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Looking into Writing-about-Writing Classrooms

Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs

This chapter primarily focuses on how we each go about enacting the composition pedagogy that we have been advocating for some years now, a “writing studies” or “writing-about-writing” approach that takes declarative and procedural knowledge about writing as the content of the course, and that regards helping students think and learn about writing as the appropriate goal of the course (rather than teaching students how to write). However, in order to make the best use of our “how do we do this?” discussion, it is essential to start with our rationale for teaching this way. Our pedagogy relies on a set of particular beliefs about the nature of writing that, in turn, impacts what we believe a first-year composition course can and should do. This chapter begins by briefly laying out our understanding of the nature of writing. Then, in light of the understanding we outline, we briefly describe what we believe the role and objectives of first-year composition should be. We then spend the majority of the chapter describing how these beliefs about writing and the goals of composition are enacted in our own classrooms, using a dialogic approach to emphasize areas of similarity and difference.

Our Understanding of the Nature of Writing

We understand writing as a process of composing (inventing and designing) and inscribing (arranging and recording on some medium) a language-using text (Patriq). Writing processes are unique to a given group of writers and readers in a given writing situation, involving phases of goal-setting, planning, formulation, and controlling (e.g., a feedback/revision loop) (Perrin and Wildi). These phases typically overlap and produce the composing effect Ann Berthoff calls “allotroniceness.” Because inscription requires use of tools (and because composition is often aided by them), writing is unavoidably technological.

Writing is a kind of symbolic human interaction (the symbols being linguistic), and because such interaction is inherently rhetorical, we understand writing to be a rhetorical activity, meaning that it is situated, motivated, contingent, material or embodied, and epistemic. By unpacking each of these terms, we end up with a reasonably thorough description of our understanding of “the nature of writing.”

First, writing is situated in specific contexts and reasons-for-being that are unique to each act of writing. Writing is driven by exigence: people do not write unless some need exists for the writing they’re producing (including writing produced to fulfill a private, psychological need for self-expression). Meaning, convention, form, and success of texts are dependent on, influenced by, and in return, always influence the communities, systems, and groups whose work is mediated by them. Our two dominant ways of understanding this social dimension of exigence are in terms of activity, where writing is a tool used by groups of people to help accomplish some task, and also in terms of genre, where recurrent forms of writing are dynamically shaped by the situation. To say that writing is situated is to say that a text is understood differently when taken out of the context in which rhetors originally produce and read it; stated another way, what a text means and how it is composed and produced will inevitably depend on the context and circumstances in which it is composed and read.

Second, because writing is situation- and exigence-driven, it follows that it is motivated: Rhetors have motives for writing what they write and how they write it, and also for reading texts in the ways they do. The production of texts and the meanings rhetors make for them, then, unavoidably depend on motivations. Because there is no unmotivated writing, there is no objective, neutral, unbiased, or impartial writing or text.

Third, given that writing is situated and motivated, its nature and processes are therefore contingent on the rhetorical situation and the motives that situation encompasses. The answer to any question about how a text "ought to be" is: “It depends.” Because the shape and quality of a text are contingent on a situation and its conventions, there are almost no universal, “hard-and-fast” rules available for how to write.
Instead, the common ground we find across writing situations—the guidelines and principles writers constantly begin with and return to—are questions. What is the exigence for what you’re writing? What do you need it to accomplish? How will readers use it? What are readers’ expectations for what you’re writing, and what are their values for what will make your text “good”? How do those values arise from the activity the text is meant to help accomplish? What genre does the situation suggest or require, what are the typical elements of that genre, and what modifications does this situation suggest for that pattern? What conventions—from word choice to design to style and mechanics—should the text follow? These and other questions are the most stable, “universal” aspect of writing.

Fourth, writing is material (as rhetoric itself is embodied). Because writing is in one sense a recording of ideas, it’s easy to lose sight of how writing actually plays out on material objects and how it results from material (not just ideational) labor. It is this aspect of writing’s nature that is most closely associated with its technological aspect. Writers are proficient with certain kinds of material practices and objects, and usually we understand that the wider a range of materials a writer can work with, the greater their ability as a writer. To write is to be able to work with the technologies and materials of writing.

Lastly, writing is epistemic, by which we mean that writing is an activity that generates new knowledge. That statement may seem unremarkable until we recognize that in most corners of Western culture, writing is understood more as the recording of existing knowledge: First we learn something, then we “write it down”; or, first we do research and reach findings and conclusions, and then we “write up” our research, the implication being that we learn nothing new during and through the act of writing itself. In this way of thinking, only the inscribing aspect of writing is noted; the composing aspect of writing is elided. In both theory and practice, we find that writing is generative, not simply scribal. In theory, we believe that what people experience as reality constitutes and is constituted by language: How we understand our world depends in large measure on the language we use to describe and talk about it, so that our expressive choices generate (understandings of) reality. In practice, writers find that the act of “writing down” the ideas they already have usually gives them ideas they didn’t have before. That writing is epistemic has direct implications for how writers experience the act of writing. Because the process of writing is one not only of recording ideas, but also of having them, texts develop iteratively through revision, each new version incorporating ideas gained during the writing and reading of preceding versions. Revision is not the punitive act of “fixing” poorly done writing, but the inevitable, inherent, healthy process of developing the text from the beginning.

To summarize, we understand writing as a complex, situational activity in which a writer, in collaboration with other writers and readers, simultaneously and iteratively manages the development of ideas, the choice of the most fitting language related to those ideas, the design of the text to be inscribed, and the production of the text itself—all in response to and formation of a situation that creates particular constraints, conventions, and demands for the text. To the end of creating texts readers will use to accomplish particular activities, and which texts, in turn, continue to shape future situations, activities, and texts.

We take as axiomatic that people’s behaviors are shaped by their conceptions of what is appropriate to do in a given situation, and by their perceptions of that situation. What we do in any given moment depends on what we think we are supposed to be doing—what the moment calls for and what seems to be the best way to meet that call. We might say, in other words, that how one plays the game depends on what game one thinks one is playing. When we apply this principle to writing, it is clear that the story we tell ourselves about the nature of writing—our conceptions of what writing is and how it ought to work—will powerfully shape how we go about doing it.

THE ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

Given these beliefs about what writing is and how it works, the purposes and, indeed, the very existence of first-year composition become deeply problematic. From its inception, this course has been imagined as existing for the sole purpose of “teaching students to write” in general: for no audience or purpose in particular, but instead for any future audience or purpose in general. Its purpose has long been understood by college administrators and faculty across the country as 1) correcting faults in previous learning as evidenced by mechanical errors in students’ writing, and 2) preparing students for the rigors of “college writing,” which is taken to be an undifferentiated, academic writing that David Russell has called “universal educated discourse” (60). In both functions, college writing instruction is essentially an
inoculation: a one-shot, “fix it all now,” get-it-out-of-the-way attempt to treat writing as a basic, fundamental, universal skill that can be permanently mastered. Further, composition is usually taught by teachers with training in one particular set of disciplinary practices and purposes (i.e., English Studies, broadly understood). Its content—once literature, later student texts, later cultural studies, sometimes anything at all—is understood not as central to the course, but as an occasion to practice writing and attempt various forms of writing (or, sometimes, to encourage “critical consciousness” about issues of race, class, or gender, for example).

The ability of such a “general” writing course to accomplish any useful, long-term, writing-related goal is called into question if we accept that writing is situation- and exigence-driven, and that the motivations of rhetors deeply impact the production and meaning of texts. This concern is not new. Indeed, entire volumes have been devoted to it (see Petragnna, for example), along with critiques such as Wardle’s of genres assigned in such courses (“Mutt Genres”).

We could say much more about why the beliefs about writing we have outlined call first-year composition into question; but, for the purposes of this chapter, suffice it to say that we accept that first-year composition cannot accomplish the goals it was created to accomplish. In our own classrooms, we have laid those goals to rest. Instead, we imagine first-year composition as only an entry point to a comprehensive, vertical writing education that extends across students’ time in college (and not only in the classroom), and we believe that part of our role as writing scholars and writing program administrators is to advocate for the creation of such vertical writing structures at our institutions so that composition can fulfill a more realistic and ultimately more useful role. If composition is understood as an entry point rather than as an inoculation, it can focus on accomplishing an obtainable goal that lays groundwork for the remainder of students’ writing education: teaching students flexible and transferable declarative and procedural knowledge about writing. Such a course can focus on broadening students’ conceptions of what writing is: helping them see texts as tools collaboratively produced and used in communities of practice; understanding writing as generative, not merely scribal; experiencing writing as situated and thus contingent rather than rule-driven; understanding genres as dynamic rather than fixed, rigid forms; and considering writing expertise as being both developed over time and situational, rather than universal. Finally, and perhaps most difficult, an effective first-year composition class can enforce accurate conceptions of writing through its pedagogical procedures. For example, in addition to teaching students that genres are flexible responses to recurring rhetorical situations (declarative knowledge), assignment descriptions and scaffolding themselves treat genres this way, and ask students to engage in activities that reflect such an understanding of genre (procedural knowledge).

