

In the Beginning is the Contract

Introductions, Intent, and the Interplay between the
Familiar and the New

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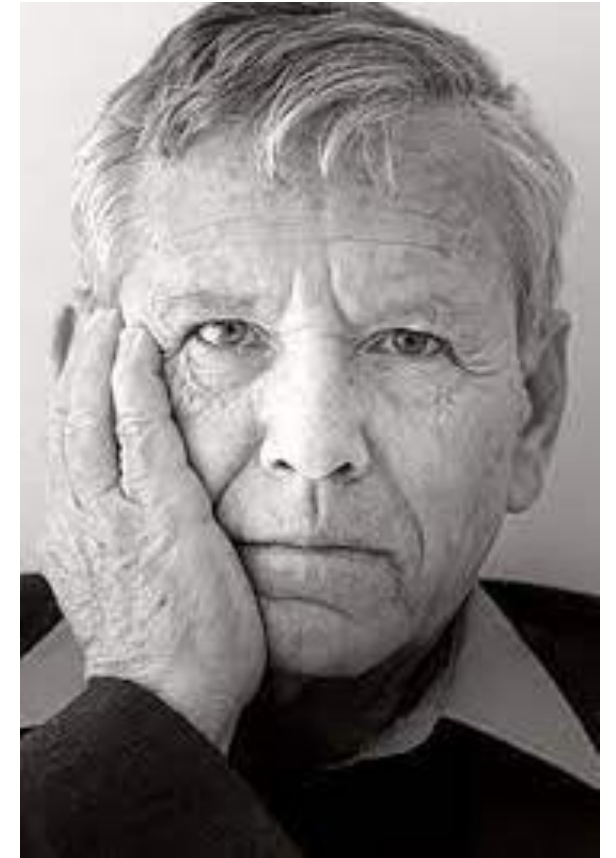
Before we start

'The beginnings of every story have a certain arbitrariness.'

Adam Phillips, 2014, *Becoming Freud*, p. 37.

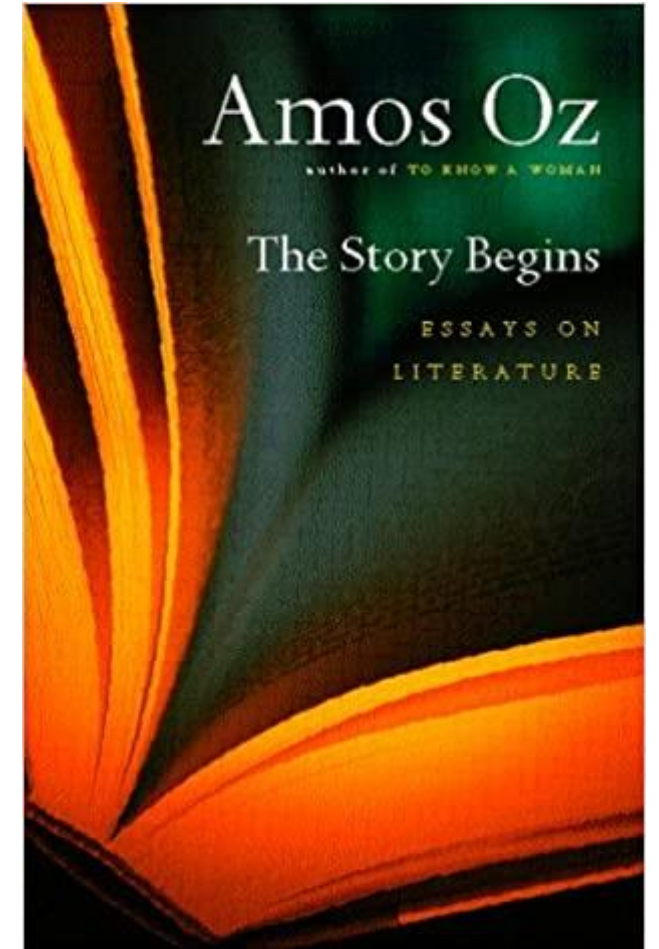
Once upon a time . . .

there was a very wise and learned
author whose books and essays were
read far and wide across the world.



