a moment of anger, or get carried away by some sappy moment, you may find yourself being "branded." So unless you want to be "that guy" you have to develop control, and only use emotions when deemed necessary. Also, it can get a bit tough at times never getting attention for yourself, and having an apathetic attitude is what it takes to endure!

Endure? Well what do you know, that just so happens to be the definition for my next point (letter?): "I," "Intestinal fortitude." Now I know what you are thinking: "Intestinal fortitude? What?!" But if you remember properly, I just told you! It means to have courage and endure, because let's face it, being so normal all the time takes its toll, but if can have courage and endure it then you can look forward to a life of complete adequacy! Now doesn't that sound nice?

And now the last letter (what no point?) of **PLAIN**, the “N.” I have no cheesy transition for this one because I find it to be of the utmost importance and significance. Not following it will without a doubt break any and all hard work you may have put in until now. “No accents.” That’s right. Nothing will make you stick out more than a country twang or Yankee slang! And if your accent is foreign? Oh, you can just toss normality out the window! Now I know everything I’ve told you is about blending in with your surroundings, but anything more than a slight inclination toward your roots is an invitation for commentary, criticism, and a whole lot of attention! So, if you ever want to join the ranks of the plebs, your first objective is to talk like them; and the most universally accepted accent is the lack of one.

Alright, so let’s recap: wear **P**lain styles, **L**ay low, stay **A**pathetic, maintain **I**ntestinal fortitude, and absolutely **N**o accents. These are the general guidelines for living a mediocre life, one without the fear of winning or losing; because let’s face it, life is a competition and you’re not going to win. But if you can remember to keep life **PLAIN**, then you’ll at least be able to look back on everything and think: “Eh, good enough.”

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*Mary Lapsley Daly is earning a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies at USC Lancaster; she wrote the following essay for Professor Kim Covington’s Rhetoric and Composition course in spring 2010.*



## Think Twice Before You Take That Space



It had been a long week. I had been at the Department of Rehabilitative Services completing test after test after test to assess future goals and career options for a person with cerebral palsy. At the end of the third day, I was exhausted. It was a cold and rainy January day, and my mother was going to take me to one of my favorite restaurants, Aunt Sarah's Pancake House, as a treat for lunch after I completed the tests. The parking lot was packed as we pulled into the restaurant, but there was one handicap spot left beside the front door. My mom made her way to the spot, and just as she was about to pull in, a carload of teenage girls whipped in front of her, parked their SUV in the handicap spot, and walked their able-bodied selves up to the front door. They had no handicap placard or tags, and it was clear by the way they trotted in stiletto heels that they were not disabled.

I knew what was coming next. Anyone who knows my mom knows that she has strong feelings about the abuse of handicap parking spaces. She will stop at nothing to make sure she does her part to stop the abuse of the system.

Sliding down into my seat, I knew she was going to make a scene. I told her before hand, "Please, please don't say anything. It's not a big deal. We can go to a drive-through and pick up some fast food," but I lost the battle and she went in for the kill.

"EXCUSE ME," she yelled at the girls. "Did you know you are parked in a handicap spot?"

"Oh, we're just running in for a minute," the girls responded.

"Well, do you really need that spot?"

The driver looked at Mom and tried hard to come up with an excuse. She stuttered, "Uh, well, I hurt my knee."

My mom told her that I was disabled and that we couldn't get into the restaurant unless we could find a handicap space. The girl began to walk into the restaurant in complete defiance, but for some reason, she turned around and told my mom that she would move her car. That was an unusual instance when someone abusing the privilege of parking in handicapped parking actually admitted to being wrong and gave up the privileged parking. She apologized, and we were able to park, enter the restaurant, and have a wonderful pancake lunch.

The handicap parking system seems to be a joke in today's world, but to those who really need those wide spaces close to the entrances of places, it is no joke. People seem to think that parking in those spaces is a privilege. What they don't understand is it is not a privilege, it is a necessity. If a disabled person needs a handicap space and the spaces are all taken, then that person cannot park and cannot go in anywhere.