Approaches that take up these goals have come to be labeled as “writing-about-writing” composition courses. Yet, the fact that these goals have garnered a name should not lead readers to conclude that there is only one way to enact them. To the contrary, there are many ways to enact a classroom with these as stated goals. In our own classes, we often find ourselves changing approaches, assignments, sequences, and activities (not to mention readings), depending on the students in the class, our recent experiences, and the work we have seen our colleagues doing in their own classrooms and programs via the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Writing-about-Writing SIG and the related Ning, listserv, and newsletter. We want to stress this point because we have often heard colleagues talk about the Wardle and Downs curriculum. We see a writing-focused approach as an end, with many possible means and, even in our own classrooms, we do not enact one, static curriculum over time. In the next section, we discuss some of our own teaching practices for writing-about-writing courses, but we want to be clear that we are not advocating one way to reach the goals described above. Rather, we illustrate some ways that we have been recently enacting the pedagogy.

**Enacting A Writing-about-Writing Pedagogy: A Dialogic Overview**

We are not one person; we are very dissimilar in many respects, as anyone who has ever met us both can attest. In fact, we have never taught at the same school, or even observed one another teach. So writing one chapter about how we conduct “our classroom” has been a challenging experience (please pardon this moment of meta-commentary). As we’ve talked over our classroom practices for this project, we’ve come to recognize a number of shared philosophies and practices, as well as some areas where we were surprised to learn of some deep-seated
beliefs and practices where we differ. To be as fair to our differences as we can, while still abiding by the constraint of length for this book chapter, in this section we discuss some of the major areas of importance to our teaching: designing a course around outcomes, giving thorough assignments and using modeling (or not), deeply integrating reading into a writing course, and using writing as a means of learning, whether through in-class or out-of-class writing. When we come to places in the text where we need to speak in separate voices, we break out into individual, dialogic exchanges.

Outcomes. Regardless of differences in our daily classrooms and on some philosophical issues, we share a deep agreement about the purposes and desired outcomes of our first-year composition classrooms, as the previous discussion suggests. Our primary goal is for students to gain flexible and transferable declarative and procedural knowledge about writing. We both find this goal made more achievable by the fact that students come to our classes with extensive experience as readers and writers in and out of school, and with many questions and ideas about their experiences. Their ideas, coupled with additional, declarative knowledge about writing, can benefit all of us—including the teachers and scholars who often talk about students rather than dialoging with them. (See Downs and Wardle, 2010, for more on what we believe first-year students can contribute.)

This larger goal is broken down into smaller objectives that can be explicitly listed as we draft the course syllabus. These include helping students broaden their conceptions of what writing is and how it is done, thinking explicitly about the affordances and constraints for the writing they face, seeing themselves as writers, understanding the contributive and conversational nature of both reading and writing, and understanding writing rhetorically. We also share a desire to help students create and explore open research questions about writing and learn how to engage in the “moves” of academic inquiry.

As a result, much of the classroom apparatus we design to help students achieve these outcomes uses writing-to-learn activities of various sorts. We both design our assignments, reading lists, and classroom activities to reach forward toward the outcomes, and we try to sequence activities so that students are scaffolded into learning and building toward the skills and experiences needed to engage in the next activity and achieve each outcome. One example of this type of scaffolding is illustrated in our 2007 article in College Composition and Communication (CCC), where we teach invention and move through source searching, summarizing, synthesizing, and data collection and analysis. But many such scaffolded sequences are possible.

Elizabeth. As I design the assignments at the beginning of the semester, I focus very much on writing to learn: What are we reading and talking and thinking about that I would like students to explore further in writing? Given the topics and learning at hand, what should those assignments look like? In a recent semester, I loosened up the structure we described in CCC so that students had more time for invention, and I assigned multiple “Thought Documents” that students shared with me and also with one another. They also blogged, did research and analysis together in class and posted about it on the class blog and in EverNote. Eventually, they got to a class project. The assignments weren’t really “the thing” in 1102, the second of our two required FYC courses, but rather the impetus for making the moves that people make when they really want to learn more about something, as this was a primary course outcome. In 1101, our first required course, I have a similar philosophy: Help students use the writing assignments as a way of learning about the ideas under discussion. They might explore their own writing processes or those of others and write narratives about them, analyses of the data they collect, or they might even compose more multimedia (even documentary) descriptions of what they learn. They might conduct their own discourse community ethnographies, or they might take up a theoretical point and argue with Swales, Gee, and Harris based on their own experiences. Again, the assignment forms are not “the thing,” but are a means of exploring ideas and learning declarative concepts about writing that can help expand their conceptions of writers and of writing.

Doug. Like Elizabeth, I see every shred of writing students do as connecting to one or another learning outcome. For me, many of these outcomes are essentially about shifting students from existing misconceptions of writing to more accurate or usable conceptions. So I find that I design course activities and assignment sequences to explicitly try to connect with and complicate those misconceptions. For example, students often believe that knowledge is simply given, rather than constructed, and they don’t connect research to the very real people whose curiosity led them to conduct it and share their findings with others.
My students’ experiences with texts and research tend to have been fairly limited, and their ideas about writers tend to come straight from fantasy: that good writers are people for whom writing is quick and easy. So I try to design assignments that speak to these ideas and experiences so that engaging in a given assignment creates the experience that guides students to think about a given conception and offers evidence that might re-shape it.

For example, I can combine a reading like Margaret Kantz’s “Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively” with a prompt for a short response writing that asks, “Which of the students in Kantz’s article do you most identify with, and why?” Writing that response has students reflect on their previous experience and their current thinking as it relates to course outcomes like understanding writing, rhetoric, or the conversational nature of reading and writing.

Assignments and Modeling. Starting from outcomes and working backwards to design the class helps us keep in mind a central principle we draw from Erika Lindemann and Daniel Anderson’s A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers: For any given assignment, find out what knowledge, abilities, and rhetorical moves it will demand, and then make a specific plan for teaching each of those to students. We both tend to write fairly comprehensive assignment sheets (from one to two single-spaced pages) that serve not only as guides for students, but also as reminders for us about what we should teach, how we should respond to drafts, and how we should assess final texts. We give specific rationales for an assignment, describe its goals, and provide a narrative description of how to accomplish the assignment (usually in phases over time, a nod to our desire to emulate as much as possible the ways that working writers really work, outside of school settings; see Appendix 1 for examples of two assignments).

We use writing assignments—small and large, low stakes and high stakes—as learning tools throughout the class, emerging from the purposes and content under consideration. Because content is central to the course, writing in the classroom can function as it does in many other fields: as a means of learning concepts and ideas, demonstrating that knowledge, sharing it with others, and contributing to the conversation on those ideas. Our response to such writing-to-learn assign-ments helps students learn both procedural and declarative knowledge about writing, rather than serving as error correction or editing.

When giving assignments, we encourage students to consider what “working writers” actually do in varying situations, and to reflect on how they might engage in relevant and useful practices themselves; we strive to avoid teaching a sterile, formulaic process that fails to reflect actual writerly practices. This strategy influences everything from the openness of assignment design (for example, not requiring a specific number of sources, since no working writer sets out to write an article with an exact number of sources) and to process requirements (for example, not requiring a specific number of revisions or a particular invention and drafting process, since these are always situation-, text-, and writer-dependent).

Yet we find that no matter how carefully scaffolded assignment sequences are, and no matter how clearly assignment sheets are written, writing assignments never really “rest.” Different students struggle with different skills or ideas required in an assignment, and we struggle to find a happy balance between model or target texts that aid writing and formulaic examples that reify genres or reduce them to modes.

Doug. Most of our divergence here goes to models, which we discuss shortly, but I want to make a point on writing-to-learn versus writing-to-comunicate. The introduction suggests that we consider the majority of writing in our classes to be writing-to-learn, but I’m not sure that’s true for me. In my classes, some of the main assignments, like a literacy narrative or a writing self-study, are essentially written for students themselves—for their own self-reflection and learning. The assignments are not framed as writing that helps anyone else accomplish anything else (thus, “writing-to-learn”). Other assignments, particularly research reports that culminate in half-semester or full-semester projects that also involve primary research, are explicitly framed to indicate and share knowledge with other researchers. The best of them, for example, could be submitted to Young Scholars in Writing or similar venues.