Source: https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://thumbs.dreamstime.com/b/amos-oz-israeli-novelist-writer-journalist-professor-intellectual-activist-addresses-gathering-lautenberg-family-135371895.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.dreamstime.com/amos-oz-israeli-novelist-writer-journalist-professor-intellectual-activist-addresses-gathering-lautenberg-family-image135371895&h=900&w=649&tbid=K_V8L7DfFqfwoM&q=find+free+images+of+Amos+Oz&tbnh=146&tbnw=105&usq=AI4_-kTfmVbgx1D_3Y-Gx7A6Sld9AF1Xg&vet=1&docid=jU-U-TH4y4XiyM&hl=en-GB&sa=X&sqi=2&pj=1&ved=2ahUKEwj335fqjYz4AhX0h_OHHZoiBY4Q9QF6BAgAEAY

In one of his books (Oz, 1999), he posed a simple but thought-provoking question:



Source: Amazon.co.uk. Available from:
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Story-Begins-Essays-Literature/dp/0151002975>

‘Where does a story properly begin?’

Oz, 1999, p. 7

His answer was equally thought-provoking:

'Any beginning of a story is always a kind of contract between writer and reader.'

Oz, 1999, p. 7

Can the contract analogy be helpful when explaining how to write an introductory paragraph to an **academic essay**?

Can it serve as a type of loose pedagogical framework on which to hang the **introductory paragraph**?

Perhaps . . . **but**

my thinking is still in its infancy - *beginning phase*

Contracts do not have to be (legally) binding

(Many types of contract - 'including those that are insincere'.¹)

"Academic Contract" = 3 Features

(I've been working with students in class to clarify this)

¹Oz, 1999, p. 7

1. The Parties to the Contract & Their Intentions

One Party = Reader = Tutor

Attentiveness = Intends to assess *quality of learning*

(Ideally, she promises slow and careful reading of students' work.)

Other Party = Writer = Student

Wants to show understanding = "Engagement"

(Ultimately, the strength of her deductive reasoning)

2. Contract Clauses (Terms)

=

Content of introductory paragraph

- (i) Exploration of **Logical Geography**
- (ii) Identification / significance of Problem
- (iii) Student's **Position** (Relative to ... / Closed or Open?)

3. Fine (Small) Print

=

Employment of formal academic conventions / devices

Line spacing, font, definitions, signposting sentences, quotes, [ellipsis ...]
citations, *emphasis*, complex passive voice, AWL vocabulary,
tense, "scare quotes", punctuation (. . . ; :) . . .

Logical Geography



Context / Background

(often, *de rigueur* = required as a matter of course)

Logical Geography

Question: What is an academic essay?