I am one of the lucky ones, because if I had to, I could find a way to make do with a regular parking space, but some people are not so lucky. My good friend, Jennifer Raines, has spina bifida. This is a condition where a person is paralyzed and completely wheelchair-bound. She has to have a handicap space in order to lower the ramp on the side of her car. There have been many times when Jennifer has tried to park somewhere and can't get out because all the spaces are taken, many times by cars with no handicap placards. She told me about one particular instance when she was attending

classes at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. It was pouring down rain, and she was trying to park to get into class when a girl whipped in front of her, jumped out in her red heels, and dashed into the building. Jennifer had to miss class that day because there were no other spaces available and she could not find a parking spot where she could lower her ramp and get her wheelchair out.

Lee Carter, President of the Spinal Cord Injury Association of Chester, South Carolina, is another wheelchair-bound friend of mine. Lee was a twenty-two-year veteran who had just retired and come back home to South Carolina. Every year at Thanksgiving, it was a tradition in his family to climb the pecan trees and shake the nuts down. Lee climbed up one year after a particularly dry season, and the brittle branch he was standing on broke. He fell from the tree and knew right when he hit the ground that he couldn't move. He said he knew at that moment he was going to be in a wheelchair from then on. He has become a great advocate in Chester for those with disabilities. One of his passions is patrolling the town looking for violations of handicap parking spaces. He had pictures on his cell phone of cars who parked in violation of handicap spots. These included the husband of the former mayor of the town and a Chester County government car, complete with the seal of the town painted on the side. Lee photographs violators and calls the local police to report them.



**Figure 1: Chester County Government Vehicle Illegally Parks in Handicap Space**

His worst story was when a motorcycle parked in the loading zone of the handicap space beside Lee's van. When Lee wheeled out of the store, he found that he was unable to get into his van because the motorcycle had blocked the ramp. Trapped, he had to find someone to back his van out for him so he could lower the ramp and get into his vehicle.



**Figure 2: Husband of Former Mayor of Chester Illegally Parks in Handicap Space in Downtown Chester, SC**

There are many problems with the handicap parking system. Almost anyone can get a placard because most doctors do not want to tell their patients “No” if they ask for a placard. The biggest problem is the misuse of placards. People will take their relative's placards and use them for themselves. One lady actually told my mother that she was so excited when her mother died because she got her handicap parking tag and now got the best parking in town. Unfortunately, our world today is very self-absorbed. People think it is their “right” to park in those premium spaces and do not realize that for the truly disabled, those spaces are a necessity and not a privilege.

There is actually a website where handicap parking abuse can be reported. The website, [www.handicappedfraud.org](http://www.handicappedfraud.org), is a place where suspected parking violators can be reported without having to confront them. This organization does not try to decide

who has the right to use the handicap spots, but it is a site that is trying to protect the rights of those who really do need those spaces. If someone suspects abuse, they can write down the license plate number of the car and the number on the parking placard and report it anonymously to this website. The website then sends the information each month to every state's Department of Motor Vehicles. The DMV offices can then investigate to see if the placard is being abused, or if it has been lost or stolen, or if the person it was originally issued to has passed away. This website is a great tool for those who may worry about confrontation when suspecting parking abuse but really want to help report parking violations.

When I was younger, I was always embarrassed when my mother made a scene if someone parked illegally in a handicap space, but now, as I have gotten older and am driving a van with a ramp, I understand the importance of having access to those spaces. Even though I still do not like conflict, the abuse of the handicap parking system enrages me, and I have become an advocate for the rights of the disabled population to have access to these spaces. The system needs to be changed because it is too easy to abuse and there is little enforcement of the laws protecting these spaces. Society needs to change as well and start caring about the needs of others, especially those with disabilities.

The system needs more advocates, whether you are disabled or not, who are willing to help protect the needs of handicapped drivers and become warriors against the abuse of the system. Until we have a change in the system and a change in the values of society, the problem will remain the same. The disabled population will have to struggle not only with everyday life issues, but just getting out running errands or getting to school or going to an appointment will continue adding to the stress of a life that is already complicated by a disability. So remember, next time you have to run an errand and are tempted to take a handicap spot in a crowded parking lot, think twice before you take that spot! Your decision could make a tremendous difference in the life of a disabled person.