My sense is that I use a few more communication-based assignments, and a few less learning-based assignments than you, Elizabeth, and this might parallel differences in how we handle genre and modeling. At the same time, I hesitate to make too much of a dichotomy between learning-writing and communicating-writing. It’s a writing
course; ultimately, it's all "writing to learn." Still, I'm intrigued by the different teaching demands the two kinds of projects tend to create.

Elizabeth. Doug, I think you are on to something when you question the dichotomy between writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate. I am coming to see these as inextricably intertwined in a class about writing, both declaratively and procedurally. I start with the learning aspect, because what will students communicate if they aren't first learning something, engaging in a conversation about something? So, I offer many smaller assignments that are primarily used for learning and thinking, but those almost invariably morph into communicating—with me, with peers, with the conversation they are reading and thinking about, and possibly for an audience like *Young Scholars in Writing* or our University of Central Florida (UCF) publication, *Stylus*.

This complication of learning and communicating might account for some of why I have struggled for many years to find a balance between giving models of text types that can serve as aids and guideposts, without sliding into assignments that make a particular genre sound formalistic and reified. In a composition class that is supposed to be a bridge to writing elsewhere, this latter practice is especially dangerous. Students are being told, implicitly and otherwise, that what they are learning will help them and will apply somewhere else. If the assignments are for learning and engaging with others around that learning, then we must be cautious of stunting that learning too soon with examples of rigid text types. Equally as important, if we assign a text with rigid and formulaic expectations (like a "report" or a "research paper" or a "memoir") and then students run into a text with the same name but different conventions elsewhere, we have undermined the credibility of anything we might have told them. If part of what we tell students is that genres are flexible responses to recurring rhetorical situations, but what we show them is quite the contrary, we confuse and frustrate them as well as undermine the declarative concepts we try to teach them.

I try to contextualize and complicate every assignment in my own classroom: How many sources? It depends. How long? It depends. What citation style? It depends. Students discuss why it depends and how they can make a good choice, since they have to make a choice (and then defend it). If I assign a literature review, for example, we look at a lot of examples of literature reviews and figure out where they show up. We examine other texts that a literature review is similar to.

We talk about other names it might go by, and what they can learn from writing one that could be re-purposed later, even if they never write another literature review.

Doug. I like what you say in that last point about showing lots of kinds of models. That is part of the reason I'm apparently not as conflicted as you are on this question. Writers need "goal texts"—they've got to be able to visualize an image of what they're trying to create. To the extent that we are, one, asking them to do activities they have never even imagined before, or, two, struggling to get them re-conceptualizing genres they're already familiar with, we've got to show them something of what's possible. Thus, models are a central pillar of my writing courses. I find that showing students multiple models that are quite different from one another not only reduces the possibility of formulizing the genre, it also quite strongly makes the very point that genres are flexible responses to a rhetorical situation; they are dynamic and new every time.

It's definitely a challenge to help students understand models not as "directions" or recipes, but only as instances of how an assignment has been done before, each with a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, admirable and unfortunate aspects and features. I may assign students to read models prior to class discussion, or have them read them live, in the classroom (displayed on-screen), and I typically present models in a "strengths and weaknesses" framework. Doing so helps students see good things to do and good things not to do. I often blend professional models and student models: professional writers tend to model specific processes or approaches well, while previous students have created multiply-revised, fairly polished versions of the specific assignment and documents I ask students to create.

Elizabeth. Just to be clear, I do work with examples, but I tend to back into them rather than start with them. The longer I teach, the more meta-discussion my classes have about what they are trying to accomplish, with whom, and what genres and conventions could help students in accomplishing their communicative purposes—all before I ever provide a model or sample text of any sort. During these analyses, students sometimes hit on genres that are fairly common and have consistent conventions across situations. Other times, they point out that the world is changing, and the genre they need doesn't quite exist yet. Last semester, one student, Joe, explored the impact of technology on
writing via observed writing tasks, writing logs, and interviews. During
our discussion of purposes and conventions, he very rightly pointed
out that a simple, text-based article would not nearly be as rich for
readers as would an interactive, online article that allowed readers to
see sample texts, listen to parts of the interview, and examine the writ-
ers’ logs. Had I simply provided a couple of traditional model texts at
the beginning of the assignment, I might have closed off the students’
thinking, and Joe might have never considered that new technologies
and research methods could converge to create new hybrid genres.

I’ve also watched teachers teach an assignment that is really a writ-
ing-to-learn assignment—such as a writing autoethnography, a genre
that doesn’t really exist anywhere in the world, and doesn’t need to
look one particular way—and, over time, those teachers have taught
the assignment so often that it starts to look reified and static. If one
goal of the course is to help students understand the contextual na-
ture of writing and the stabilized-for-now nature of genres (thank you,
Cathrine Schryer), then the message of such a static and rigid assign-
ment with “models” from previous students completely undermines
this message and keeps students from achieving a primary outcome
of the class.

I think models are useful and necessary, but that they also have
the potential to completely undermine the entire message of a writing-
about-writing classroom. “Use models with caution and a large dose of
meta-reflection,” is my mantra.

Doug. My mantra on this issue tends to be: “Surprise me!” I comple-
tely concur that, even as we use models, we have to help students think
beyond them. That is extremely difficult. Never, ever, in my classrooms
do we work with a model without me saying, “Remember, this is not
what you are supposed to do. This is a way this has been done.” Saying
this lets us talk about the difference. For this reason, I also shy away
from the “best” possible models I’ve seen or can imagine—I usually
show pieces that can be improved, and then help students figure out
how. We usually take class time to revise and edit a model, with me ask-
ing students, “How could this be better? What would you have done
on this problem?” The resulting conversations are productive. The few
times I use an exceptionally good model, I pair it with a weaker one to,
again, teach by comparison.

Ultimately, I never work without models (except on brand-new
assignments; I very rarely use the teacher trick of writing a version
myself), but I simultaneously try to help students see what the mod-
els don’t show and what I don’t know about the assignment. This
brings us back to the exploratory element of the course: When stu-
dents ask how an aspect of a piece should be, I most often tell them,
“I won’t know that for sure until I see what you all write—then I’ll
find out some things that seem to work, some that don’t, and I’ll feed
that back to all of you to consider as you write the next version of
your piece.” Students seem more comfortable with that kind of non-
direction, especially if it’s accompanied by models that show them past
approaches to an assignment.

Reading. We both ask students to engage with rigorous texts about
writing. This is not because we focus on reading over writing, but
rather to help students use those texts to learn relevant and transferable
declarative knowledge about writing. Such texts also provide students
with jumping off points to explore their own experiences, sites of ex-
pertise, and pressing questions about writing. In addition, assigning
such readings demonstrates that writers, particularly in a college set-
ting, are always interacting with texts and streams of data (some of
them difficult to make sense of initially), and are always finding ways
to use and respond to them. We recognize that within a traditional
process paradigm, an easy objection to a reading- and discussion-based
class is that one doesn’t learn writing by talking about writing, but by
writing. While we agree that students do need to learn about writing by
writing, we disagree that talking about writing is unhelpful. As we’ve
already indicated, we see teaching declarative knowledge about writing
as central to our classrooms. Such declarative knowledge is learned, at
least partially, through reading content that students themselves cannot
provide: carefully researched, specialized knowledge about the nature
of writing, writers, and writing processes; tales of professional writers
writing; and content accessed via scholarly and professional texts.

As with every other aspect of the course, when choosing readings
we start with our desired outcomes and consider how to help students
achieve those outcomes. A wide range of texts work in the approach.
We’ve used, for example, John Dawkins’s “Teaching Punctuation as
a Rhetorical Tool,” Shirley Brice Heath’s “Protein Shapes in Literary
Events,” Tony Mirabella’s “Learning to Serve: The Language and Lit-
eracy of Food Service Workers,” and Christina Haas and Linda Flower’s
“Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning.”
writing that they face now and will face in the future. Discussing the technologies of writing has been a good way into this conversation because, as soon as we start talking about Facebook or texting, students immediately imagine writing in a broader way than they had before. I’ve also found that some students really latch on to discourse communities or activity systems as helpful, explanatory theories for what they have experienced but have been unable to explain in their writing lives. Sometimes, students very much want to talk about issues of identity, authority, and power in their writing lives. Other times, they don’t. I usually start with a set of readings that I think will meet students where they are and will get them talking and thinking. I adjust the readings as frequently as necessary to go where the students’ questions, ideas, and expertise take them. Recently, I started with the Stanford and WIDE studies of writing (Grabill), a chapter by Danielle DeVoss, an article by Kevin Roozen, and a thesis chapter by one of my MA students, Autumn Shrum, who was finishing up case studies of student writers at UCF. While I expected students to latch on to the technologies of writing, most were far more interested in Roozen and Shrum’s findings, so we added readings about discourse communities, genre theory, identity, and authority during the semester.

