Part I: Finding Your Essay Topic and Writing a Thesis:
In this unit we have read the essays “The Company Man” on 319, “Women Still Fighting for Job Equality” on 314, “Less is More” on 323, “A Father’s Character...Shapes Kids’ Careers” on 327, “Oh, I’m Just a Housewife” on 347, “Two Cheers for Sweatshops” on 333, and the handout “If I Were a Carpenter.” Through reading these essays, you have thought about the roles of men and women in the work force and in family life and you have thought about issues of status and employment and considered various definitions of success. Finding a good topic for you and crafting a good topic sentence is a vital step in writing a good essay.

Your first step is to review and/or determine what others have said or what society seems to think about these issues. As you read through the list of titles, ask yourself what the author said or what people generally believe about these topics. Because the authors as well as many others have written about these topics, you will be entering into an ongoing conversation. What can you add? Think about how you felt when you read the essays. Did you agree? Did you think of examples from your own life? Did something an author said upset you? Did you think of related ideas you wish the author had discussed? Your annotation or writer’s notebook might be of help.

As you answer these questions, you should look for an issue where you have something worthwhile to add to what has already been said. You may also add a new angle or idea about work or success that was not mentioned in the essays—maybe something the writers overlooked or something your generation views differently. You may wish to argue with the author and point out things he or she said that bother you. You can agree and add your own supporting evidence, you can disagree, or you can agree with some things and not others. You also may move into a direction that the author only touched upon that should also be considered.

You will be using a set format or “template” to help you write the introductory paragraph and thesis. The handout “Templates to Begin Explanatory or Argument Essays” will give you methods both to explain what others have said and to introduce your own thinking. These templates will be useful for other essays as well, so keep them all semester. Look at the following examples for how you might use these templates to help you structure your own essays. The italicized section shows what others have said regarding this topic, and the underlined sections show what the student thinks—his or her thesis. The words in bold are transition words or phrases that prepare the reader for the movement from what others say to what you say.

In the essay “Two Cheers for Sweatshops,” Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl Wundunn argue that sweatshops may be a vital source of income for poor families and a necessary element in a country’s economic progress. Although I agree with the main points they make in the essay, I believe that American companies in these countries should abide by three rules: no one under the age of 16 should be employed, every employee must be given one day off each week, and the working environment must be as safe as possible.

In the essay “A Company Man” author Ellen Goodman introduces readers to Phil, a man who appears to have been a workaholic. Goodman and many others challenge the view that a person’s main goal in life should be to get a job with high status and to become wealthy. I agree with Goodman’s general idea, however, in my view a person cannot succeed at any job unless he or she is dedicated and is willing to put in the required hours to achieve excellence.

In the essay “Women Still Fighting for Job Equality” DeWayne Wickham says “women are still bumping up against that glass ceiling,” and I agree with him. I have observed both female family members and friends who have received more negative treatment than their male co-workers.

HOMEWORK- due next class: Using the template handout, write a topic sentence that addresses what one of the authors (or society) says and then transition into your opinion about this topic. In other words, create a thesis that lets the reader know what point your essay will make and explore.