

*the* **WAC** *Journal*

Volume 13 • June 2002  
Writing Across the Curriculum

---

# **The WAC Journal**

**Volume 13**

---

---

**Editor**

Roy Andrews

**Editorial Board**

Jeanne Dubino  
Cinthia Gannett  
Robert Miller  
Meg Petersen  
David Zehr

**Review Board**

Jacob Blumner, *University of Michigan, Flint*  
Jeanne Dubino, *Plymouth State College*  
John Eliason, *Philadelphia University*  
Robert Miller, *Plymouth State College*  
Meg Petersen, *Plymouth State College*  
David Zehr, *Plymouth State College*

**Managaing Editor**

Jane Weber

**Design**

Lisa Prince

**Subscriptions and Submissions:**

Roy Andrews  
MSC#56  
Plymouth State College  
Plymouth, NH 03264  
roya@mail.plymouth.edu

**Submissions:** We welcome inquiries, proposals, and 5-15 page double-spaced manuscripts on WAC-related topics, such as WAC Techniques and Applications, Reflections on WAC, WAC and Assessment, WAC and WID, WAC and Writing Centers, WAC and Faculty Development. Proposals and articles outside these categories will also be considered. Manuscripts reviewed September through February.

**Subscriptions:** Eight dollars for one issue, fifteen dollars for next two issues, twenty dollars for next three issues. Please make check payable to Plymouth State College. Include your mailing and e-mail addresses.

Reproduction of material from this publication, with acknowledgement of the source, is hereby authorized for educational use in non-profit organizations.

Copyright ©2002 Plymouth State College  
Printed by Kase Printing

---

---

## Editor's Introduction

As WAC-related manuscripts arrived via e-mail from around the country (and the world), *The WAC Journal* reviewers had no quotas to fill, no specific topics or approaches they were looking for. Rather, they sought articles that best communicated WAC concerns of our time, articles that would make a significant contribution to the already published body of WAC literature, and, most importantly, articles that would speak to you, a reader of *The WAC Journal*.

The first four articles in this volume explore WAC program concerns. Rutz, Hardy, and Condon's "WAC for the Long Haul: A Tale of Hope" tells of a private liberal arts college's longstanding WAC program, which recently reached its third stage of development—assessment. In the second article, Rose and Theilheimer share results of their study, which uses student and faculty interviews and student statements to assess a WAC initiative at an urban community college. Donahue's article, "Strange Resistances," explores a seemingly odd but, we suspect, common problem of declining faculty participation when a WAC program is declared a success. In the fourth article, Martin takes us through the trials and tribulations of developing a state university WAC program, and the instating of directed self-placement in lieu of standard proficiency testing.

In the second four articles, we expect you will find techniques and applications that you could use in your classes: Manahan and English on letter writing among students to increase student involvement and thinking, Gessell and Kokkala on collaborations between science students and students from English classes for editing experience and raising the quality of the writing involved, D'Alessio and Riley on the use of informal writing assignments to determine where additional scaffolding is needed for ESL students to grasp concepts, and Murray on how to apply principles of art critique to a writing intensive class.

In the final three articles, Reiff defends against an attack on WAC by applying post-process theory, Chanock gives an inside view of how a writing tutor working in unfamiliar content does more to help a student learn to write by addressing content concerns than if she restricts herself to surface errors, and Petrucci shares his merging of WAC and WID in a linguistics course.

Welcome to *The WAC Journal*, and enjoy the read.



---

---

# The WAC Journal

Volume 13, June 2002

---

## Contents

### WAC Assessment

WAC for the Long Haul: A Tale of Hope 7  
**Carol Rutz, Clara Shaw Hardy, William Condon**

You Write What You Know: Writing, Learning,  
and Student Construction of Knowledge 17  
**Lisa Rose, Rachel Theilheimer**

### WAC and Faculty Development

Strange Resistances 31  
**Patricia Donahue**

### WAC Program Experiences

(Re-)establishing a WAC Community: Writing in New  
Contexts at Governors State University 43  
**Eric V. Martin**

---

---

## **WAC Techniques and Applications**

- “I received your letter about the fruit flies...”*:  
Interdisciplinary Scientific Correspondence as a  
Means of Transforming the Laboratory Experience 59  
**Susan Manahan, Tom English**
- Establishing Author-Editor Interdisciplinary  
Learning Communities 72  
**Donna A. Gessell, Irene Kokkala**
- Scaffolding Writing Skills for ESL Students in an  
Education Class at a Community College 79  
**Diane D’Alessio, Margaret Riley**
- Writing in the Age of Technology:  
Plundering Art for Ideas about Writing 90  
**Cara Murray**

## **WAC and Writing Theory**

- Teaching Audience Post-Process: Recognizing the  
Complexity of Audiences in Disciplinary Contexts 100  
**Mary Jo Reiff**

## **WAC and Writing Centers**

- How a Writing Tutor Can Help When Unfamiliar  
with the Content: A Case Study 113  
**Kate Chanock**

## **WAC and WID**

- A Writing-to-Learn Approach to Writing in the Discipline  
in the Introductory Linguistics Classroom 133  
**Peter R. Petrucci**

- Notes on Contributors** 144

---

# WAC Assessment

---

# WAC for the Long Haul: A Tale of Hope

*Carol Rutz and Clara Shaw Hardy, Carleton College*  
*William Condon, Washington State University*

---

If the tale we are about to tell sounds familiar, the reason lies in a familiar pattern. An awareness of the status quo arises from emerging dissatisfaction with an increasing number of features of that situation. A certain floundering around ensues, during which various factions propose various solutions. Finally, a new plan emerges and is put into place. Over time, that new plan becomes a new status quo; and the cycle continues. Robert Connors describes that cycle within the field of Rhetoric and Composition, but the pattern itself is hardly new. Thomas Carlyle described it in his 1831 essay “Characteristics.” Thomas S. Kuhn documented similar cycles throughout the history of science in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), a work that reads across disciplines to chart revolutionary shifts in accepted intellectual paradigms. Our story of WAC’s evolution at Carleton College chronicles two of these cycles, and what justifies the telling is the way the story parallels WAC’s evolution from a faculty development movement to a multi-disciplinary initiative, and finally into an era when demands for outcomes-based accountability extend what we believe are unprecedented opportunities for WAC programs, which are a nexus where several important dimensions of student learning come together. Our tale, then, chronicles an alliance between WAC and assessment, an alliance that we believe represents WAC’s third evolutionary stage.

On the other hand, if the tale we are about to tell sounds new, the reason stems from that very alliance, from the fact that what we are chronicling is WAC on a new frontier. For a variety of reasons, the growing accountability movement has focused on Writing Across the Curriculum. Of course, WAC in its writing-in-the-disciplines mode brings together

students' learning outcomes in their fields of concentration and in their writing. What better, more economical place can we find to evaluate a significant portion of what college graduates know and are able to do? Carleton's writing program has evolved in this direction, and so the story we tell is new because it represents our contribution to a small but significant body of work that is pushing WAC toward a closer relationship with assessment. Yancey and Huot's *Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum* (1997), McLeod, et. al.'s *WAC for the New Millennium* (2001), and Haswell's *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction Within a University Writing Program* (2001) have established this trend, which Carleton's writing program is attempting to enact.

### **Context and Background: Carleton's WAC Program**

Carleton is a small, private liberal arts college located in the upper mid-west. Until some thirty years ago, Carleton taught writing the way most colleges taught writing for most of this century, with a required rhetoric and composition course offered by the English Department. In the mid-1970s Harriet Sheridan, then the Dean of the College, replaced this requirement with what turned out to be one of the country's first Writing Across the Curriculum programs. Carleton's early WAC program started with a fairly small group of faculty from outside of the English department (who with some degree of pride called themselves the "Extra-Territorials"). With extensive training and support, these "E.T.'s" agreed to offer some of their courses with the designation "Writing Requirement." Now, rather than the required English department composition course, Carleton students were able to complete their requirement by taking any one of these WR courses. The faculty, as the system was instituted, needed only to decide at the end of the term whether the students should pass the requirement or not, a decision that was based solely on the quality of the writing the student had produced in the course, and was, theoretically, unrelated to the grade the student received in the course. A positive decision resulted in the student completing the college Writing Requirement. A negative one meant they needed to register for another such course and try again.

The system, eccentric as it seemed, was remarkably successful for a long time. The Extra-Territorials had a sense of pride and excitement that came with the novelty of the system; they were energized in part by their feeling that they were on the pedagogical cutting edge of a national move-

ment. While they received extensive training on creating and responding to writing assignments, they were not expected to explicitly teach writing in the course, only to judge it. If, at the end of the term, they felt that students' writing was still too weak to warrant a pass, they would refer those students to writing courses taught within the English Department for further help. Explicit writing instruction thus was still centered in the English department.

From the outset, then, the system was distinctive in having replaced a system of instruction with one of certification, or (as we would now call it) assessment. Guidelines for WR courses were crafted and revised, but the high premium set on faculty choice at Carleton precluded any kind of fixed requirements about the number or kind of papers students had to write, or the amount of drafting they had to do. Writing pedagogy more broadly defined, however, was well entrenched in the curriculum as a whole; even faculty who did not regularly offer courses designated WR still believed strongly in writing as a powerful way of learning, and the amount of writing they required all across the curriculum was, and continues to be, substantial. The Writing Program offered good support for this pedagogy of writing: there were regular short workshops during the term and longer ones during winter and summer breaks on various aspects of the teaching of writing. The practical reality was that writing assessment via WR courses meant a version of writing instruction in disciplinary contexts—a WAC benefit that was often forgotten as students migrated among disciplines, coping with varying conventions and expectations.

Carleton's WAC program thus rested on the assumptions that faculty were already assigning a good deal of writing in their courses across the curriculum, and that they were able to consistently assess students' skill levels. In 1995, the college adopted a plan—mandated by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools—for institutional assessment, and this added one more assumption: that faculty could accurately assess the Writing Program from an institutional perspective. Responding to what had been lurking discontent with student writing in recent years, the college committee charged with assessment identified writing as one of the first of Carleton's learning goals to be assessed, and a small sub-committee comprising faculty, administrators, and students started on that project in the Fall of 1995.

In happy ignorance of methods of institutional assessment the sub-

committee started looking at what people thought of writing at Carleton. Surveys were administered, focus groups were conducted, the office of Institutional Research was mined for potentially relevant data. Actual student writing was never considered. What the committee documented in its 1996 report were several troubling consequences of the manner in which the program had developed over the twenty years or so since its inception.

The most glaring problem identified was one of consistency. The student experience of the Writing Requirement varied enormously; denied WR by one professor, a student could usually quite easily find another who would grant it. Jane would find herself required to write two drafts of five papers in her WR class, while her friend Joe down the hall only had to write three and draft none in his. From the faculty standpoint also, consistency was a problem; many faculty expressed anxiety at having to shift from being a coach of writing through the term to a judge at the end. Was their experience of the students' efforts and travails interfering with their judgment about whether the student had skills sufficient to pass the requirement? And how could they be certain the decisions they made were comparable to those made by their colleagues?

The timing of the requirement also seemed to be a problem. While the rationale of the requirement was to make sure students had the skills they needed for their Carleton career early on, some students would end up without having passed the requirement (or even, potentially, without having attempted it!) in their final term at Carleton. Shady deals had to be cut to get seniors through the requirement so that they could graduate.

From an administrative perspective there were ongoing difficulties recruiting faculty to offer courses designated WR. The original Extra-Territorials were now approaching retirement and had, after all, been dutifully teaching their WR courses for twenty years. Persuading new faculty to do what looked like extra work with no institutional incentive was not always easy.

The faculty surveys also documented a general grouchiness about the quality of student writing. Some cited generational factors, television, poor high school preparation, and the effects of a more diverse student body. Many lamented the decrease in explicit writing courses available: while some students still took these, there were many fewer sections available in the 90s than had been in the 70s and before.