Doug. It really is interesting to see where students’ interests tend to land, among the readings I ask them to encounter. I’m not as flexible in my reading list as you’re describing, Liz. I wind up keying readings pretty tightly to assignments, and because the assignment list is fixed when the semester begins, the readings tend to stay so, too.

The obvious challenge this creates is, as you say, meeting students where they are; that gets trickier when the reading list won’t necessarily follow students’ intrinsic interests. In lieu of that flexibility, I find myself working a lot with rationales (e.g., “Why would I ask you to read this piece, at this time, in a course like this, when we all know it would bore you silly?”) and, in any given reading, stretching the envelope of what ideas can be developed from that reading. I find that a lot of my classroom work in discussing readings is in taking students from wherever they start from in a reading and helping them see the connections I want them to see in the piece.

An example is a frequent student reaction to Robert Tierney and David Pearson’s “Toward a Composing Model of Reading.” The reason I assign the piece is to help students begin to see writing and reading

Elizabeth. As I choose readings, I want to tap into recent scholarship about writing that might appeal to students, and also respond to some of the problems or ideas my students have had during the previous few semesters. In one recent semester, I wanted to help students broaden their conceptions of what writing is and how it is done, and get students thinking explicitly about the affordances and constraints for the
as two expressions of the same textual activity, endlessly intertwined and relying on surprisingly similar strategies. This is usually students' first encounter with reading scientists who say, flat out, that individual readers construct individual readings of a text, and why. (They explain a psycholinguistic, schema-based model of textual processing.) Students frequently descend, then, into unrestrained relativism—people can interpret texts "any way they want to," and thus what people take from students' own writing is "completely up to them." When many students in a class take this meaning from the reading, our class discussion of it definitely starts from where they are and will explore the possibilities of what's interesting to them about this reading; but of course I work to help the discussion call into question overly relativistic interpretations of the legitimacy of relativism while, at the same time, try to make sure my own "here's what's important" points are made.

I add here that students are often most interested in the technology and literacy/discourse readings and that I must work a little harder to get them interested in the writing process readings with which I originally began teaching the course and still, to some extent, use (though I tend to use fewer than I used to). I also find myself using almost no purely theoretical readings—students handle empirical work much better because it tends to be more grounded and readable for them.

**How Writing Is Used In and Out of the Classroom.** Since the beginnings of the process movement in the early 1970s, composition pedagogy has tended to split writing instruction into two camps: one camp concerned mostly with *what is written about*, and another camp concerned mostly with "*how to write*"—*how writing happens and comes to be*. Richard Fulkerson articulates four axiologies or paradigms for writing instruction that break along these lines: mimetic and critical/cultural studies courses that focus on using writing to learn particular subject matter; and expressivist and rhetorical courses that emphasize personal writing processes and how to write convincingly for audiences, respectively. (Fulkerson also describes a fifth, "formalist" axiology that is irrelevant to our dialogue here.) Using student writing in the classroom—both reading it and writing it there, using classroom time—has tended to be a hallmark of the expressivist and rhetorical approaches, while mimetic and CCS approaches tend to focus more on other writers' texts.

We find it interesting to look at our own uses of student writing in the classroom through this lens, because the results are more mixed than might be predicted. We have previously suggested that writing-about-writing integrates Fulkerson's mimetic, rhetorical, and expressivist axiologies (see Downs and Wardle, "Re-imagining the Nature of FWC"). Its focus on content—in this case writing studies—is its mimetic aspect; yet, as we compare our uses of writing in the classroom, we find ourselves making the same uses of student writing as do expressivist and rhetorical approaches. We don't, though, go about it in quite the same ways.

**Elizabeth.** In my classroom, we try lots of activities with writing in class that we also reflect on. I'm sure this is linked to what I said earlier about writing to learn both procedural and declarative knowledge about writing. We write homework and we freewrite; we share ideas with partners, who write them down and give them back to us; we use recordings to get our ideas out; we write in the dark to practice getting ideas out without correction; and, sometimes, we even practice yoga breathing before we write. These are definitely strategies reminiscent of expressivist writing classrooms, but I find this focus on invention is every bit as necessary in a truly rhetorical writing-about-writing classroom. Expressivist invention is part of the process, not an endpoint, as it might be in an expressivist classroom.

**Doug.** I'm again sensitive to the risk a writing course takes by spending too much time talking about writing and not enough time *writing*. My students are the first to say that there's no shortage of writing in my writing courses. I find equally great value in talk about writing, because it lets me get at the being and nature of writing in ways that simply writing cannot. So there's no denying that my classrooms can look pretty barren of the activity of writing itself; I have the vast majority of the writing happen out of class to save time in class for talking about writing. However, a recent wildcard here is online discussion boards, where "talk about" writing happens in writing, outside of class. Then, in class, we display that writing and talk about it.

**Elizabeth.** I was surprised to learn this about your classroom, actually. I certainly share your sense that talk about writing is very important, but I make sure that the writing happens in class as well as out of class, because I'm just not sure students would try some of the things I want
them to try unless we do them together. (Will they really go home, turn out the lights, and do some yoga breathing before they write as a homework exercise?). I take your point, though. The discussions about all these in-class writing activities are very important. We can't just do them and then not reflect on why we did them and on what happened (more meta is very important to me because of its apparent role in transfer of knowledge). What is writing to learn? What is invention? What is low-stakes writing? What happened when you did this versus that? Would you do it again? When is it useful and when is it not? Every activity every day includes analysis and explanation of it, what we learned from it (or not), and how it relates to what we've been reading and discussing. This is writing about writing and discussion about writing, and because the reading content of the class is about writing, we are not side-tracked by discussions of the death penalty or of global warming.

Where and how does invention for your assignments come, if not via in-class writing?

**Doug.** I like this focus on invention because it seems to me to be one of the places where talk and writing most fluidly meld—when writers need most of all to be back and forth between (in and amongst) both activities. When we're working on invention activities in class, I use either small-group brainstorming discussions (if we're starting from scratch) or, more often, small-group reading sessions of freewrites or thought pieces that students have already written outside of class. While I have students do a lot of reading and discussing each other's texts in class, it's pretty rare for me to have students use class time to do that initial writing. Those rare exceptions are moments with, for instance, a literacy narrative, where I give a short prompt, like "think back to the earliest writing you can remember, and describe that scene." I let students write for five to eight minutes on that and then, crucially, place students in groups and read what gets written. I don't do that too often, because that writing time in the classroom feels a little inefficient to me, compared with starting from a freewrite written earlier and using that writing as a basis for reading around and discussion.

**Elizabeth.** I can see why you might feel that putting a lot of written invention into class time might seem inefficient. I'm all for efficiency, but I find that the longer I teach, the more I loosen up on things I used to be pretty inflexible about—for example the reading list and use of class time to write and follow ideas. I'm guessing that this goes back to my increased focus on the writing-to-learn aspects of a composition class. All of my students' in-class writing is central to invention and writing to learn—a necessary step on the road to communicating and engaging in an ongoing conversation. We don't just engage in invention. We also talk about it a lot, and we explicitly discuss the concepts of writing to learn and low-stakes assignments as we work through ideas. We consider and try various processes that seem to work for students in the class (for learning and for drafting), for other writers we read about, and even for me.

This is directly linked to the role of what is generally called "peer review." I am leery of a calendar that has one day for peer review, and then teacher reads and then grade. I couldn't produce an extended written document like that, so I don't ask students to do so. We try to unpack and lay bare all the ways that writers plan and invent long before the pen hits the page (or the fingers hit the keyboard) on the document. We talk about these things, but we also do them together. After readings and class discussions, we consider an upcoming assignment and spend a few minutes freewriting or brainstorming together ways to attack that assignment or arguments that might be made in the assignment. I try to ensure that by the time an official drafting day comes around, students have notebooks or blogs or EverNote notebooks full of ideas and snippets of text. Their minds have been mulling things over long before the assignment "draft" needs to be written.

Peer review is not so much review as invention. Pairs might talk about their ideas and write them down for each other, or pairs might work on parts of a developing draft, asking, "Is this idea interesting? Where is it going? What would you say about this?"