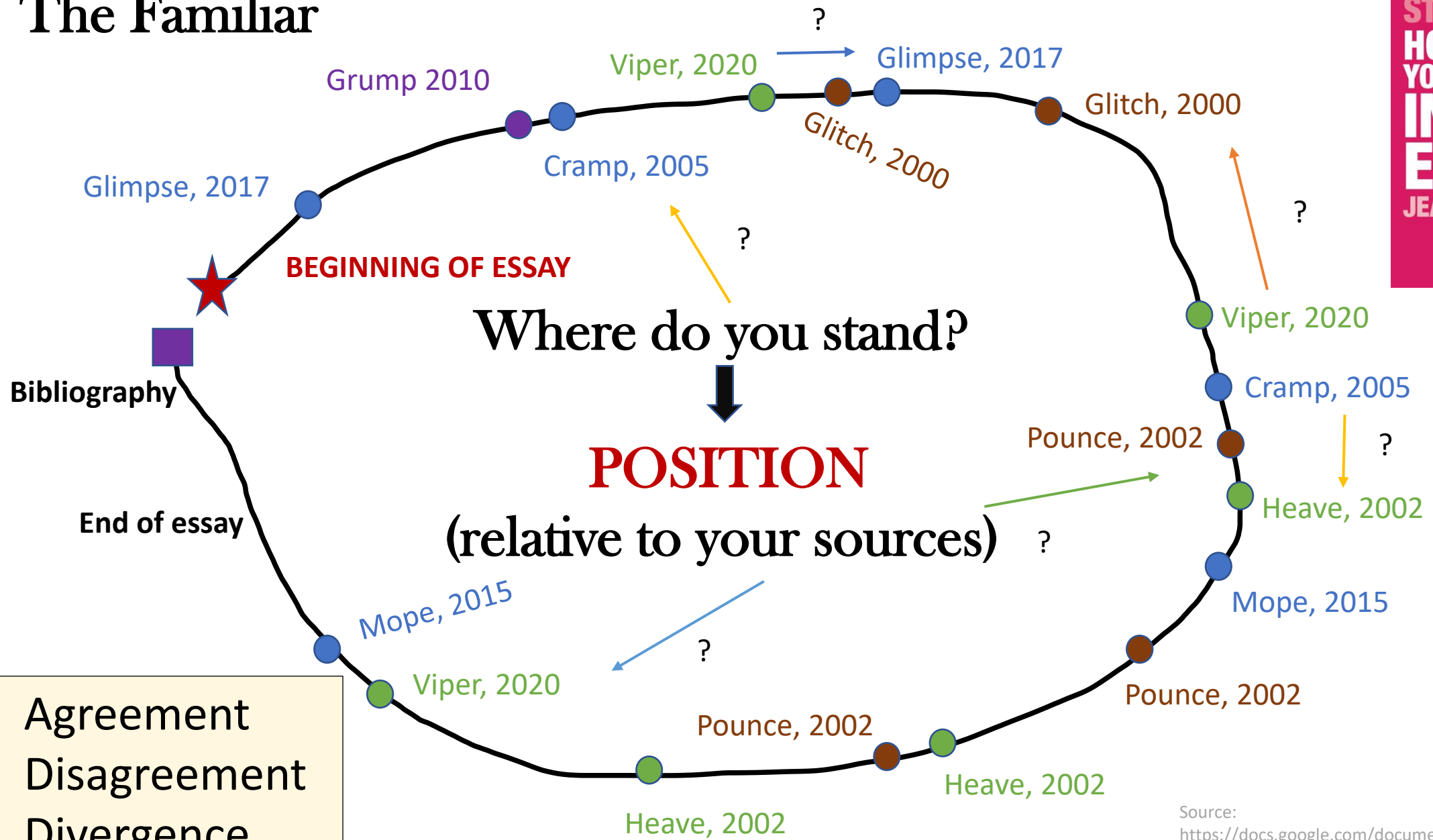
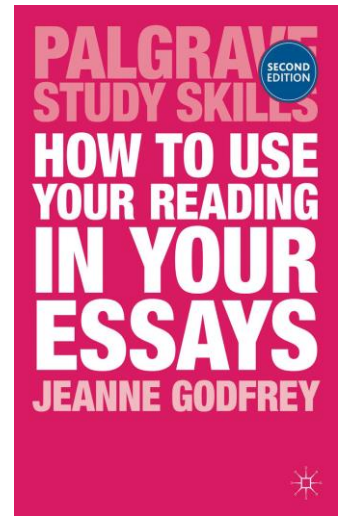
an **intervention**¹ = important implications

(Who is already engaged in the conversation / debate?)

Contract/Introduction needs to express intention to navigate through what others have already said – the familiar.

¹Said, 1985.

The Familiar



- Agreement
- Disagreement
- Divergence

Source:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UfDebVLMxs65d dWf8OPtQB15LEnQKTg4E-ICZpBuvxM/edit?usp=sharing>

Position: The New = Student's Response

Scenario: Over a period of several weeks, students have worked on the topic of crime in the UK: extent of, how crime levels can be reduced, the problem of recidivism (repeat offending), attitudes to purpose of prison etc.

Essay Question:

To what extent can crime levels in the UK be reduced through the introduction of rehabilitation programmes in prisons to tackle recidivism?

Position (Open or Closed)

(Quality of learning - After Biggs & Collis, 1982)

'Unistructural Response' (Thesis/Position Statement)

This essay will show that rehabilitation programmes give prisoners a chance to develop skills they previously did not have, like carpentry and IT skills.

= Limited understanding - So what?

'Extended Abstract Response' (Thesis/Position Statement)

[1] It will be argued in this essay that the rehabilitation of repeat offenders can help them gain skills they will be able to use once they are released. [2] This will give them greater opportunities to find employment and to purchase goods and services, for example, which will be an incentive not to re-offend. [3] If we accept Ward's observation that 'a *necessary condition* for the reduction of offending is the instillation of ways of living that are [...] fulfilling and coherent' (2016: 22. Emphasis added), then rehabilitation programmes increase the chances of prisoners finding fulfilment and coherence. [4] Without rehabilitation programmes, the essay will argue that the chances of finding fulfilment and coherence are much reduced and recidivism will continue to grow.

= Relational thinking

= Abstract/Deductive reasoning

Closing Thought

Idea of contract = Gravitas / Formality

BUT, remember . . .

'like any contract, if you do not read the fine print you may be taken for a ride; but sometimes you may be taken for a ride precisely by getting bogged down in the fine print and failing to see the forest for the trees.'¹

¹ Oz, 1999: p. 115

References

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