While it was (usually) agreed that in some supernatural fashion se-

niors seemed to have learned to write better than incoming students, there were disturbing anecdotal exceptions even here. Disaster stories of seniors unable to write their senior papers, or (perhaps more frightening) unable to construct respectable job application letters, proliferated.

The fact that the sub-committee on the assessment of the Writing Program never actually read any student writing suggests that faculty, students, and staff had to tell stories about the problems before attempting any systematic analysis. Therefore, the surveys, focus groups, and meetings with departments provided a forum for concerns to be voiced, even if solutions seemed unlikely, perhaps impossible, given the imagined trade-offs: If we are going to teach writing differently, what would that look like? Who would do it? How will they be compensated? Can the curriculum afford a return to a required writing course? If English can't accommodate such a course, where would it be taught? If we're going to evaluate student writing differently, how can we accomplish that? What would be the role of advisors? What's so bad about what we do now? And so on. The circular, ruminatory approach had to run its course before we could move beyond dithering toward change.

The report did have one fairly immediate result. In the next year the faculty voted to institute a writing placement exam for incoming students, with which they would be able to determine whether students needed immediate assistance with their writing in a designated writing course, or whether a WR course in any department would adequately address their needs. This was an attempt to deal with the problem of students who waited too long to attempt the requirement, or who floundered around failing it too long before being directed to a specific writing course for help.

But the larger problems of consistency in the standards of the requirement—or the amount of writing necessary to fulfill it—remained. And the specter of assessment was not going away; under the college's plan, each of the nine educational goals we had specified had to be assessed every three years. The conclusion of the 1996 report (Hardy) suggested that in the next round, some system of student portfolios would allow actual assessment of student writing, as opposed to assessment of attitudes about it.

### **Slouching Toward Assessment**

In 1998, the Bush Foundation approached Carleton's administration



with an invitation to apply for a planning grant for faculty development. We decided to take advantage of the momentum produced by the 1996 Hardy report on writing—both as a feature of the curriculum and as a site for faculty development. If we had learned nothing else from previous studies, we knew that faculty wanted help in addressing writing in their courses. Offering that help within the existing WAC context seemed sensible, and if our concerns about assessment could also be addressed, so much the better. The proposal that we submitted to the Bush Foundation was, to be honest, rather lame. The site-visiting team patiently asked us questions that we lacked the knowledge to answer. We didn't know how much our students were writing. We could not compare the writing our students were doing with the writing at similar schools across the country. Nor did we know anything definitive about the quality of student writing, although many anecdotes were forthcoming about egregiously awful student papers. We could not evaluate our current Writing Requirement except in quantitative terms—e.g., how many students fulfilled it before the end of the sophomore year. To the site visitors' credit, they were able to look past the gaps in our knowledge and help us recognize that what we were really proposing was to 1) teach ourselves about writing assessment and 2) prepare to write a more detailed proposal for a faculty development program with writing assessment at its center.

The planning grant allowed us to bring in some outside experts (Bill Condon from Washington State, Kathleen Blake Yancey from Clemson, Martha Townsend from the University of Missouri, Richard Haswell from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi), offer workshops on writing assessment theory and techniques for interested faculty and others, and develop a plan.

As we gained more knowledge about writing assessment in a WAC context, mid-career portfolios emerged as a good alternative for us. In fact, many of us were resolved to implement a portfolio system, even if we could not obtain external funding, because we could envision a much better environment for teaching and learning with the help of portfolio assessment. Hard on the heels of that revelation, we wrote a proposal to fund a pilot portfolio at the sophomore level with volunteers from the Class of 2004. The proposal also featured:

- faculty stipends for workshops on WAC and portfolio assessment;
- faculty stipends for reading placement exams every fall;
- summer support for faculty to retool or develop courses with assign-

- ments appropriate for the portfolio;
- follow-up grants to help faculty write up their experience with new assignments and/or courses;
  - conference funding to encourage faculty involvement in writing as a discipline and in writing program administration;
  - course release for three faculty to serve as Writing Advisors to help administer the program;
  - a retainer for an outside consultant to the project;
  - expenses and honoraria to continue to bring in outside writing experts once a term;
  - expenses and honoraria for outside facilitators for annual workshops on WAC and portfolios;
  - partial funding for a one-term rhetorician-in-residence for the second and third years of the grant;
  - supplies and administrative costs for the portfolio itself;
  - training for peer tutors to specifically address the portfolio; and
  - a budget for library acquisitions (journals and monographs).

The Bush Foundation funded the proposal in full, as well as a second, smaller proposal for partial funding for an assessment position in the Institutional Research office. As we define our data base—derived from portfolios of student writing—we now have the personnel to help capture data that can support a wide range of research questions.

For a program like this to be successful, faculty participation is the key. The long-standing WAC-ish culture at Carleton has paid off in many ways, not least of which is an appreciation for writing as a pedagogy—even if that appreciation is sometimes couched in terms of despair. We're fortunate to have a core of people who have wanted change for a very long time, and they are being rewarded for their advocacy with stipends, access to summer funding, and great workshops. Without them and support from the dean's office, this would never fly. Along the way, we have gained additional faculty support from some who were never particularly interested in the problem. Thanks to abundant opportunities to participate in workshops, interact with speakers, or serve on relevant committees, they have learned that talking about student writing means good things for pedagogy. To that end, our parade of outside speakers has kept writing visible in a wonderful way. Faculty now participate in workshops who were completely off the radar screen a year ago. Some of them will adopt and extend the kind of leadership that Clara Hardy and others have

shown so diligently for so long.

To summarize, we aren't there yet. But we can now identify the factors that have yielded movement away from a vexing status quo toward a pilot program that blends WAC and writing assessment theory in the context of faculty development: 1) historical interest among faculty in the teaching of writing as well as writing assessment; 2) support from the administration; 3) external funding; and 4) the help of a congenial and vigorous rhet/comp community. People—and institutions—make changes when they are ready. Readiness can certainly be inspired by emergency: we are fortunate that we did not have to take on this complex project in the face of a damaging accreditation report, declining enrollment, student revolt, or some equally difficult situation. Instead, we have been able to harness faculty energy and goodwill, enlist administrative support, earn external funding, and benefit from the knowledge and generosity of a professional community that has been welcoming, critical in the most benevolent and constructive sense, and respectful of our institutional context and goals.

WAC at Carleton is clearly engaged for the long haul, having shown the flexibility to last through two cycles of reform and renewal. We expect, as the results from the current portfolio project roll in, to gather information that will allow us to demonstrate—not merely claim, as in the past—which strategies are working vis-à-vis writing and which need more attention. Students' reflections about their experiences during their first two years at Carleton, the papers they include from their classes, and the data about assignments that are attached to the papers will tell us a great deal about students' experiences writing at Carleton. The degree to which that evidence matches the expectations of the faculty who rate the portfolios will tell even more. Indeed, this matchup provides a new and crucial opportunity to assess students' writing and make necessary interventions; it also provides an almost unprecedented opportunity to keep the faculty's finger on the pulse of instruction in many ways. Faculty raters will come face-to-face with student learning outcomes in writing and, assuming our experience parallels Washington State University's (see Haswell, 67-68), with student learning outcomes in every department and program at Carleton. The writing portfolio thus presents opportunities to learn directly how faculty might improve their classroom practice, and it provides the institution with a rich set of data describing and evaluating what students have learned, what they know and are able to do, at mid-

career.

Only by focusing our evaluative lens on actual student learning outcomes can we gain such a rich set of data and make such fine yet sweeping analyses. As Leonhardy and Condon argue:

If we were not examining actual samples of writing, we could not ask the questions we have asked. Because our assessment exists within our local institutional context, it gives us information that helps us improve the way that context functions. Because the assessment is tied to specific programs' curricula, we can ask questions that help us learn how better to meet students' needs. Finally, because we are gathering a rich set of data, we can...turn the lens back on ourselves to evaluate the strengths and needs of our own...program. (Haswell, 79)

Establishing a strong assessment component within a WAC program not only provides grist for the accountability mill, it also provides the kinds of specific information that faculty want and need in order to ensure that the curriculum is serving students well. For these reasons, we see the evolution of WAC as bound up with assessment and program evaluation, to the benefit of all three.

Finally, we expect that our new model will incorporate the traditional emphases of WAC: faculty and curriculum development. In fact, these important functions of WAC, rather than being its *raison d'être*, become significant by-products of involving assessment with instruction. As faculty design their courses and assignments, they are aware that the learning outcomes from those designs will end up in writing portfolios. Faculty are therefore motivated, first, to think of assigning writing as an integral part of their jobs, no matter in what department they reside, and, second, to participate in the various faculty development programs offered to support effective assigning and evaluating of writing. In addition, as Washington State University's experience has shown, the annual portfolio rating sessions will provide significant faculty development, since the raters will have ample opportunity to learn how—and how well—their colleagues are incorporating writing into their courses, to learn what kinds of assignment or other learning opportunity seem to work best for students, and to learn first hand—by helping develop them—the standards for good writing at Carleton. This system invests faculty in WAC by giving them clear and substantial input into the system and by making their participation necessary for the program's very survival. Thus, one of

WAC's biggest challenges—faculty ownership—is a central feature of this design.

Our formula may not be the right one for other schools, even schools that are similar to Carleton. Any planning strategy will require at least these two essential steps: 1) patient problem identification through whatever processes are comfortable and effective on a particular campus, and 2) as those problems begin to be consistently articulated, investment in professional consultants as teachers—not as SWAT team members. One of the best features of Carleton's developing program is the growing ownership fostered by faculty development. Administration of the program requires attention to that ownership—to continue to distribute the control of and pride in the program as it develops around us.

### References

- Carlyle, T. (1969). Characteristics. In G.B. Tennyson (Ed.). *A Carlyle reader: Selections from the writings of Thomas Carlyle*. New York: Random House.
- Connors, R.J. (1996). The abolition debate in Composition: A short history. In L. Bloom, D.A. Daiker, E.M. White (Eds.). *Composition in the twenty-first century: Crisis and change*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Hardy, C. S. (1996). *Report on assessment of student writing at Carleton*. Unpublished internal report. Carleton College.
- Haswell, R.H. (Ed.). (2001). *Beyond outcomes: Assessment and instruction within a university writing program*. Westport, CT: Ablex.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLeod, S., Miraglia, E., Soven, M., & Thaiss, C. (Eds.). (2001). *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Yancey, K.B. & Huot, B. (Eds.). (1997). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

---

# You Write What You Know: Writing, Learning, and Student Construction of Knowledge

*Lisa Rose and Rachel Theilheimer,  
Borough of Manhattan Community College,  
City University of New York*

---

You write what you, what you understand, what you  
know, right? About the topic or about the concepts...

*--Lata, a community college nursing student in a  
writing-intensive course*

Still in the relatively early stages of our college's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative, we have begun a study to assess its impact. As members of the WAC committee, full-time instructors in two of the college's career programs (human services and early childhood respectively), and qualitative researchers, we were charged with the task of developing and implementing the study. In our urban community college we often conduct interdisciplinary work, and both the WAC program and committee reflect that. The WAC committee has enlisted support for WAC from the variety of career programs and liberal arts departments. Our role as assessors is to look at and learn from the way instructors are implementing WAC. Walvoord & Anderson (1998) state that

assessors are not external imposers of something brand new but investigators, ethnographers, and facilitators. The assessor's approach is not to get people to do assessment, but to examine how people teach and assess critical thinking, and to help them improve. (pp.150-151)

During the planning stages, we envisioned at least two purposes of

assessment: to find out what faculty and students can suggest to us about the connections between writing, learning, and student construction of knowledge and to continue the deliberate process of educating the college community about WAC pedagogy.