**Doug.** I am right there with you on peer review as invention work even more than as revision work. I've always sort of abhorred the term peer review in part because "review" sounds, to me, like "I'm checking what you've done." Instead, if I use instead a term like reader response, then I hear something more like "I'm experiencing what you're doing." It seems crucial to me to use students' texts in this way less for the writer and more for the reader. In reader response sessions, I emphasize that the first reason for the session is for readers of drafts to get ideas about what they ought to do in their own drafts. For the writer of the draft, formative feedback is actually a secondary consideration, mostly because we also emphasize that the reader isn't responsible for improving the paper—the writer does that. The reader simply helps the writer
know where and what to work on by relating the reader’s experience of encountering the writing.

Those reading response sessions, by the way, are “emergent” in my classrooms. I mean that, within those goals for the sessions I just recounted, students run the show about what to look for in the texts. I’ve never quite been able to bring myself to go into the session with a pre-made reading rubric for students to work through, though I’ve seen other faculty use such reading guides to great effect. Rather, we start the session with “harrowing tales of drafting this nasty beast” (asking, “What was it like to try to write this?”), and then move to “So what do you need your readers to focus on as they read your piece?” or, in other words, “What are you concerned about with the piece right now?” That lets us construct a reading guide on the spot from actual writerly concerns that are specific to the particular writing experience.

**PARTING THOUGHTS**

Our writing prompt for this chapter was something along the lines of, “So you talk a lot about teaching writing, but what is it actually like in your composition classrooms?” We hope our discussion here has provided some of that flavor. We conclude with these final reflections on our classrooms.

Doug. I really got in my groove with teaching college writing when I came to see that it is hard to screw up once you understand: (1) the point, and (2) how writers learn. The point is to change the way students have been taught, culturally and in previous education, to think about writing. Doing so changes the ways students go about writing. The way they’re going to learn is by immersion in a world of writing, a world I and they collaborate on creating in our classroom, a world where we are ceaselessly reading and thinking and talking and writing about writing.

I say that writing-about-writing is hard to screw up because, within that ballpark, there really isn’t a wrong way to do things; there are a practically infinite number of good ways. My daily teaching plan is typically quite general: It usually lists two to three main “segments” for the day, particular activities I intend for us to do during a given segment (e.g., “small group discussion on X,” “whole-class edit of draft on-screen,”), and any key ideas (usually three or four) that I absolutely want to make sure come up during the day’s discussion. It’s almost never more specific than those few steering notes—and there are days, either through my own negligence or because I don’t yet know what students have produced, where I have no teaching plan at all. What makes this comfort (with general planning and with letting the class unfold based on where students take it) possible is that I enter the classroom every day with the certainty that there is a world of writing to be discussed and reflected on, and that the corner of it we happen on that day doesn’t matter—we can always learn something important about writing.

Elizabeth. Over time, I think that a move to a writing-about-writing approach has meant that I have increasingly turned my attention to writing to learn. When procedural and declarative knowledge about writing is the focus of the course, then writing about ideas about writing and using a variety of written practices to do so become natural and constant foci. For example, writing becomes a means not only of learning to write a particular genre, but also of learning about genres and why and how they function, come to be, and change. Not only that, but writing in any genre becomes a means of learning more about the ideas we’ve been reading and discussing; deciding on a genre in which to write becomes an exercise in learning about how to dialogue with interlocutors in a way that makes sense to them.

Several times recently, we have heard ourselves referred to as “post-process theorists,” a term I feel the need to object to here, now that we’ve gone on at some length about the processes in our writing courses. Putting writing at the heart of a writing class leads to an ecological and theoretically sound sense of what writing is and how it works, including all of the possible processes that writers use to engage with ideas and with others. If this approach has to be labeled at all, I hope it can be labeled as a full return to the roots of rhetoric, where invention was central.

**Works Cited**


Appendix 1: Assignment Sheets

Rhetorical Analysis of a Writing Experience (Downs)

Think back: What’s the most memorable piece of writing you’ve ever done? Now: what was the situation? And how did that situation help shape the writing? In this 4–5 page rhetorical analysis of a memorable writing experience, your task as a writer is to reflect on how that particular writing experience was a result of the particular situation it was related to, how the situation helped determine what you wrote, and why.

Assignment Rationale

Writers are always responding to the situations they’re writing in, from, and for, more or less consciously. One of the tasks of this course is to give you a beginning understanding of rhetoric as a theory of communication and to explore its implications. One of those implications is that even when you’re not aware of it, you’re responding to rhetorical situations. The purpose of this assignment is to show you how you’ve already been doing that, and to spur your thinking about what possibilities writing holds if you do it more consciously.

Assignment Description and Instructions

Your rhetorical analysis will be based on some significant piece of writing or writing experience that you’ve had in the last several years. That writing could have been for school, work, family, or your personal life. It could have been completely private (like a journaling experience) or all-the-way public, like a blog or other online post. It could have been a single short document, like a poem or song lyrics, or it could have been an extended project or experience that involved multiple pieces of writing. The key requirement here is that it has to have been a memorable or important enough experience that you can clearly remember the circumstances surrounding the writing.

Once you know what experience and writing you want to focus on, you need to reflect on and analyze that experience and writing from a rhetorical perspective. What’s that mean? Based on the principles

Grant-Davie demonstrates as well as our workshops in class, you’ll learn what particular questions to ask of the experience you had and the circumstances surrounding it. They will be questions like these:

- Why did you need to write to begin with? Since it’s easier not to write than it is to write, for most people, there had to be some reason or purpose behind your writing, some problem to be solved or addressed. What was that?
- Where did that need come from? What gave rise to it? This is a historical question: to understand the circumstances that demanded writing, you need to know what led to those circumstances.
- What constraints did you face as a writer? What were the givens in your situation—the aspects of it you could not change that controlled what you could do with your writing?
- Who was meant to read and use your writing and what did you mean them to do with it? How was your writing supposed to do something for, to, or with the readers you imagined it for? The answers to all of these questions, and others, will help you talk about why this piece of writing took the shape that it did.
- In order to make your analysis most meaningful and clear both to you and to other readers, it will need to include at least the following features:
  - Some description of the writing or experience itself. Ideally, you might include an electronic copy of the writing you’re talking about, if one is still available, but in many cases that may not be possible. Whether you can do that or not, take whatever space is necessary in your analysis to describe as clearly as possible what this writing and experience were.
  - An extended discussion of the questions above in order to describe and analyze the rhetorical situation in which the writing or experience occurred.
  - A conclusion including implications of your reflection: what do you learn from this? What principles can you draw to help you in future writing situations?
THOUGHT DOCUMENT #1 ENC 1102H (WARDLE)

Purposes and Audience

There are multiple purposes for this thought document:

- To synthesize what you have read so far;
- To analyze the data you have collected so far (in this case, the writing logs);
- To begin to explore some implications, consequences, possibilities, and research questions/projects based on what you have read and thought about so far.

You will, as with almost everything in this class, share your thought piece with the other class members so that you can all pool your thinking in order to work toward the final class project.

Given the above, this text is primarily what writing researchers call “writing to learn.” But it is also writing to communicate with others, so you should do some organizing and editing before you turn it in.

You will, of course, turn the Thought Document in to me and receive a grade for how well you have achieved the purposes and conveyed your ideas in a clear and organized manner.

Contents

The above purposes and audiences should guide everything about how you write this Thought Document. Toward that end, here are my suggestions for the parameters of the document:

1. Keeping the CARS model of research introductions in mind, tell us about some of the research you have read so far in and for this class. Synthesize this research instead of just summarizing one article after the other. For example, you might note that “writing researchers are interested in X, Y, and Z and have recently concluded A, B, and C about the literacy practices of today’s students.” You might also discuss various research methods that have been used: “Researchers have come to these conclusions using methods as varied as A, B, and C.”

2. Analyze the writing logs we have kept for this class and tell us about your findings, being sure to link them to the findings from others that you synthesized. You could try making the transition by “creating a niche” (again, CARS model) and then filling it. For example, “Others have examined what students write at Stanford and Michigan State. Building on that work, our class examined . . .”

3. Spend some time mulling over (thinking) about the implications, consequences, problems, interesting projects related to the above. Given what you’ve learned so far, what can you conclude? What do you want to know more about? What are the questions you find interesting right now? What data would you like to collect to help you try to answer your questions? What would you like us to be reading in order to learn more about your questions?

4. If you have any ideas for the final class project, tell us about them.

5. Include a works cited page, correctly formatted in either MLA or APA. Use your Everyday Writer or the Purdue OWL to help you format correctly.

