

ENGL 359 In-Class Activity: Create a Positionality Statement

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In the introduction to Mohawk writer E. Pauline Johnson's *The Shagganappi* (1913), Johnson is quoted as follows: "Never let anyone call me a white woman," she said. "There are those who think they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people" (7-8). Similarly, in her 1911 text *Legends of Vancouver*, Johnson introduces a short story by stating, "I here quote the legend of 'mine own people,' the Iroquois tribes of Ontario" ("The Deep Waters"). Though these examples are taken from works published over 100 years ago, we can consider both as helpful to understanding the unique position from which Johnson was coming to her own literary work as a person of mixed Mohawk/English ancestry.

Today, and with decolonizing the institution in mind, we refer to this process of self-identification as determining one's "positionality" – in other words, explaining who you are and where you're coming from as a way of "locating the self" in relation to the work you're doing (and also of acknowledging the potential limitations of your perspective). Consider the creation of a "positionality statement" as an opportunity to acknowledge your position or identity in relation to the work that you're doing, and also to provide some additional context (for example – explaining how you arrived at your current research topic, which might include sharing an influential experience that has led you to your research). You can include this statement as part of your academic writing, and can also use this (in combination with an appropriate land acknowledgement) to respectfully introduce yourself in both academic and community settings.

Keep in mind that these prompts are just a starting point to get you thinking; to simply "fill in the blanks" is not the goal. It's also important to keep in mind that some people may have difficult relationships with their identities, or perhaps don't have information about their family heritage; we must be flexible in following this guide, in a way that shows care for ourselves and for others.

- What is your name?
- Are you a settler/non-Indigenous person?
- Are you Black? Are you a Person of Colour? Are you Indigenous?
- What is your relationship to SFU (are you student/faculty/staff/etc.)?
- What department are you located in at SFU?
- Whose territory/territories are you located on? Grew up on?
- Why are you engaged in this work/area of study?
- What is your "compelling action" in doing this work? (i.e. how are you engaging in a meaningful relationship with the land and/or Nations?)