In this article we compare two students' points of view about WAC, based on data gleaned from interviews with them. We have triangulated and augmented their interviews with interviews with their professors and written statements from other students in those professors' writing-intensive classes.

### **Background**

After a great deal of deliberation, the WAC committee decided to begin our assessment with a qualitative component. The strategy seemed to be in concert with the WAC assessment literature and our local purpose. By putting a small sample under a microscope, we observed the "DNA" of the WAC efforts at our college. Then, by relaying our preliminary findings to the community at large, including administrators, faculty, and students, we are helping to shape the development of the project. While we do not generalize from the findings of this study and while they may confirm what is already known about WAC pedagogy, we believe that an analysis of our data and a discussion of what we are learning from them raise issues that are worth the WAC community's attention.

WAC is a complex set of processes and practices that does not lend itself to a search for simple truths about its effectiveness. Rather than identifying universal or crisply denoted markers of success, WAC assessment demands attention to the local details particular to any given setting. Williamson (1997) notes that WAC assessors must include WAC participants (faculty, administrators, and students) in decision-making and must take specific situations into account to avoid conclusions not ultimately helpful to those involved in a WAC project. In fact, the WAC assessment literature repeatedly recommends that evaluators turn to stakeholders as they set their research agenda (Walvoord, 1998; Selfe, 1998; Townsend, 1998). Selfe (1998) captures this view when she aptly notes:

contextual evaluation can provide faculty and staff with a dynamic sense of their own agency as professionals as a basis for encouraging and acting on their own reflective teaching practices." (p. 55).

While WAC assessment often focuses on faculty development and faculty issues and sometimes includes administrators' concerns, it rarely

begins with the student's perspective as the focus for analysis. This is paradoxical, since improving student writing and capacity for critical thinking is the purpose of WAC initiatives (Huot, 1998; Prior, Hawisher, Gruber, & MacLaughlin, 1998) and thus students are significant stakeholders in a WAC project.

As was noted earlier, our college's WAC project is still in its nascent stage. More than 30 faculty have attended WAC faculty development sessions, writing-intensive courses in various disciplines are running during Spring 2002, and a cadre of five graduate-student Writing Fellows work closely with faculty in different stages of planning and implementing writing-intensive courses. At our college, a writing-intensive course incorporates informal writing-to-learn activities and requires 10-12 pages of formal writing with opportunities for revision based on feedback from the instructor and/or peers. A significant percentage of the student's final grade is based on the writing component of the course.

### **Methodology**

When we began our WAC assessment, we asked Professor Donne, who teaches American government, and Professor Fern, who teaches developmental psychology, to select a student from their writing-intensive course who would be willing to speak to us. Lisa interviewed Professor Donne and the American government student Diane, and Rachel interviewed Lata and her instructor, Professor Fern (all names have been changed). In addition, we collected short writing samples from the students in Professors Donne and Fern's writing-intensive classes to compare these students' responses with Diane's and Lata's. These students wrote in response to this question:

*Please think about one piece of writing you've done for this course.*

*How has it helped you learn American government or psychology?*

We then analyzed the four interview transcripts and the 39 writing samples, 23 from the American government class and 16 from the developmental psychology class, using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Introducing Diane and Lata as Students and Writers**

Diane is an Early Childhood Education major who is a native-born speaker of English. She is 20 years old and in her second semester, having transferred from another school. She works as a substitute teacher in



a childcare program when the hours fit with her daytime schedule at the college. At the time of her interview she was completing a writing-intensive section of the introductory U. S. government course that is required for her major. She did not know before registering that the section would be writing-intensive. Had she known, she said, she would not have enrolled in it.

Lata is a Nursing student who is an immigrant from Guyana. She is 45, married with teen-age children, and in her third semester at the college. She also works in a childcare program, but as a full-time worker while she takes two evening courses at the college. She was enrolled in a required upper-level developmental psychology course that was billed as writing-intensive from the start.

Both Diane and Lata are good students with GPA's well over 3.0 and are reflective about their learning styles, but they see themselves differently both as students and as writers. Diane described herself as an "in-school type person." She said,

I love to come to class and hear the professor talk. But to come home and do a report, that's what turns me off. I'd much rather a little homework, a few tests, but research papers...no, I don't like that.

In contrast, Lata felt writing is "a way of expressing oneself," a way with which she is comfortable. While Diane depicted herself as a rather passive student, Lata described herself as active. Lata, comparing writing with multiple-choice assessment, said about herself,

I attack every part of my education in the same way. The same conscientiousness that I put in my writing I will put into reading or studying to do my multiple-[choice] test.

Diane and Lata's similarities and differences, which we discuss below together with other data, indicate that the processes of writing, tapping personal knowledge, and engaging with content are the main building blocks in these students' construction of knowledge.

### **Writing: To Learn or To Show What You Know?**

Diane's instructor, Professor Donne, and Lata's instructor, Professor Fern, spoke about writing as a process of grappling with ideas and exploring content, a way to assess students' acquisition of knowledge of American government or developmental psychology, and as preparation for what students would do in the future. Toward these ends the instructors used

writing-to-learn exercises as well as extensive graded writing projects. Nevertheless, our two student subjects and most of the students from whom we solicited writing focused primarily on their writing-to-show.

Diane and Lata did speak briefly, however, about writing as process. Diane said that she learned from the act of writing, not from her professor's comments. She reiterated that she continues to struggle to develop her ideas fully whether she is speaking or writing. Lata, on the other hand, reported that her professor's and classmates' comments helped her to know whether she was doing the assignment correctly and that she learned that one must be very clear when both writing and speaking. Diane was somewhat vague as she spoke about the process of writing, and Lata focused on the writing product, not on the process involved. They both spoke at greater length and more specifically when discussing their assignments, which they described as reflections of what they knew and did not know.

Of the 39 students who wrote about a favorite informal or formal assignment they did in Professor Donne and Professor Fern's classes, twelve wrote about the actual process of writing. Most of these students talked about using the Internet, learning how to do a bibliography, and knowing writing was important, whether they liked it or not. Only three talked about the relationship between writing and thinking. One American government student wrote:

Before each class we're assigned questions to answer, and these questions we have to read and write our responses to. This helps us to clearly understand and prepare for the day's work ahead.

A psychology student wrote that writing her autobiography for her developmental psychology course helped her to organize her thoughts, categorize details, and express her thoughts in writing. Another psychology student said the writing-intensive course helped her "by improving some of my vocabulary and my way of thinking. It helps me to think faster and write without fear of sounding stupid."

These three students were unusual, though. Most students wrote—and Lata and Diane spoke—primarily about conveying content through writing. As we listened to Diane and Lata, we found a pervasive theme in the connection they made between knowledge and writing. They rarely spoke about writing without referring to their personal knowledge or to their lack of knowledge in general and the impetus they felt to gain knowledge of what they were writing about. Diane and Lata never mentioned writing as a process that engenders thinking, but rather spoke of it as a

way to display knowledge that they already had or had acquired as part of their work for the course.

*Personal Knowledge and Generative Themes for Constructing New Knowledge*

Laughing, Professor Fern said in her interview:

[I]n something like psychology where [the discipline is] about people, you want it to be about **these** people that you're with. You don't want it to be about some other that's over there.

In keeping with this statement, half of the sixteen students in the psychology class who gave us writing mentioned their personal involvement with the subject matter of their favorite writing. They said, in reference to their autobiography assignment, that to "review my culture and my life," "to remember a lot of things in my past that I never knew I could remember," and to "understand more about me" were important components of their writing. One student wrote that she "can identify many things that I have experienced growing up in life through theories that my professor has demonstrated to the class," precisely the connection for which Professor Fern hoped. Another student wrote:

I get knowledge by going over and writing my own experiences. I never knew that my "experiences are my knowledge." Also, I start looking at each issue with more understanding. We discussed issues such as culture, religion, and childhood [through] our own experiences.

Through the writing they did for this class, this student came to recognize a knowledge source everyone has but of which this student was previously unaware.

American government students did not write about their personal involvement in the same proportions. Only four of the 23 respondents in that class wrote about their personal connection to the subject matter. Three of them wrote how one of Professor Donne's assignments helped to make them more politically active. For this assignment, they found out where their elected representatives stood on an issue of importance to the student. A fourth wrote:

The paper that I did in this class was really helpful to me, because I chose the issue. Then I was motivated and had more interest in the topic than if I would've written a paper about a designated topic.

This student confirms the importance of student ownership of learning

and the way in which writing can be a vehicle for that ownership in classes that are traditionally taught in a lecture format where the professor presents the content.

Not surprisingly, Diane and Lata, too, said they find writing easier when they already know something about what they are writing about or when the topic is of personal interest. Both talked about their interests and about how they apply knowledge gained in the course to their personal lives. Diane complained that she is not “good at” writing because “I’m not creative enough. I don’t know how to expand on the point.” Even in her Early Childhood Education classes, which she said interest her and in which she can draw from her experience as a substitute teacher, she said, “I just get right to the facts.” She thought she did better in her health class “because it was personal,” but even then the professor had to ask her to “expand [her] opinion.” Diane, while critical of her own writing ability, seemed to believe that she is more successful with personal writing. When she can write about something personal, she feels knowledgeable, knows what to say, and is more likely to be specific and write in greater depth.

Diane’s favorite assignment in her U.S. government class illustrates Schor’s (1992) statement that “[g]enerative issues are found in the unsettled intersections of personal life and society” (p.55). She said, “I mean, [Professor Donne’s] writing project about the representatives.... That was interesting because it had to do with me.” This is the assignment, in the professor’s words:

[Students had] to find out who their elected officials are at the city, state, and federal level.... I ask them to pick an issue that they care deeply and passionately about and tell me why they picked that issue—why it is important to them—and then go find out who their representatives are and what their position is on this issue. And then what was the process like for them to find out...? How did they feel when they found out that that person was aligned with that issue or has a different position from them? It’s sort of like a “who dunnit” project.

Reflecting on the assignment, Diane said she was nervous about contacting her elected officials, but feels good to have done it. As the course progressed and she worked on the assignment, her curiosity expanded. Her interview comments demonstrate that despite her insistence that she “can’t do it,” she is indeed beginning to think critically about additional

issues about which she cares:

But now there's a whole lot of things I want to know. Like I could have asked [my elected representatives] about education, like about the [university] budget cuts, now I want to know about that.

As a result of her favorite writing assignment she can tie her issues of concern to concepts the class discussed. As she spoke in the interview she demonstrated that she was able to integrate the exercise conceptually, thus constructing or "generating" new knowledge. Interestingly, despite her overall sense that she did not like writing, she did not complain about the writing for this assignment.

Lata, too, particularly enjoyed writing activities that related to her life and her immediate concerns. When she talked about what she liked about writing in her psychology course she said:

I work in a day care. And, while working or before working, I never did any research on this topic. Certain things I never knew, right? And while writing, while doing my research, I became a little more interested in my job. Yeah!...I know that we have a curriculum, but the thought never [struck] me that, you know what, these kids are coming here for the first time, and they have to adapt to our curriculum, you know? So by reading, by doing my research, certain things, you know, strike me, yeah.

To provide quality infant care, Lata must be aware of and avoid this disconnect between what caregivers do and the life patterns of infants and toddlers. The research she did in order to write for her developmental psychology course illuminated this insight for her.

Lata said she saw the applicability of her psychology course when what she did there "pertains to everyday life." She was enthusiastic about writing about child care, an arena in which she already had a lot of practical experience, just as Diane enjoyed researching and writing about a topic she chose and about which she wanted to know more.

### *Not Knowing and Wanting to Know: The Process of Gaining New Knowledge*

Lata expressed amazement and excitement when she learned new information through her writing that she could apply to her everyday life on the job. She also was delighted when the research she did in order to write led her to interview an individual who told her something that she had not thought about before. In an interview with a 64-year-old with a

visual impairment, Lata discovered that her ideas about older people and work were not necessarily true.