Getting Started, Drafting, and Revising (Your Writing Process)

To start writing a thoughtful piece that accomplishes the above tasks, you will need to:

- Review all the reading we have done for class, as well as the reading that your classmates have posted on Diigo. You don’t have to cite all of it, but you should cite a good amount of it.
- Analyze the writing logs. We did a practice analysis in class, but now you will need to analyze the full set of logs available in EverNote from all of your classmates. You can decide what you want to analyze for—type, amount, audience, purpose, etc—any of the things we tried or discussed in class. But you’ll need to do your own analysis for this Thought Document, and do it carefully. Since we all have the same data set, it will be fairly obvious if you don’t do a good and careful analysis of the logs.
- Start drafting in sections if that is a helpful strategy for you. For example, I would draft the synthesis of existing literature first, trying to highlight main points and interesting conclusions across articles. Then I would try to summarize what I found in my writing log analysis.
After you've read, analyzed, and done a first draft, then get serious about revision and organization. How do you want to order information? Are your main points clear? Have you carefully transitioned from one idea to the other? I like to use headings when I write because they help me stay organized and focused. If you've never tried headings before, you might try them out here and see if you like them.

Don't wait until the night before to start writing. A good thought document is going to require some actual thought. I suggest doing the reading and taking notes one day, drafting that section another day, analyzing the logs another day, drafting about the logs another day, and then revising the entire paper another day. This is about 5 days of steady work, working 1-2 hours a day, maybe more or less on some days. So I suggest getting started right away and then keeping up the steady pace until next Wednesday.

General Expectations for Length, Etc.

The name of this document says it all: Thought Document. I want to see you thinking about what we have read and collected, and saying smart things about it. I care much more about quality of your thinking and analysis at this point than I do about anything else. I have a general sense that good thinking about so many articles and a data set will likely be around 5-8 pages. However, I am not terribly concerned with page count. If you write 20 pages of thoughtless BS, that is not going to be impressive. If you write 3 brilliant pages, I will be so swept away by your ideas that I won’t care about the page length. So start writing without a concern for page length and see where you end up.

While the focus here is on content and ideas, you do have an audience: your classmates and me. We need to be able to understand you, and you want to have some credibility with us. So do spend some time revising and organizing and editing before you turn this in. Otherwise, you might end up with something that is really smart but doesn’t make a lot of sense to anyone but you.

Grading

- This Thought Document is worth 40 points.
- I will likely grade each subsequent Thought Document more rigorously, as you learn more and have more experience with the ideas and writing style appropriate to those ideas.

At the end of the semester you will turn in all of your Thought Documents and your final class project as part of your Class Portfolio. You may revise the Thought Documents for the portfolio if you would like, although you are not required to do so.

APPENDIX 2: ELIZABETH WARDLE’S COURSE SYLLABI

ENC 1102
Dr. Elizabeth Wardle

Course Description

ENC1102 is a course intended to help students understand research as genuine inquiry. In this course they are expected to ask difficult questions and explore them using appropriate primary and secondary research methods (library research, historical analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, interview, and so on).

In ENC1102 students are invited into the research “conversation” on their topic and asked to carefully read what others have said on the topic before they jump in.

Students in 1102 receive instruction in how to find, evaluate, and read difficult material. They learn how to use this material to frame their own research questions, and also how to integrate sources carefully and effectively.

Course Method

The course is about doing, not lecturing. I’ll help you with some hard concepts and readings, but the success of this class depends entirely on your willingness to jump in and do things. All of our in- and out-of-class activities are designed and sequenced to help you think, learn, and make regular progress the final course project.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to

- Read, analyze, and respond to difficult texts
- Understand texts as claims and test those claims
- Ask meaningful questions and seek answers to those questions
- Gather and analyze data of various kinds
Use technologies to help achieve writing and research goals
- Thoughtfully discuss the literacies required in the 21st century
- Convey ideas and research findings effectively in writing as appropriate for various audiences and purposes
- Explain writing-related concepts such as intertextuality, genre, originality, plagiarism, technology, writing, and research.

Course Texts & Resources
- Articles (links are posted on Webcourses in MyUCF):
  o Greene, "Argument as Conversation"
  o Kleine, "What is It We Do When We Write Articles Like This One?"
  o Haven, "The New Literacy: Stanford Study Finds Richness and Complexity in Students' Writing"
  o Grabill, et al, "Revisualizing Composition: Mapping the Writing Lives of First-Year College Students" (The WIDE Study)
  o Roozen, "From Journals to Journalism: Tracing Trajectories of Literate Development"
  o Shrum, draft of thesis chapters ("Case 1" and "Case 2")
  o Wardle, "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces"
  o McCarthy, "A Stranger in Strange Lands"
  o Johns, "Discourse Communities and Communities of Practices: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity"
  o Penrose & Geisler, "Reading and Writing Without Authority"
  o Kain & Wardle, "Activity Theory for Students"
- Diigo: http://groups.diigo.com/group/enc1102-wardle-fall-2011 (you'll need an account and I will send you an invitation to join our group)
- Evernote: www.evernote.com (you'll need an account and you'll need to grant the class members access)
- WordPress Blog: http://enc1102hf2011.wordpress.com (you'll need a WordPress account and then I will add you to this private site)

Course Assignments & Point Values

| Homework | Responses to readings, interviews & transcriptions, writing log, Diigo contributions, bringing required texts to class, etc. Note that most written homework will be posted to WordPress, but all data collected will be posted to EverNote, and source annotations will be posted on Diigo. While some homework cannot be missed, the other course assignments cannot be done unless you have done most of the homework and done it on time. If you make a habit of skipping homework assignments, I will suggest you drop the class. | 80 points |
| Thought Documents (2) | In each unit we will collect some data and analyze it together. Afterward, you will write a formal, documented "thought pieces" that reflect on the data analysis and discuss it using in and out of class readings. These "thought pieces" will give you the chance to think about the data, the readings, and your ideas and help you think about how to present them. You will draw on these for your Final Course Project. Both Thought Documents must be turned in for you to pass the class. | 80 points |
| Final Project: Writing Lives of UCF Students | Drawing on the research, reading, and thinking you do this semester, the class will determine the form, purpose, and audience of a final project that conveys relevant information about the literate lives of UCF undergraduates. While the full class will produce the complete project, you will be responsible for at least one formal aspect of the project yourself (for example, the class might create a magazine and you might write one article). | 140 points |
| Portfolio & Framing Thought Document | At the end of the semester you will turn in all of your homework, thought pieces, and contributions to the final project with a framing reflection discussing what you have learned and accomplished this semester. | 40 points |
Publication Opportunity

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric publishes a journal for outstanding writing produced by Composition students called *Stylus*. You may find the student work published in this journal helpful during our exploration of writing this semester. Also, you should consider submitting your own work for publication. Students published in *Stylus* become eligible for the President John C. Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing, a $450 book scholarship awarded annually. To submit your work, simply email your essay to me as a Microsoft Word-friendly attachment and I’ll send it to the editors. To see previous issues and learn more information, visit the *Stylus* website at [http://writingandrhetoric.caah.ucf.edu/stylus/](http://writingandrhetoric.caah.ucf.edu/stylus/)

**DETAILED ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS**

**“ Homework”-Type Assignments (80 points)**

**Written Homework on WordPress (30 points)**

Will not be graded for grammar and polish, but instead for depth of thought and engagement with the ideas. You should write a page or two in direct response to the day’s text(s) and the prompt on the daily calendar. Post your written responses before class on WordPress.

There will be 7 WordPress Homework Entries by the end of the semester (due dates are on the daily calendar, and these end after Week 11).

7 entries X 5 points each = 35 points but I will drop the lowest grade, so 30 points.

**Diigo Entries (10 points)**

We have created a class Diigo site ([http://groups.diigo.com/group/enc1102-wardle-fall-2011](http://groups.diigo.com/group/enc1102-wardle-fall-2011)) where we can post and annotate resources relevant for our class project. You are expected to post and annotate (5–10 sentences) no fewer than two useful and credible resources for each of our three main class “units” (students and literacy, literacy and technology, and genres/rhetoric/intertextuality). The purpose of these postings is to share resources that the class can use as they consider these topics and think about the final course project. Don’t post just to post. Post things that speak to what we read about and discuss in class.

You should make at least 4 annotated Diigo Entries by the end of the semester, two for each unit.