While Lata spoke about not knowing and then coming to know in preparation for writing, Diane spoke about not knowing and the relationship between that and her lack of self-confidence as a writer. At one point when she was explaining the difficulty she has elaborating upon her ideas, she said that at the start of the semester she couldn't add details and examples when Professor Donne asked the class to write about democracy "because I didn't understand politics, so I guess that was just my broad view, just the basics." By contrast, Professor Donne sees writing as the opportunity to "flesh out [concepts] more systematically." He said in his interview:

What I like about...writing is that it forces them to, allows them to grapple with and spot what they are thinking or feeling about what they've just read...especially if it gets kind of heated as social and political issues can. So it forces them to stop and reflect on what they've just heard or read and process [it] in terms of a specific question.

Professor Donne thinks writing will force students to think and, thus, understand the content of his course better.

Diane implies that she cannot write—she cannot begin to do the fleshing out that Professor Donne anticipates—if she has no knowledge about which to write. Lata seems to concur, not by agreeing in so many words, but by repeatedly referring to her processes of finding out new information to include in her writing.

Professor Fern, too, emphasizes the role of knowledge, but unlike her student, Lata, she immediately links it to the process of learning psychology when she says:

I found that in the first exam students had really very little to say about psychology, which doesn't necessarily hold for all subjects. I think that it's a new vocabulary with a new set of concepts and that we learn with old words, and we learn new words for old concepts, to elaborate them. So, I decided that's what was operating here, and whatever [the students] had to say wasn't coming out in sentences at that point.

This early in the semester, Professor Fern speculated, before students had learned the language of the discipline, they lacked the tools to write about it. Only later, after the students developed a foundation through reading,

lecture, and discussions, could they write about their knowledge and construct new knowledge through their writing.

When Diane and Lata spoke about the role writing played in their respective writing-intensive courses, they referred most often to how the writing pushed them to acquire knowledge. Lata repeatedly said, “because I had to write, I found out these things.” She learned psychology because she had to know about it in order to write about it. She did not say that the process of writing, other than the research itself, led her to knowledge about psychology:

[I]n our writing course, our long paper, our short paper, or our interviews, right, the topics pertained to psychology. So we really have to do some research. And by researching we learn a little bit more of the topic that we are going to write on.

She found that she “had to go more into the topic” because she was writing about it.

Diane likewise reflected on the knowledge she gained about American government and the role writing played in that process:

I think [the professor’s] writing projects backed up what we were learning. So we were learning about government and who our representatives are, and we had to write to back up our learning. Like it just expanded it for us.

Diane and Lata focus on knowledge. Kennedy, Kennedy, and Smith (2000) also regard research and writing as a way to acquire knowledge, but go further when they explain to students that:

Professors typically assign research papers to make you an active, independent scholar, who is able to first locate other people’s ideas, and second, to analyze and synthesize those ideas and come to an independent conclusion. In a sense, studying research methods is *learning how to learn* (p. 144, emphasis in original).

Diane describes writing as a reinforcement for what she learned by reading, asking questions, participating in discussions, and listening to lectures. It would have been constructive, however, for her to reflect, as Kennedy et al suggest, upon how the thinking she had to do to put words on paper extended what she learned in this class .

Diane, Lata, and the other students talked about not knowing and about finding out. They talked about wanting to know more and their delight in learning things they didn’t know. The emphasis for them is on what they have to know to be able to write. Thus, writing is both their

impetus for seeking knowledge and the vehicle for displaying that knowledge. It also helps them to apply abstract concepts to concrete situations. What they may not realize is that they are engaging in a process of creating knowledge that is entirely their own (Kennedy, Kennedy, & Smith, 2000).

### **Implications**

Weissman (1990) discusses “illumination” as the product of a creative endeavor, such as writing:

Illumination refers to the moment of insight when a person first becomes conscious of the solution to a problem. It is not necessarily an instantaneous revelation. There could be a number of small incremental revelations that add up to something larger (p. 123).

He further discusses the need for “data and ways to manipulate that data [sic]” (p. 124) in order for illumination to occur. Although he was referring to the generation of new and innovative ideas in social work, the concept of “illumination” or creating new knowledge from what one has mastered is applicable when discussing how students generate knowledge through the writing process. For our purposes “data” can be understood as “content” or information that students master and that instructors intend for them to learn via writing assignments. As students do research, manipulate data, and engage in the process of writing, they develop the skills they need to craft a piece of writing. Interviews and written statements from students discussed here suggest that students use the process of writing, their personal knowledge, and the content they find in their research to construct knowledge, in this case about American government or psychology. While most of them seem unaware of the import of these three building blocks, their writing-intensive courses offer these building blocks to them.

Whether instinctively, through experience, or by design, the instructors we interviewed crafted writing assignments that drew initially on students’ personal experience. This was one of the three building materials that students and instructors discussed in interviews and in students’ written statements. Students were thus able to use their personal experience as a critical resource for constructing or, as Schor (1992) puts it, generating new knowledge. We observed how personal experience was the impetus to learn more, how the lack of knowledge about a familiar subject stimulated curiosity, how newly acquired research skills offered



the tools to gain new knowledge or illumination, then how knowledge that began as “new” became familiar and “personal,” thereby allowing students to see gained knowledge as owned knowledge. Through this process, with writing as the foundational vehicle transporting the basic materials—a combination of content, craft, and what is familiar—students can construct new knowledge and ideas.

We, too, have experienced “illumination” through our process of research and writing. By examining the writing-to-learn process as it is experienced and articulated by these students and instructors, we have started to look at our own teaching practice differently. We become more reflective teachers as well as more effective assessors, able to shed light on and reinforce the most elemental yet essential components of WAC pedagogy.

Our next step can be to develop strategies for faculty and students at our college to articulate this multifaceted process and to become more aware of how they are teaching and learning through writing. This study suggests that from the student perspective, and perhaps also from the point of view of faculty, the culture of writing-to-learn is still new and largely uncharted territory at our college, one that instructors can map out clearly with students.

Authors’ note: We wish to thank Ruth Misheloff and Gay Brookes for their careful reading of and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

## References

- Kennedy, M. L., Kennedy, W., & Smith, H. (2000). *Writing in the Disciplines: A Reader for Writers* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Prior, P., Hawisher, G. E., Gruber, S., & MacLaughlin, N. (1997). Research and WAC evaluation: An in-progress reflection. In Kathleen Blake Yancey & Brian Huot (Eds.). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices* (pp.185-216). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Schor, I. (1992). *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Selfe, C. L. (1998). Contextual valuation in WAC programs: Theories, issues and strategies for teachers. In Kathleen Blake Yancey & Brian Huot (Eds.). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices* (pp. 51-67). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Townsend, M. A. (1998). Integrating WAC into general education: An assessment case study. In Kathleen Blake Yancey & Brian Huot (Eds.). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices* (pp. 159-172). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Walvoord, B. (1998). From conduit to customer: The role of WAC faculty in WAC assessment. . In Kathleen Blake Yancey & Brian Huot (Eds.). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices* (pp. 15-36). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Walvoord, B. & V. J. Anderson. (1998). *Effective Grading: A Tool For Learning and Assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Weissman, H., Editor/Senior Author. (1990) *Serious Play: Creativity and Innovation in Social Work*. Silver Spring MD: National Association of Social Workers
- Williamson, M. M. (1997). Pragmatism, positivism, and program evaluation. In Kathleen Blake Yancey & Brian Huot (Eds.). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices* (pp. 237-258). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

---

WAC  
and  
Faculty Development

---

# Strange Resistances

*Patricia Donahue, Lafayette College*

---

With my title, “Strange Resistances,” I mean to characterize the difficulties that arise, especially in the area of faculty development, when a WAC program at a small liberal arts college (Lafayette College in Easton, PA) acquires a certain degree of success. Since my criteria for “success” are primarily local and institutionally determined (although broader disciplinary standards could apply), I will begin by describing the program itself.

## **I. WAC at Lafayette College**

Our program—the “College Writing Program” (CWP)—was conceived and piloted sixteen years ago, during my first year at Lafayette College. I had been hired by the English Department as its first writing specialist to teach writing and literature and to provide “leadership” in composition. While my “leadership” responsibilities were never defined—although I was advised to lead by example not dicta—the allocation of a tenure line in composition was itself a radical move, signaling a desire for revision and the expectation of change. The impetus for a new program came, surprisingly, from the Department of Economics and Business. Its faculty had arranged a meeting with the English Department to express its concerns about the writing abilities of their majors. (At that time the college’s writing requirement consisted of a two course freshman sequence and five additional writing intensive courses, whose only condition was the completion of twelve pages of formal writing). The proposal made by the Economics and Business Faculty was that they would assign more writing and the English Department would review it for grammatical ac-

curacy and logical consistency. My department head suggested instead that a newly hired woman in Economics, Mary Beckman, and I spend a semester designing an alternative.

Our recommendation was that the college make use of its best and most plentiful resource: smart and talented undergraduates (Lafayette College is a highly selective institution of 2,000 undergraduates). We had in mind a program in peer response similar to the one designed by Tori Haring-Smith at Brown University. But while the Brown Writing Fellows played the role of teacher *manque*, reviewing papers in the privacy of their rooms and making marginal and final comments, our Writing Associates (“WAs”) would discuss student writing with student writers face to face. For our program’s conceptual base, we drew heavily from rhetorical and composition theory (peer tutoring, collaboration, the reading/writing transaction), literary theory (dialogics and reader response), and Paulo Freire’s theory of radical praxis. Eschewing a writing center model, we decided to assign each WA to a single course for an entire semester, and require that they meet at least three times with every student in conferences of approximately thirty minutes. WAs were to serve not as proof-readers or editors but as informed readers who, through a process of strategic questioning (“What are you saying and doing? Why? What’s next?”), would help students revise their writing and reflect on their rhetorical choices. To receive the assistance of a WA, faculty members would need to participate in workshops, modify writing assignments if necessary (although they were given remarkable latitude in terms of what to assign and how to grade it), and meet regularly with the WA assigned to their course. In the faculty development workshops, they would be introduced to a range of “best practices,” and, most importantly, provided the opportunity to engage in pedagogical self-reflection and to cultivate a common language for writing instruction. In keeping with the spirit of much WAC/WID work, we expected these occasions to be “empowering.” As the story goes, faculty members are themselves writers: therefore, they possess a great deal of tacit and intuitive knowledge about writing which, with assistance, they can learn to articulate. Finally, it was our hopes that since small college faculty tend to be more receptive to students than to colleagues (with whom they may share long and bitter histories), WA training might have a bottom-up effect. What we taught the WAs they would then teach the faculty. WAs seemed in the best position to make the case for a revision-based strategy and to enable the faculty to distinguish be-

tween teaching writing and teaching *with* writing.

For sixteen years our program has remained remarkably true to these framing principles (I am grateful to the many campus visitors over the years who helped us refine them: Elaine Maimon, Tori Haring-Smith, Kenneth Bruffee, Nancy Sommers, Mariolina Salvatori, Jean Carr, John Gage, and, especially, Toby Fulwiler). Over that period it has grown considerably: from a pilot with six WAs to a campus-wide program of fifty-plus WAs; from one writing specialist to three (but neither of my junior colleagues is yet tenured); from no administrative assistance to a program coordinator (but secretarial support is inconsistent). It displays all the markers of success. Its goals are widely advertised. It is often featured in the college's promotional literature. And it has been praised by external review boards as a site of ongoing innovation. Student writers regularly state in evaluations that they appreciate having the chance to meet with a trained peer who has faced and overcome similar writing challenges, and they look forward to working with WAs in the future (the acronym "WA" has even entered the college lexicon, in the form of "to WA" or "to get WA'd.>"). The WAs themselves benefit enormously from the program and are the most persuasive evidence of its success. Listen for example to one of our current WAs, Vilas Menon, reflecting on himself as a writer in an excerpt from a literacy narrative he wrote in Fall 2001:

A Writing Associate is meant to help others examine their writing in ways they would not under normal circumstances. Over the past year, I discovered that this relationship works both ways: by examining others' writing, the Writing Associate also ends up examining his or her own written work. I learned several skills—critical analysis, stylistic variation among them—and was able to adapt them to different situations. I learned that writing is not an absolute process....

Perhaps the most important indicator of our success is the fact that eight years ago the program was mainstreamed, becoming a required component of two general education courses: a First Year Seminar (FYS) taken by all entering students, and a seminar in Values in Science and Technology (VAST) taken by students in their sophomore year (engineering students take a course in professional ethics, which is also affiliated with CWP). Once a voluntary endeavor, the program became an integral component of the college's curriculum, required of all students and also of all

faculty choosing to teach (or conscripted to teach) FYS and VAST. It became highly visible. It was assumed powerful. For the first time we began to experience the dark side of success: the irruption of “strange resistances.”

## II. When Faculty Behave Badly

**Strange:** 10.a. Unfamiliar, abnormal, or exceptional to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment; difficult to take in or account; queer, surprising, unaccountable. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

When the writing program was mainstreamed, every faculty member who taught either FYS or VAST had to “use” a Writing Associate, whether he or she wanted to or not. Participation was no longer voluntary but required. That meant that I no longer had the authority to refuse to assign WAs to noncompliant faculty members. If faculty refused to attend workshop sessions (for which they receive half of a \$3,000 curricular stipend, whether they show up or not), or modify assignments, or meet with their WAs, or impede their WAs’ efforts, or require four conferences, I had no recourse except gentle persuasion. A story that has acquired the status of campus legend tells of a WA who sat for hours in a friend’s third floor dormitory room, hoping to catch a glimpse of the professor whose students she was responsible for, so she could hand him a conference sign-up sheet.

This cataclysmic redefinition of The College Writing Program led to the program being more closely identified than ever before with lower-level instruction and “remediation.” And it continues to provoke “strange resistances.” Attendance at faculty development workshops has declined markedly. Faculty members ignore voice mail, claim they never received e-mails and memos, say they “forgot” about a workshop, refuse to make eye contact. This semester, for example, after one of our program’s assistant directors, Bill Carpenter, had asked the six faculty teaching a new VAST course when they might be available to meet for three sessions, and had made all room and lunch arrangements, one of the six sent him an e-mail saying that she had decided to attend a yoga course instead. Many of our colleagues seem to think our purpose is to micromanage their classrooms, pry into their professional lives, pass judgment on their pedagogical choices (some call us the “grammar police;” others say that “[we]

don't believe in grammar"). Many seem to view our offers to "help" as coercive, manipulative, or controlling. In fact, our greatest crime seems to be our desire to "help," because it seems to imply that help is needed.

Why these strange resistances? Why this bad faith from colleagues who pride themselves on their reputations as good teachers, who argue at length in faculty meetings that students are the top priority, who claim to value teaching more highly than research? Why this resistance to a curriculum the faculty itself constructed, voted upon, chose to implement?

### **III. WAC as a Site of Displacement**

The story of The College Writing Program could be summarized as a narrative of a larger institutional culture appropriating a WAC program and turning it into a convenient site for the displacement and projection of numerous institutional, professional, and personal anxieties. I will reflect on some of the tensions, conflicts, dichotomies, and representational paradoxes that now define our program in its maturity (or its decline):

- The more financial resources that have become available for faculty development initiatives, such as workshops and textual materials, the less interest instructors appear to have in pedagogical development.
- The more sophisticated our faculty's discourse for talking about writing has become, the fewer changes have occurred in actual classroom practice. In the early stages of our faculty development efforts, the goal was to develop a common pedagogical language, with the hope that this discourse would be built upon and complicated. Now, my colleagues can talk the talk and have become adept at theoretical inflection, but they continue to do what they always have. Our "intervention" is impeded, because all we really know is what they say they are doing (the other information comes to us indirectly).
- Such "representational duplicity," whether it is willed or accidental, can be also observed on the administrative level. Although as embodied in the figure of the Provost and others, the college is proud of its commitment to writing instruction, singing the program's "successes" whenever convenient, little is done to assure the translation of promise into performance. Whether there is a gap between



what the institution says and enacts does not seem to matter: what does matter is the image, the promotional fiction, the simulacrum. Repeatedly, I have shared with certain administrators incidents of faculty refusing to meet with their WAs, undermining their WAs' efforts, complaining to students about the WAs assigned to the course, failing to require the stated number of pages, and so on. (At times I am asked to be a snitch; I try to resist). I am provided sympathy, not action. And the stipends continue to flow like milk and honey.

- Writing assignments are a particular problem area. My colleagues often complain that our students are not good enough, are insufficiently quirky, despite our designation as a highly selective institution. At the same time, these same teachers design the kind of writing assignments that call for the mindless reproduction of a field's commonplaces and foundational themes. Many of them do not want to spend their time on effective assignment design, or they too easily remember the assignments they responded to as students, or they simply want to believe that students cannot write well. It is also possible that they recognize that more difficult writing assignments might require dramatic changes in pedagogical practice.
- Certain advice and recommendations we have made over the years, generally in response to faculty requests for ideas, have become reified, turned into formula, and then used against us. Most recently, for example, a professor in the Department of Economics and Business (an early volunteer) told us that he did not want to use a WA next year for his FYS class (he has no choice) because he felt the "three essays" stipulation too restricting. However, there is no "three essays" requirement. A straw program has been erected, so that it can be attacked.

#### **IV. Strange Explanations**

Is it possible to explain why these resistances occur, why a current of discontent now runs through our program? Let me offer a few reasons, which I propose only provisionally, since this is a problem that, *in toto*, I still find mystifying.

- Perhaps our writing program is now a convenient site for the pro-

jection of neurotic energy because it is visible, because it is associated with the English Department, because the college's Provost is a former member of the department, and because power, as all of us post-Foucauldians know, is what matters in institutions and is dispersed throughout the system. Who has it, who does not have it, where is it, where it could be—these are the important questions. A well-established WAC program exists within an institutional structure dominated by rhetorics of scarcity and competition. (Although Lafayette College possesses an enormous endowment, this discourse nonetheless circulates, if only as a strategy of administrative control: for the real power—to the extent that it is identifiable—is possessed by those who distribute the resources.)

- Especially at a small college that claims to value teaching, faculty members have a great stake in their image as good teachers. The desire to protect (and promote) a reputation makes it difficult for them to speak honestly about what they do in the classroom. (Like many small liberal arts colleges, Lafayette exalts teaching, but privatizes its performance.) The early innovators were confident enough to risk self-exposure; the conscriptors are not (or perhaps they believe that there is now more at stake; if they are junior faculty, they are probably right).
- My colleagues see themselves as teachers, but not as students of teaching, and certainly not as scholars of teaching. For many that formulation would be oxymoronic (to understand why this is the case, one needs to understand how the rise of academic professionalization in the nineteenth century led to the conflict between so-called specialists and generalists, and the subsequent privileging of research over teaching. See Salvatori and Donahue). The idea of thinking critically about teaching, of theorizing a practice, or of viewing pedagogy as an enactment of theory, would strike them as strange. Teachers, they would argue, are born not made; good teaching is a product of inspiration; discussions of teaching are appropriate in education departments, but not in departments of history, biology, English, philosophy, sociology, etc. (For a history of these commonplaces, see Salvatori.)
- As writing specialists, we are inclined to emphasize the thera-

peutics of writing. But as Plato and Derrida remind us, writing is a *pharmakon*: it can cure, but it can also kill. While Lafayette has always required its faculty to sustain a coherent research agenda, only within the past fifteen years or so (about the time the writing program was created) has that research been expected to take regular and visible form in publication. Many of my colleagues, especially those hired by what they remember as a gentler Lafayette, do not want to rise to these new demands. They project upon the “writing people” their own apprehensions and bad experiences with writing; courses like FYS and VAST become scenes of personal deficiency, insecurity, anxiety. What they are resisting, in short, is the culture of writing and of writers that they see CWP promoting. In addition, there are those faculty members who do write but who see no relationship between their work and their students’. This is another reason why their writing assignments tend to demand so little of students. Finally, some faculty members prefer to think of research as their “real work”—work that is generative, intellectually engaging, inventive—and the classroom as the site where such work is merely reproduced; why, then, spend more time on teaching? (For an analysis of “work” in English Studies, see Horner.)

- Our adherence to the model of faculty empowerment ultimately placed us in an untenable position. In the early years, we believed that our colleagues possessed a tacit and suppressed understanding of discursive strategies. Our purpose as program administrators was to serve as midwives, by helping to bring this submerged knowledge into light so it could be consciously enacted. This was not mere devise. We supported this model. We still do—in theory. But we did not understand that in affirming our colleagues’ expertise we had undermined our own. If teachers in the disciplines are the “experts,” our ideas carry no special warrant.

## V. Writing Disappointment

If it is difficult to understand exactly why our program has diminished and what may lie ahead, I draw courage from the Writing Associates, who exult in their experience, turning it into attractive offers of graduate assistantships, exciting careers in teaching, and expanded opportunities in the professional workplace. I hope that we will move forward,

continue to innovate, perhaps by adding a component in oral presentation or by shifting from a WAC model to a new model of writing instruction based on the idea of disciplinary discourse as content (I thank Bill Carpenter for sharing this idea with me). I am inspired by the optimism of my junior colleagues, Bill Carpenter and Bianca Falbo, and the program coordinator, Beth Seetch, and by their insistence that we be perceived as “consultants and facilitators, not organizers and gatekeepers” (conversation with Carpenter). And I believe that it is time for me to hand the program over to my talented and capable assistant directors. As reluctant as I am to admit it, it is possible that my colleagues have turned a deaf ear to my pleas and platitudes for no other reason than that they have heard them so many times: the instrument needs tuning. The story of Lafayette College may be paradigmatic in illustrating that whenever the effectiveness of a method, or a person, or a program begins to wane (let us think, after all, about how and why traditions do not hold their value as they did initially), then is the time to hand it over, as painful as that can be, to others willing to stand by its rule.

To engage in such thinking may seem to ignore the very institutional realities I have presented here. It may mean I have yielded to what Richard Miller refers to as “an almost irresistible temptation, when thinking or speaking of ‘revising’ institutional relations or pedagogical practice or the social sphere more generally, to conceive of an absolutely compliant world ready to be rewritten in whatever way we see fit” (8). Perhaps further innovation is impossible. Perhaps the program is unraveling in ways more insidious than I know. Perhaps I will not be able to step down for years, since I would need to be replaced, and so far earning tenure as a WPA at Lafayette College has not been a simple matter. (For an unhappy tale of a former colleague’s experience, see Tiernan.) Is there no other choice for a WAC director than to become a practitioner of denial or despair?

In a recent essay in *College English*, entitled “More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work,” Laura R. Micciche examines what she calls the “climate of disappointment that characterizes English studies generally and composition studies—particularly writing program administration (WPA)—specifically” (432). Micciche’s essay has struck a powerful chord; the WPA list-serve was engaged in lively discussion about it for two weeks. Her essay has much to recommend it—its subtle analysis of emotional discourse, for example—but its resonance may result more

from its willingness to name despair and pain, to make them visible, to make them legitimate topics for professional discussion. Her essay indicates how very great is our need for *more* writing of this kind, more stories about disappointment, failure, resistance, administrative duplicity, especially at this moment, when so many writing programs have moved out of their glory years and into a period of inertia or decline. Fifteen years ago, when designing the program at Lafayette College, I derived enormous intellectual support and sheer courage from the “success” stories I read about writing programs in their formative stages. The profession needed those “coming of age” stories then; now it may need stories of a different kind.