5 points for each unit’s entries X 2 units = 10 points

**Writing Log (4 Weeks, 4 separate week-long logs) on EverNote (20 points)**

You will keep an ongoing writing/literacy log for this class, which will be used as data (along with your classmates’ logs) to get a sense of the breadth and depth of the writing that UCF students do. In this log you should record everything you write every day and how long (roughly) you spent writing it. For this log to really “work,” you will need to broaden your definition of “writing” to include all the texts that you write—IM, texting, Facebooking, emails, grocery lists, class notes, homework, cards, gaming. As we read and think more together, you will expand this log to specifically mention the various technologies that mediate your writing.

Once a week by class time you should post your writing log for the previous week on EverNote so that we can all access the logs that all class members have kept. You’ll post a new Writing Log every week for Weeks 2–6, so there should be five full, week-long logs. These logs will be used for analysis by the class.

4 logs X 5 points each = 20 points

**Classmate Interviews & Transcriptions on EverNote (10 points)**

During Unit Two you will learn how to write research questions, conduct interviews, transcribe interviews, and analyze interview data. Toward that end, you will conduct two interviews with classmates, transcribe them, and post them to EverNote. These will be used for analysis by the class.

You will post two Interview Transcripts to EverNote.

Two interviews and their transcripts X 5 points each = 10 points

**Genre Postings on EverNote (5 points)**

You will post two documents to EverNote, examples of genres you don’t write but think you will need to write later. These will be used for analysis by the class.

2 documents X 2.5 points each = 5 points
Research Project Proposal (5 points)

On October 5 you will turn in a 1-page research proposal describing in as much detail as possible your plans for the final research project. What is your research question? What data will you collect to try to answer that question, and from whom? When will you do the work?

Thought Documents (2) (80 points)

In each unit you will read about some aspect of student literacy as well as collect and analyze some data. At the end of each unit you will write a “thought document” that pulls together what you have read and analyzed. These sorts of documents are commonly used by researchers to gather their thoughts and think through ideas as they conduct research. The audiences for these documents are you, the instructor, and your classmates. Thus, they need to be organized, readable, and edited. However, they aren’t going to be perfect because they are thinking (writing to learn) documents. You might write them as memos, short essays, etc, and we will talk about this further as we see what happens in class and what your personal writing and research processes are. But general parameters for this are:

- About 5–8 pages
- Documented (citing outside sources appropriate in text and in a works cited at the end of the text)
- Organized
- Thoughtful, interesting, exploratory considering the ideas and data we’ve worked with as a class, as well as considering where you would like the research to go and the questions that interest you.

2 Thought Documents X 40 points each= 80 points

End of Semester Course Project: Writing Lives of UCF Students (140 points)

You will end the course by creating some sort of project out of all of the reading, data collection, and thinking the class does all semester. At this point it is impossible to anticipate where you as a class will end up, and that is the beauty of genuine research and inquiry—you will go where your questions and interests and data take you. We will discuss this end of course project repeatedly during the semester and when you as a class have made up your mind about what you want your project to be, we will write up some guidelines, parameters, and grading expectations for it. Don’t worry; I won’t leave you to guess about the expectations. But I can’t say much about what they are now; you all will decide.

Below are a few ideas about what this project should likely include:
- Share your research findings and ideas with an audience or audiences who need to hear about them
- Share your ideas and findings in genres appropriate to your audiences and purposes
- Explore mediums that help convey your message and reach your audience.

Each student will contribute something he/she has written, although some parts of the project might be written by the entire class or groups of students.

A wild guess about a possibility:

The class might decide to write a variety of articles describing literacies of UCF students. These might include case studies of specific students, overviews of the practices of a group of students, and so on. And all of these might be framed by a proposal written by the class to UCF administrators or legislators arguing for a different approach to writing education for students. All of this might be conveyed in a website, or in a magazine, or in a wiki. There might be visuals, hyperlinks, activities.

Don’t worry too much about this right now. You’ll all figure out what you want to do as we move through the research and thinking, and I’ll help you.

Grading:

Your independently written research project: 100 points
The full group project as a deliverable: 40 points

Portfolio & Final Course “Thought Document” (40 points)

At the end of the semester you will turn in all of your work for the course—homework, thought pieces, and the parts of the final course project to which you contributed. You will frame all of this with a reflection of your learning and accomplishments this semester. This reflection should really be your last Thought Document. It should talk about your reading, research, and ideas from the semester, talk about your understanding of both research in general as well as of the literate practices of students today. This sort of reflection is an essential
part of "learning transfer"—if you want to use what you’ve learned this semester, you need to reflect on it and think explicitly of how you want to integrate it into your scholarly, personal, or professional life going forward.

The portfolio is also an opportunity to revise anything from the semester in an effort to raise your overall course grade. If you didn’t do a very good Thought Piece 1, for example, you could revise it and include it in the final portfolio to demonstrate your growth as a writer/thinker/researcher.

Depending on where and how you end up writing and collecting your work, we might try electronic or paper portfolios.

**Appendix 3: Doug Downs’ Course Syllabi**

**WRIT 101 College Writing I: Writing with Authority in College**

**Dr. Doug Downs**

Course Description and Objectives

WRIT 101 is a writing course which takes as its object of study the activity of writing in college and how students participate in that activity. We do not, in other words, simply practice writing—rather, we investigate it, exploring how writing has been for you in the past and what differences you can expect in transitioning from other kinds of writing (high-school, workplace) to college-level writing appropriate to the written work you’ll be asked to do in many of your other courses. Put simply, this course aims to change the way you think about writing and the way you understand the game of writing. By the end of the course, you should:

- Understand the nature of writing, and your own experiences with writing, differently than when you began;
- Increase your ability to read rhetorical situations and make rhetorical choices aware in your writing;
- Know what questions to ask when entering new rhetorical situations in order to adjust your approach to writing to meet that situation;
- Be a more reflective writer;
- Build your ability to collaborate in communities of writers and readers;
- Gain comfort with taking risks in new writing situations;
- Increase your control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing; and
- Expand your research literacy.

**Required Texts**

The following articles (listed in the order to be read) are available as PDFs in the password-protected Readings section of our course website:


Coursework
In addition to engagement in class discussion, individual conferences, and workshops, you will complete the following assignments:

Thought Pieces (an average of one per week)
One-page reading responses that reflect on what you found interesting, useful, or problematic in a given reading. You are welcome to use thought pieces to reflect on any aspect of class currently of interest to you, though usually you’ll use them to respond to the focusing question that accompanies a given reading. The purpose of the thought piece is to say what you think—not necessarily, or even usually, to come up with “answers” to the focusing question. They need not know, seek, or tell “the Truth”; they need only say what’s in your mind in response or reaction to the readings.

Rhetorical Analysis of a Writing Experience (weeks 1–2)
Think back: What’s the most memorable piece of writing you’ve ever done? Now: what was the situation? And how did that situation help shape the writing? In this 4–5 page rhetorical analysis of a memorable writing experience, your task as a writer is to reflect on how that particular writing experience was a result of the particular situation it was related to—how the situation helped determine what you wrote, and why.

Rhetorical Summary of a Scholarly Article (weeks 3–4)
As a college writer, you need to make rhetorical reading (a la Haas & Flower) completely natural. To read texts rhetorically is to read them as if they’re people talking to you, people with motivations that may not always be explicit but are always present. It means talking about not only what a text says or what it means, but what it does. (Start a war? Make a friend smile? Throw down a gauntlet? Refocus everyone’s attention? Woo a lover?) When you read a text trying to figure out what it does or why a person would bother to write it, you’re reading rhetorically. The rhetorical summary gives you practice rhetorically reading a scholarly article and forwards your research project. Write a 4–5 page summary of one of our course readings arguing what the article attempts to accomplish, and how.

Writing Process Analysis (weeks 5–8)
Your task in this assignment is to investigate some aspect of writing process by comparing published research on it to your own experience, in a 5–6 page analysis. You can look at the writing process as a whole, or select just some aspect or feature of experience of it. This assignment combines a few different goals. First, this course in some ways wants to make writing “strange” to you—to look in new ways and open new questions for you about how writing works. (And, possibly, provide some answers.) Studying process is one way to go about that. This course also means to crack open the door on the world of university research, both that which searches for existing research via library resources, and that done to get direct, firsthand answers to your questions (we call that primary research). So this assignment introduces you to library resources that help you search, and lets you practice writing about your own, firsthand experiences in the context of other people’s work that will give a particular perspective on your experiences, and vice versa.

“Good Writing” Study—Collaborative Project (weeks 9–12)
What counts as good writing, and what makes writing “good,” in the fields of study you’ll be entering? In this assignment you’ll address these questions through collaboration with three other students and with primary research, interviewing faculty on campus and members of professions related to your major. As a class, we’ll develop a shared set of interview questions, and each team will write and present a 5–6 page report on findings from the interviews it conducts.