Tales of resistance, like the one shared here, can also play an important role in further developing a scholarship of teaching within our field (see Shulman). By writing about our experiences as teachers, and as *teachers of other teachers* (which is what much WAC administration amounts to, although we seem reluctant to say it), we can achieve a wonderful alchemy: we can transform disappointment into dialogue, strangeness into professional understanding. By writing about local administrative scenes, we can make material our insistence and desire that the culture of teaching be paid more than lip service, that the scholarship of teaching be built into the institution so that it can stand side by side with other kinds of scholarship (see Boyer). Thus we will help ensure that these wonderful programs, their fruitful changes, even their strange resistances are not wiped out but acquire new life within our disciplinary history.

Author’s note: An earlier version of this essay was delivered at the Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Indiana University, in March 2001. I thank Bianca Falbo and Mariolina Salvatori for their insightful commentary.

### Works Cited

- Boyer, Ernst L. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.
- Horner, Bruce. *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique*. Albany: SUNY P, 2000.
- Menon, Vilas, "WA Reflection." *Writing Matters: The Newsletter of the Lafayette College Writing Program* 2 (2001): 2.
- Micciche, Laura R. "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work." *College English* 64 (2002): 432-458.
- Miller, Richard. "Critique's the Easy Part: Choice and the Scale of Relative Oppression." *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*. Ed. Diana George. Portsmouth: Boynton, 1999, 3-13.
- Salvatori, Mariolina Rizzi. *Pedagogy: Disturbing History, 1819-1929*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1996.
- Salvatori, Mariolina Rizzi and Patricia Donahue. "English Studies in the Scholarship of Teaching." *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Eds. Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2002, 69-86.
- Shulman, Lee. "Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform." *Harvard Educational Review* 57.1 (1987) : 1-22.
- Tiernan, M.L. "Writing Program Administration and (Self)-Representation: Paradoxes, Anomalies, and Institutional Resistances." *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell their Stories*. Ed. Diana George. Portsmouth: Boynton, 1999, 162-173.

---

# WAC Program Experiences

---

# (Re-)establishing a WAC Community: Writing in New Contexts at Governors State University

*Eric V. Martin*

---

## **A Scene from ENGL 301**

Recently I entered the English 301 classroom here at Governors State University for the first time. Even though I had taught college writing at all levels for ten years prior to this, I was nervous about teaching this particular course entitled “Composition: Structure and Style.” Sixteen students sat in front of me. Thirteen of them were women; twelve of the sixteen were members of ethnic minorities; most of the group appeared to be older than me (35-years-old or older); and none looked happy about being in the course. One African-American woman who sat in the back row seemed to glare at me from the moment I entered the classroom. A little girl (perhaps 6-years-old) sat close beside her and seemed to be doing the same as I began to speak.

“Hello. My name is Eric Martin, and I will be your instructor this term. I have taught college writing for a decade, and over the years I have always started my courses by asking students to introduce themselves to me and one another. We’ll do that later, and I will go over the syllabus for this course as well. First, I would like for you to take a few minutes to write a response to this question: ‘What is English 301?’

“Before you begin, let me give you a bit more context. I am relatively new to GSU; I started here in June 1999. Also, I am not a faculty member. Rather, I am a full-time administrator. I direct something called the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which attempts to enrich the overall culture for writing on campus. My job entails working with faculty in all disciplines to enhance the teaching and learning of writing in each major. While this involves teaching, I will not be in the classroom unless I re-



quest to teach, just as I have done this term. Finally, I have not taught English 301 before now. That said, I would like for you to tell me about this course as you already understand it.”

Except for the initial ruffling of papers and snapping of three-ring binders, the room remained quiet as the students wrote. After a few minutes, I asked for volunteers who might be willing to share what they had written. Hands went up cautiously. I reminded the students, “Remember, I haven’t read the roster. I don’t know who you are, so there’s no need for hands. Just tell me about this course as best you can.”

Volunteers began speaking. The first student: “English 301 is meant to improve my communication skills.” From another student: “It will help me write better in my other classes.” From a third: “This course will help my vocabulary and help me learn grammar.” At this point, I signaled for a time-out. “Okay,” I said, “these things are more or less true. But I get the feeling that you are holding back. Remember, I don’t know your names, and I certainly won’t remember who says what. So, can anyone else tell me about 301?”

At this point, the comments flew. “I’m here because I failed that stupid test.” From another student: “I failed the test two times, so they told me I had to take 301 or not graduate next year.” From a third student: “That test was unfair. Mine was so old it fell apart, and they didn’t give us enough time.” From a fourth student: “I got a B in English at my community college; I thought I was done with this. Besides, that was a grammar test. How does that tell about writing?”

After a few more such comments, silence again retook the room. Having said nothing throughout the first twenty minutes of class, the woman in the back row continued to follow my every move.

## **Our School**

Governors State University is a state-supported, open-admissions institution enrolling approximately 6,000 students. The school offers only junior- and senior-level courses, as well as a variety of graduate degrees in its four colleges that include Arts and Sciences, Business and Public Administration, Health Professions, and Education. Students come to the university from “partner” community colleges in the region. Prospective students must have either an associate’s degree in hand or 60 hours of course work. The vast majority of our students attend part time, hold full- or part-time jobs, and are the heads of their families. The average age of

students is 34, although we are beginning to enroll more “traditional-age” students. Approximately 70% of the students are women and over one-third are minorities. Perhaps most important for the discussion at hand, our incoming undergraduate students have already satisfied general education writing requirements at community colleges when they arrive, but many are still underprepared for writing in upper-division courses despite the best efforts of the community colleges.

Faculty members and administrators at GSU have been concerned about the quality of student writing for many years. However, they have been unable to agree on how best to address the “writing problem.” Overworked faculty members have objected to solutions which they see “coming out of their hides,” whereas cost-conscious administrators have worried about funding proposed solutions as well as other potential “costs” related to community-college relations. Administrative turnover has also contributed to the problem. Between 1992 and 2000, the Provost’s Office was occupied by six “permanent” and interim appointments. In June and July of 1999, both the provost and the university’s president of seven years resigned for a variety of professional and personal reasons. The current president began in April 2000, and the new provost/vice-president for academic affairs began six months later in October 2000. As was noted above, I started at GSU as the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum in June 1999.

### **Issues Surrounding Proficiency Testing and the WAC Program**

Governors State began to address concerns about student writing in the early 1980s by requiring all incoming students to take a proficiency exam. Initially, the exam was a timed writing that was scored by a group of faculty members and administrators. Although interrater reliability was considered high, the exam eventually was seen as a deterrent to retention because community-college graduates simply applied elsewhere to avoid GSU’s test and the requirement (and stigma) of additional course work if they failed. What’s more, community college faculty questioned the exam. Many considered it an insult to their hard work. Even though most GSU faculty members supported the testing process and wished to see it continue, the former administration decided in 1995 that the exam’s costs outweighed its benefits. However, because of strong faculty opposition to abandoning proficiency testing altogether, it was decided that an objective test would replace the timed writing. The assumption was that such

an instrument would ensure “more accurate” placement. The results would be “irrefutable” and would therefore eliminate much of the controversy surrounding the timed writing. Or so the thinking went.

Facing pressure from the faculty, administration, students, and community colleges, GSU’s first WAC coordinator recommended ETS’s Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) as the proficiency examination until the new WAC program could be implemented. It should be noted, however, that in the early stages of WAC’s development at GSU, the relationship between proficiency testing and the WAC program was sketchy at best. As a result, TSWE was in place as a “temporary” arrangement from 1995 until February 2000. Students who failed the exam on their first attempt—and approximately 60% did fail—were required to take a grammar workshop offered by the Writing Center before being allowed to retest. Students who failed a second time—and approximately half of the initial 60% did fail again—were required to take ENGL 301. Registration holds ensured compliance.

Not surprisingly, this policy only increased the frustration of everyone involved. The students who failed the TSWE were frustrated at having to take another writing course. Their frustration increased when they learned that some academic programs counted ENGL 301 merely as elective credit, whereas others did not count the course at all. GSU’s faculty remained frustrated. Most disagreed with the move from direct to indirect assessment, and, not surprisingly, few noticed any significant improvement in student writing. GSU’s Writing Center staff grew increasingly frustrated because they had been forced into the grammar business, which took time away from individual tutoring and offering other kinds of workshops related more purposefully to the writing process. Finally, the English 301 instructors—most of whom were part-time faculty members—were frustrated because many of the students who were placed into the course resisted instruction. Student outbursts in the 301 classrooms and in the Writing Center became an ugly routine.

The WAC program faced turmoil as well. GSU began developing a writing-across-the-curriculum program in 1993. The following assumptions supported the original initiative and continue to do so today: 1) Writing is a tool for learning as well as communicating information; 2) Writing is a process and should therefore be treated as such; and 3) Student difficulties with writing must be addressed by faculty in all disciplines. Unfortunately, these assumptions were largely invisible between 1993 and 1998.

After several years of exploring WAC and discussing the local situation with experts in the field of writing program administration, GSU named its first WAC coordinator in 1995. The coordinator was to work in cooperation with a newly formed Writing Across the Curriculum Board, which included faculty from each college as well as the coordinator of the Writing Center, the director of Student Development (the office directly responsible for proficiency testing in both writing and math), and various other campus constituencies. The first WAC coordinator was a tenure-track faculty member in English; therefore, he reported to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences while working closely with the Provost's Office on matters related to WAC.

The WAC coordinator and the provost at the time determined that GSU's program would follow the writing-intensive (WI) model. Such an approach was considered both viable and cost-effective. In the GSU model, a student would complete at least one (and eventually several) WI courses in his or her major. These courses were to be existing content-area courses which would have a writing workshop built into them. Thus, students enrolled in a three-hour course were to spend two hours each week investigating the "content" of the course; the third hour would then be devoted to using writing to explore that content in a student-centered workshop format. One full-time faculty member was to be responsible for both facets of the course. He or she would be supported with WAC workshops, while his or her students would receive assistance with writing through the Writing Center. In late 1995, the University Curriculum Committee voted to make the completion of at least one WI course a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students beginning in the fall of 1996. The Faculty Senate approved this proposal shortly thereafter.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1996, the WAC coordinator and WAC Board worked with various programs to develop WI courses. This process extended through fall 1996 and well into 1997 as conflicts arose regarding the definition of "writing intensive." Thorough guidelines had not been developed. The role of the WAC Board in program development and oversight was unclear. Most faculty viewed the WAC Board with suspicion. And the authority of the WAC coordinator was questionable as there was considerable disagreement about this person's leadership style.

The WAC coordinator subsequently resigned in the spring of 1998. An interim coordinator was appointed for the 1998-1999 academic year,

and a search for a permanent replacement began in the fall of 1998. I began on June 16, 1999, and while I have been assured that their respective decisions were “nothing personal,” the provost resigned at the end of my first week on campus and the president followed suit several weeks later. These resignations were especially significant because after the departure of the first WAC coordinator, the position was reclassified as an Administrative and Professional position that reports directly to the Office of the Provost.

In the wake of such conflict and administrative turnover, the WAC Board lost all authority over the writing-intensive courses. Instead, individual programs and instructors began indicating for themselves which courses would be taught as “WI” simply by checking (or not) the “WI box” on the university’s official course proposal/revision form. These decisions were made in the absence of WI guidelines and, in most cases, administrative support for those earnest instructors who genuinely wished to satisfy the original intent of the WI initiative. As a result, some of these faculty members now teach WI courses with enrollments of 30, 35, or 40 students. Also, as one can imagine, student compliance with the one WI course graduation requirement has been and remains suspect. In many cases, it would be impossible for students to satisfy the requirement if it were strictly enforced because the status of many WI courses varies from section-to-section, term-to-term, and year-to-year.

In sum, by June 1999 the proficiency testing policy was again being criticized by all of the university’s stakeholders both for the exam being used and for the course in which students were being placed; the WAC program had essentially collapsed; and perhaps most damning, consistent administrative leadership was once again missing. The WAC Board remained but was powerless as it watched both the WAC community and its curricular context implode.

### **A Summary of Assets and Actions**

My first instinct in the wake of such chaos was to leave town. I decided to attend the *Council of Writing Program Administrators Annual Summer Conference* and its accompanying pre-conference workshop. In one of the workshop sessions, I learned for the first time of Dan Royer and Roger Gilles’s article “Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation” (CCC 50.1/September 1998). Prior to this, I had heard of DSP, but I had not considered the idea for GSU. Like many others, I assumed

that such a placement method works only at elite schools. However, as the workshop and conference unfolded, directed self-placement became increasingly appealing. I asked myself: Who better to make an authentic, adult decision about education than adult learners? What better way is there of restoring student dignity while repairing damaged relationships with our partner schools? Directed self-placement seemed like an obvious choice for GSU. When I returned to campus, I shared the idea with the WAC Board members, and they agreed. In fact, their collective enthusiasm may have eclipsed my own.

Early in the fall of 1999, the Board and I began exploring several possible new directions for the WAC program, all of which featured directed self-placement. The best of these ideas actually originated in a 1993 WPA Consultant-Evaluator's report written by Edward White. This report was sent unceremoniously to me in August 1999 by an administrative assistant working in the Provost's Office.

As discussions of WAC were starting at GSU in 1993, White was invited to campus to evaluate the existing writing program. In his subsequent report, he indicated that the single best way to ensure student writing competence at GSU was to create a rigorous upper-division writing course and require it of all incoming students. As a result, there would be no need to test incoming students either by means of timed essays or objective tests. The course would simply be part of the curriculum—thereby eliminating the stigma of remediation—and writing proficiency would be reflected in a passing score for the course. Recognizing that some students enter GSU with superior writing skills and experience in their field, White also recommended a “challenge” (course-equivalency) exam for highly-qualified students. Back then, his recommendation fell on deaf (if not frugal) ears, but in 1999 it burst with promise. The WAC Board ran with the idea.

We quickly developed a proposal for *expanding* the WAC efforts at GSU. We hoped to build upon existing work with student writing which was, in fact, exemplary and to avoid unnecessary conflicts. We developed a model in which students would self-place into either English 301 or a required, upper-division “gateway course” that would introduce them to the discourse conventions of their respective majors. We proposed developing such a course in each of the university's eight academic divisions. After successfully completing the gateway course for their major, students would then take WI course(s) which, at least for the time being,

would remain undisturbed. Our model also promoted the development of writing portfolios which would both benefit the students and facilitate program assessment. Throughout the fall of 1999, the Board and I worked on this proposal, and I began circulating numerous copies of Royer and Gilles's CCC's article to faculty members and administrators alike.

The gateway course was soon given a name. We wanted the rigorous writing course that White had advocated, but we realized that either adding a new three hour requirement to already packed curricula or converting existing courses to a new format would be impossible unless the course could address other needs. The two most obvious possibilities related to our students' struggles to collect, analyze, and synthesize information as well as the inability of many GSU students to use even basic technology, let alone discipline-specific data bases. We began calling the course a "Writing-Research-Technology" (WRT) course, but later changed the name to "Writing-Information-Technology" (WIT) at the behest of colleagues in the physical sciences who did not like the term "research" banded about so casually. We didn't quibble. Given the overall condition of the WAC program, it seemed like the time for a little "WIT" was long overdue. More importantly, this new identity would allow us to move colleagues away from earlier thinking which viewed writing and conveying "course content" as separate activities. Appendix 1 depicts our proposed program as of the Fall 1999 Trimester.

Throughout the fall term, reactions to our ideas ranged from generous support to complete disagreement. Although the outgoing president loved the idea of directed self-placement, she remained silent about curriculum revisions. The interim provost also supported self-placement, but she too was skeptical about curriculum revisions. In various meetings with faculty members, our ideas regarding directed self-placement and the WIT courses were generally well-received, but like the chief administrators at the time, most were skeptical given the WAC program's sordid history. Strong resistance was also voiced. As one long-time division chair put it, "We think WAC is a pain-in-the-ass, and we want less of it, not more."

### **The "Not-So-Silent" Spring of 2000**

Despite such remarks, the Fall 1999 Trimester generated many positive discussions of directed self-placement and WAC. By the Spring 2000 Trimester, more decisive events began to unfold.



At the request of the Director of Student Development (who by this time was serving as the interim associate provost), I called ETS in February 2000 to inquire about the status of the TSWE. The reason for the call was innocent. The test booklets which GSU had been using throughout the five-year “temporary period” were worn-out, and the Student Development Office needed to obtain new versions of the exam prior to testing for the Spring/Summer 2000 Trimester. None of us was sure that the TSWE was still available because it was not included among the exams listed on the ETS web site. I called so that alternative instruments could be discussed if necessary.

The call proved informative. I learned that Governors State had unwittingly violated several ETS policies related to the TSWE over the period. As a result, we were asked to destroy the test booklets in our possession, and we were sent revised TSWE materials as well as information on a variety of other writing exams which were “potentially better suited to our needs.” In the hours following this phone call, the University Examination Committee was reconvened—it had not met in several years—and within days of the call, the committee had voted against the continued use of the TSWE. However, because students test weekly at GSU, because the major testing session for the Spring/Summer 2000 Trimester had been arranged and was closing in, and because discussions of directed self-placement were ongoing, the Exam Committee voted to replace the TSWE with another objective test (Conventions of Written English). At its first meeting, the committee settled on this course of action but after hearing the compelling testimony of the Writing Center coordinator (the person who administers the proficiency exam for writing on behalf of the Office of Student Development), members vowed that this new arrangement would in fact be temporary this time. Indeed, before that first meeting concluded, several committee members were already intrigued by directed self-placement as the Writing Center coordinator and I described it.

A few weeks later in March 2000, I shared with the Deans Council a report which summarized the dubious condition of the existing writing-intensive program. They reacted with shock and dismay, and (not surprisingly in hindsight) I left the meeting charged with writing a follow-up report which would: A) outline the steps necessary for correcting the situation, B) offer the WAC Board’s recommendations for training and appropriately compensating WI instructors, and C) discuss the overall cost of the “repairs.” At first, this report proved impossible to write because



the assignment asked me to revive a program that had never worked. However, the follow-up report ultimately served as a powerful tool for promoting the WAC Board's ideas related to WIT courses and directed self-placement. It was sent to the Deans Council as well as the new university president who began a month later in April 2000.

With the permission of the interim provost, I met with the new president in May 2000. In this meeting, I sketched the current state of WAC and proficiency testing, and I overviewed the steps which would be necessary to "restore" the WI requirement. After I outlined the steps—steps which included approving guidelines for WI courses, reviewing syllabi for *all* new and existing WI courses, and requiring workshops of all faculty assigned to teach WI courses—he asked what I wanted to do.

I indicated that the time for the WI approach toward WAC at Governors State had passed, and that the history and ill-will surrounding the requirement would likely preclude success. My specific comment was: "The steps outlined in this report would simply position us to repeat the mistakes of the past." I then shared with the president the possibility of developing in each academic division and/or college a Writing-Information-Technology course which would be required of all students. I also explained the WAC Board's (and by this time, the Examination Committee's) proposal for launching the WIT program with a system of directed self-placement. This system, I explained, would allow students to enter into the WIT course either directly or via English 301, depending upon a guided self-assessment of their own writing abilities when they enter the university. At this point, he began to smile.

Near the end of our discussion, the president said that the WAC Board should begin developing materials related to the WIT course for consideration during the upcoming strategic planning initiative. When I mentioned that adding a curricular requirement would not be easy or cheap, he responded, "Eric, quality never is." Regarding directed self-placement, he asked that we proceed more cautiously. He recommended conducting a pilot study as soon as possible. He reminded me that ultimately democratic processes would determine the outcomes for both WAC and directed self-placement, but he indicated that the WAC Board would have his support. It was then my turn to smile.

### **The Current Status of WAC and DSP at Governors State**

Between May 2000 and May 2001, I met with the Board of Trustees, the Deans Council (several times), the Faculty Senate, colleagues from

the community colleges, and numerous GSU faculty members and students to discuss the future direction of proficiency testing and WAC at Governors State University. Through these sessions, it became clear that at least four additional things needed to happen to give the proposal its best chance for success.

First, the portfolio requirement concerned the faculty members. Most worried about assessing and then storing the portfolios, and junior faculty members were convinced that the work would fall disproportionately upon their shoulders. Moreover, several programs were already requiring different kinds of portfolios in capstone courses, and they were against anything which might disturb the status quo. As a result, the WAC Board decided to eliminate the requirement from its proposal and return to the portfolio discussion later. Appendix 2 represents the revised proposal.

Second, regarding the writing-information-technology courses, it became clear that before the colleges would implement WIT courses at the division level, they wanted to see the course in a generic format. As a result, the WAC Board and I developed a WIT course for undeclared students, non-degree seeking students, students enrolled in the Integrative Studies program, and students enrolled in the Board of Governors program—a B.A. program that credits students for life experience in addition to previous college course work. A WAC Board member and I created the course which, similar to many junior-level WAC courses offered at other schools, covers critical thinking and research methodologies in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Physical Sciences. We also arranged to team teach the course for the Fall 2001 Trimester through the College of Arts and Sciences.

Third, regarding DSP, concerns lingered about its feasibility among working adults who may know but not necessarily make the best placement decisions due to pressures from families and/or employers regarding swift degree completion. As a result, the WAC Board and I decided to invite Dan Royer to campus in April 2001 to make a presentation and address concerns. The day was a terrific success. Many people who described themselves as “on the fence” regarding DSP subsequently considered it appropriate for GSU students. In fact, those who coordinate math placement on our campus are also now moving to a system of directed self-placement. That said, there is ample more work to be done.

Specifically, we currently lack a mechanism for directed self-placement. The former administration eliminated compulsory new student ori-

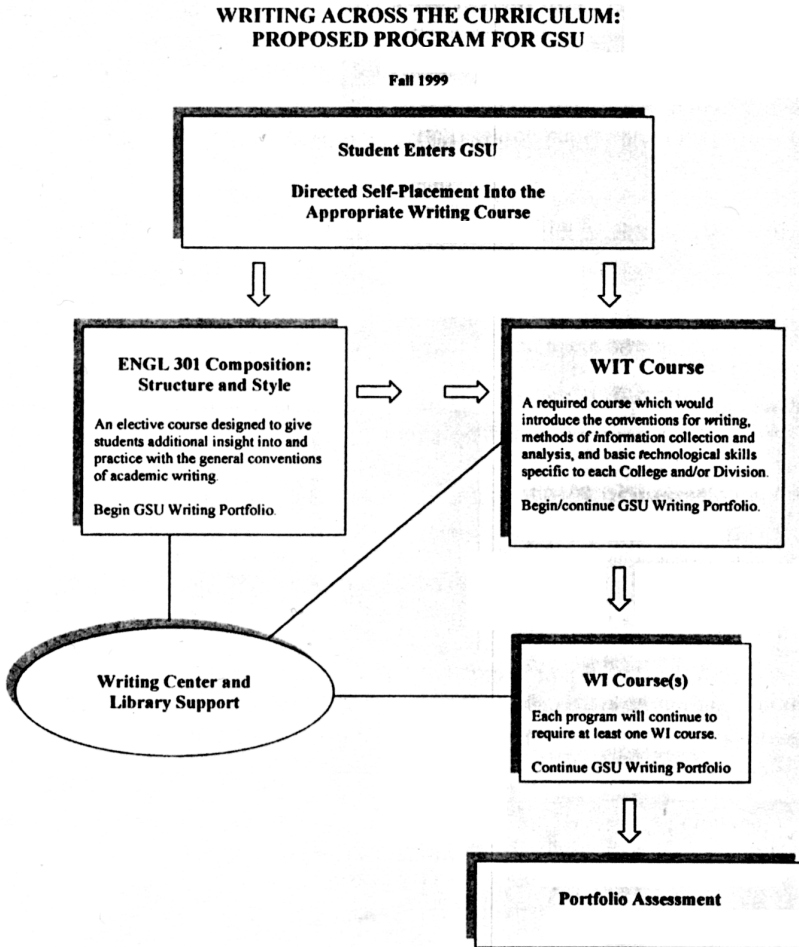
entations because these “inconvenienced” our adult student population. However, during the university’s strategic planning process last year, widespread support for reinstating mandatory orientation was voiced. If mandatory orientation is brought back—and it appears now that it will be—we will need to offer sessions in both campus-based and online formats to accommodate our many distance learners. Currently, the WAC Board is working with the Office of Student Development to create the orientation and an accompanying web site which will enable DSP online. We plan to pilot the system in fall 2002. As part of the self-placement process, students will reflect on their past writing experiences in school and on the job using a checklist similar to that in Appendix 3. They will read exemplary student essays from the respective colleges, preview syllabi for ENGL 301 and the WIT course relevant to their major, and take a self-scoring, diagnostic grammar exam. Based on these indices as well as any informal consultations with faculty regarding their writing, individual students will then make their course selections for writing. Math placement will follow a similar format, and registration holds will ensure that the orientation and placement process is completed.