List of 10 (weeks 13–14)
Create a list of ten questions that as a writer you’ve learned to ask when entering any new rhetorical (writing) situation—ten things you understand you must have answers to before you’ll know how to write in that situation. Each question will be followed by a paragraph giving the rationale for the question: why is this question an important one to ask? If you could only ask ten questions, why must this one be on the
list? Your list should reflect the principles you've learned throughout the rest of the semester both through our course readings and through your writing projects.

Final Portfolio (weeks 15-16)

Your portfolio will contain a collection of your polished writing for grading—the only graded writing you'll do in the course. It is a showcase that allows you to revise your writing to the best of your ability, and to reflect on your learning in the course. Its overall purpose is to make an argument about what you've learned in the course and demonstrate it via the writing you've prepared. It will include a reflective letter, your revised List of 10, and revisions of any two of the four other major writing projects.

Method: A Community of Inquiry

All the assignments and class meetings in this course work toward giving you new, more accurate, more professional ways to understand and strategize writing. Unlike your previous writing classes, the subject (not just the activity) of this course is writing. As each member of the class does reflective work and firsthand research on writing itself, we become a group of researchers working together on the same questions—a community of inquiry. All you need to bring is an open, inquiring attitude and engagement, and a willingness to thoughtfully connect your experience and existing knowledge with the new ideas you'll encounter in the course.

All writing you do in the course will receive credit, but only writing in the final portfolio will be graded. Major assignments in the course will be drafted, read by others in the class, revised, and read by me. Portfolio assignments will be further revised based on my feedback and on what you learn during the course. The course should stretch you, but it should create a safe environment where experimentation is not punished and where it's okay to try something new and not get it right the first time.

Evaluation and Grading

Your course grade (100 points) will be comprised of three elements:
I. Engagement: 40 points
   (Thought pieces—20 pts—10 pieces, 2 points each)

(Workshops—15 pts)
(Other class contribution—5 pts based on discussion and in class writing)

II. Writing Assignments: 25 points (5 points for drafting each of the 5 main assignments)

III. Final Portfolio: 35 points (see assignment sheet for grading details)

In this course, I judge writing quality by considering the following categories:
- match to intended genre and/or assignment guidelines
- audience awareness and appropriateness of document for them
- clarity of argument and strength of support for it
- source use appropriate to genre, assignment, and writer's needs
- careful crafting of writing and document design
- editing and proofreading

A writing shows little or no weakness in any of these categories.
B writing shows some weakness in some categories.
C writing shows some weakness in most categories, or great weakness in some.
D writing shows some weakness in all categories, or great weakness in most.
F writing shows great weakness in all categories.

Course Policies

- Your work in this class is always public. Don't submit writing you can't let other students read.
- Out-of-class work will be submitted via e-mail attachment; it must include your name and a short assignment title in the filename. Please only use an e-mail address that you check frequently, for this class.
- When I specify that a revision is to be submitted with drafts or changes tracked, I won't read it without them.
- Revision is substantive development of a piece, not fine-tuning occasional wording. (That's editing.)
- Collaboration is highly encouraged—real writers write with readers and other writers.
• Writing that was or will be submitted for assignments in other courses will usually not be accepted here too. You may work on the same problems, but not double-dip the writing itself.
• If an assignment is lost or missing, you must provide another copy no matter whose fault it is.
• I decide whether to accept late assignments case-by-case. Check with me if you need to submit work late.
• Attendance is required. Missed workshops or presentation sessions count against engagement; excessive tardiness counts as absences. More than 4 absences (two weeks of class) limits your course grade to a maximum of C.
• You’re welcome to chat with me about class business at downs-doug@gmail.com. You can find me on Facebook, but I don’t do class business there because of privacy and archival issues.
• Plagiarism: You are always responsible for acknowledging source material and ideas in your writing. Cheating—whether by claiming others’ work as your own (fraud) or fabricating material—will result in a course grade of F and report to the Dean.
• ADA: If because of a documented physical or psychological disability you are unable to meet the requirements outlined in this syllabus, you must tell me immediately. Accessibility Services (phone, address) will document your disability and coordinate any resulting accommodations. If you have questions, please ask me.
• I reserve final discretion in adjusting grades to account for unanticipated circumstances.
• I may use copies of your work, anonymously, for samples in future classes or for research.
• Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance of this syllabus and its policies.

Manuscript Style and Conventions
Skilled writers show awareness of the look and feel of their documents and the mastery of their technology to control that look and feel, ensuring that their documents follow conventions appropriate to the situation for which they’re writing. Default formatting for electronic academic manuscripts (which you should use in the absence of other necessary designs) include 1-inch margins, double-spacing, serif font (e.g., Times New Roman, Garamond, Cambria) for body copy, bolded subheadings, no gaps or lines skipped between paragraphs, and one line skipped between sections. Please note that many of these are not MS Word’s default settings.

Using Reviewing Tools / Change-Tracking in MS Word
Throughout the course, I will expect you to “track changes” from workshop drafts to drafts submitted to me and then submitted in the portfolio.
• In Word versions pre-2007, locate these controls under the Tools menu with Track Changes, which will bring up the “Reviewing” Toolbar (you can also access this under the View menu–> Toolbars).
• In Word versions 2007 and later, locate these controls on the Review tab on the Ribbon.
• In OpenOffice current version, locate these controls under the Edit menu as “Changes.” If you use OpenOffice, please save documents by using the Save As (not just Save) command and setting “Save as Type” to “Microsoft Word 97/2000/XP.” Your tracked changes will be preserved and viewable in Word.

In addition, my comments on your document will be made using the Comment function in the Track Changes system. I’ll demo these systems in class before the first paper is due that requires change tracking.

Tentative Semester Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Readings Due</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Tues</td>
<td>Green, Richardson</td>
<td>Thought Piece 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>Grant-Davie</td>
<td>Thought Piece 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tues</td>
<td>Haas &amp; Flower</td>
<td>Workshop Draft, Rhetorical Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>Kants</td>
<td>Thought Piece 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Tues</td>
<td></td>
<td>Revised Rhetorical Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>Porter</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Tues</td>
<td>Article for Summary</td>
<td>Workshop Draft, Rhetorical Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Revised Rhetorical Summary</td>
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</tbody>
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12 Attempting the Impossible: Designing a First-Year Composition Course

Kathleen Blake Yancey

I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that in designing and teaching first-year composition, we find ourselves in an impossible situation. On the one hand, as the research shows (Hansen et al.; Beaufort; Yancey, “The Literacy Demands of Entering the University”), and as this volume no doubt makes clear, first-year students need such a course; on the other hand, what the course needs to accomplish cannot be achieved in the time given to it.\(^1\) Regardless of where composition is “delivered” or how, what we think we need to accomplish continues to be broad.\(^2\) When I began teaching in the 1970s, for example, our curriculum was already overly full: in addition to helping students develop as writers, we helped them acclimate to college and to campus, to think critically, to develop wider horizons,\(^3\) and to begin a journey in review of received truth. Indeed, as important as writing was to that English course, it was more vehicle than outcome.

Since then, our curricular efforts seem to be contradictory. Seen from one perspective, it's now easier to narrow our aims, and to do so relative to a sense of national aims (at least in some limited ways), given the development and influence of outcomes generally in higher education, and specifically in writing via the WPA Outcomes Statement—with its five inter-related dimensions of focus: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Processes; Knowledge of Conventions; and Composing in Electronic Environments. Seen from another perspective, the promise of such focus—making the planning of a first-year composition (FYC) course take place in the context of a national framework—is contested by three tendencies. First, the WPA
According to a widespread belief that the field of composition is more unified than it was in the late twentieth century, Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford ask twelve well-known theorists to create detailed syllabi for a first-year composition course to explain their theoretical foundations. Each contributor to FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE, discusses their syllabus and objectives for their course, its major assignments, and reading list, the role of reading and responding to these texts, the role of classroom discussion, their methods of responding to these assignments, and their assessment methods.

Contributors to FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE include: Chris Anson, Suresh Canagarajah, Douglas Hesse, Mathieu, Teresa Redd, Alexander Reid, Jody Shipka, Victor Villanueva, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downing, Yancey. Their twelve essays provide a window into classrooms that will help readers, teachers, and writers to see how others appreciate the strengths of unity and diversity in composition as a field. The examples will empower new instructors and administrators. The editors frame the twelve essays with a concluding chapter that identifies key moments in composition studies. The concluding chapter that highlights the varied and complex ways authors approach the common challenges of the first-year composition course.

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