Finally, the stakeholders made it clear that a consistent message regarding the administration’s long-term commitment to the success of WAC had to be sent. This happened via the strategic planning process when “demonstrable academic excellence” was identified as the university’s highest priority. This pursuit of quality occasioned the creation of a Center for Quality in August 2001, which now coordinates GSU’s assessment program, faculty development initiative, Graduate Studies Council, and WAC program. The Center is administered by the Assistant Provost/Director of the Center for Quality, and I have the honor of originating the position. Although my new job still does not guarantee a full-scale implementation of either the WIT proposal or directed self-placement, it does appear that both the university community and the curricular context for a successful WAC program are nearly (re-)established at Governors State University.

The next time that I teach ENGL 301, I anticipate that the students will be smiling on that first night of class because they will want to be there. Undoubtedly, I will share their enthusiasm.

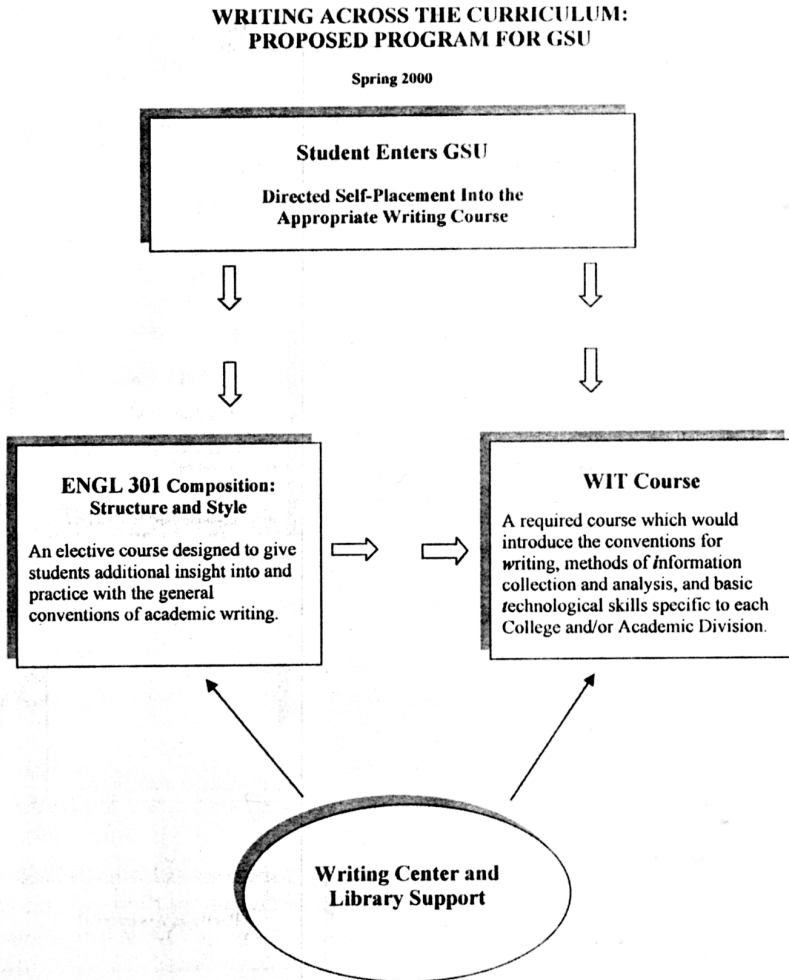
## Appendix 1

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR GSU, Fall 1999



## Appendix 2

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR GSU, Spring 2000



### **Appendix 3**

#### **Checklists for Directed Self-Placement at GSU**

##### Characteristics Which May Indicate That ENGL 301 Is Your Best Choice

- I have been out of school for a long time, and I don't write very much in my current job.
- Although I have recently taken a college writing course at another school, I am still unsure about how to write research papers and other kinds of papers which require sources.
- I am nervous that I am not really ready to write for upper-level courses in my major.
- I am uncertain about the rules of standard written English (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage), and I often make errors.
- I have used computers for researching, drafting, and revising essays, but I am still unsure of myself with such technology.
- Overall, I do not think of myself as a strong reader and writer at this point in time.

##### Characteristics Which May Indicate That You Are Ready for a WIT Course

- I have recently taken college writing course(s) and I have excelled.
- I have not taken a college writing course in a long time; however, I frequently write formal documents (e.g., memos, letters, proposals, reports, etc.) in my current job, and I am confident when composing such documents.
- Although I do not yet know the conventions for writing in my major, I am comfortable writing research papers and other kinds of papers which require sources.
- I know the rules of standard written English (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage), and I make very few mistakes when writing.
- I have used computers extensively for researching, drafting, and revising essays.
- Overall, I consider myself a strong reader and writer who is ready for advanced writing assignments.

---

# WAC Techniques and Applications

---

---

*“I received your letter about the fruit flies...”*: Interdisciplinary Scientific Correspondence as a Means of Transforming the Laboratory Experience

*Susan Manahan, Gardner-Webb University*

*Tom English, Guilford Technical Community College*

---

In both general studies and major science courses, an important goal is to establish the process of doing science – not just the facts. Scientific ways of knowing and communicating are an important part of the process, a part that is sometimes neglected in courses that survey particular fields.

One means of evaluating student understanding of methods employed in science is through assessment of writing that attempts to convey the processes involved in doing particular scientific investigations. Traditional laboratory reports provide a well-worn way of doing this, but their formal structure can inhibit student expression. Alternative assignments can allow students to explore the material interactively and openly, and thus give better insight into their grasp of concepts and procedures. One such alternative is to shift the audience so that the students must write about the experiments for someone other than the instructor.

Examination of the correspondence between scientists working on different projects provides insight not always apparent from the final publications of the research results. These letters reveal a glimpse into the inner workings of scientific inquiry, shedding light on procedural details, flashes of recognition, and the struggle toward understanding. Given this



model, we have developed a cross-disciplinary assignment that asks genetics and astronomy students to articulate the concepts behind their experiments and observations through correspondence between class members. The project was implemented during fall 2000 at Gardner-Webb University.

### **The Participating Classes**

The astronomy and genetics courses at Gardner-Webb have followed somewhat traditional laboratory sequences during recent years. Assignments varied from the traditional lab reports to task-oriented exercises with result/observation forms and follow-up questions, but each course included a handful of long-term projects that required regular observation and analysis.

The Honors astronomy class has been offered at Gardner-Webb in alternate fall semesters for the past decade. Twelve students were enrolled in the fall 2000 class, and over half were freshmen. The course satisfies the university's core physical science requirement, so it is possible that it could be the only physical science course in a student's program of study.

By coincidence (thus simplifying the logistics of the assignments) the genetics class also had 12 enrollees. The course is a 300-level biology offering whose general population is non-freshman science majors. It is offered every fall semester. The fact that each class had twelve students allowed one-to-one partnerships for the letter-writing program, so no strategies for dealing with unmatched numbers were necessary.

### **Motivation**

The idea for this project arose from discussions about our disappointment with the progress students were making in ongoing laboratory assignments involving effort outside of the actual laboratory period. A common goal of both courses was to give the students a laboratory experience which included more independent investigations and required critical analysis and interpretation of results. Attempts to do this through traditional laboratory reports had betrayed a lack of effort to keep up with extended assignments. The work students did perform was often shoddy, rushed, incomplete, or improperly sequenced. Lab reports often contained poorly interpreted data, or in some cases unfathomable results, and the students did not always provide adequate discussion of the laboratory

purpose or procedure in their write-ups.

In a few extreme cases, students who waited too long to complete the assignments gave up because they were overwhelmed with the work which needed to be finished. These students never handed in final results and did not learn the major points of the assignments or benefit from the critical thinking experience needed to finish the lab work.

Astronomy observing projects had been disappointing because of a general lack of useful results. On one level, it was obvious that these problems stemmed from the fact that the students did not make enough observations to achieve the assignment objectives. Discussions with the students indicated, however, that the problem was not just laziness. Many of the students did not fully grasp the concepts behind the observations and were reluctant to expose themselves by asking questions. Thus as the semester rolled by and the students made inferior observations, or worse procrastinated due to their uncertainty, opportunities for learning were missed.

One year featured an uncomfortable early November meeting in lab where eight students presented their data from six weeks of regular observations of two variable stars. Only a dozen observations were offered, and no analysis could be done with the scant data. This episode did get their attention, and after several questions (never asked in the prior weeks) were cleared up and the observing criteria were re-established, project-salvaging data were collected over the closing weeks of the semester.

In prior years, genetics students completed lab experiments in biotechnology by performing DNA electrophoresis. These laboratory experiments were completed over two or three lab periods, and students were then required to submit a lab report on their results. These lab reports were often hastily written, poorly organized, and lacking pertinent information. Many students were following the directions for completing the lab assignment but did not understand or could not explain the main objectives of the exercise.

Situations like these called out for fresh approaches that would transform the assignments. To encourage students to confront issues earlier, we developed the scientific correspondence project. This required them to explain concepts, procedures, and results of the long-term lab exercises throughout the semester. Our intention was to raise the level of critical thinking and avoid past problems through peer interaction and inquiry.

We hoped that student correspondence between the classes would force the students to learn the details of the topics early in the semester so that they could articulate them in the letters. With the background material more firmly established through this approach, we expected better results. Additionally, we hoped that the shift of audience would encourage students to communicate their results more clearly. Knowing that not just their instructor would be reading the material, but that persons with less background would also have to be able to understand their writing, might be enough motivation for the students to submit more complete work.

### **Implementation**

After a brief discussion of the assignment in the opening lab meetings, the scientific correspondence model was established through distribution of examples from well-known scientists in fields related to the courses. It was somewhat difficult for us to find readily available correspondence between scientists, especially in the library of a small university in rural North Carolina, but examination of the holdings at several larger state-universities turned up a number of collections of material relevant to this assignment. Easy access to archival material would provide an even greater body of material to use as examples for projects of this nature. The correspondence used for this project included exchanges between George Ellery Hale and Albert Einstein (Wright), and Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace (Marchant). Letters to a variety of persons from Caroline Herschel (Herschel), William Herschel (Lubbock), and Gregor Mendel (Iltis) were also used. Mendel's correspondence was especially applicable for our assignments because it included notes on both genetics and solar observations.

Information was also distributed about expectations for the project. In the astronomy class this was done through a detailed guide sheet before each letter in the correspondence sequence (see Appendix). Students in the genetics class were given a guide sheet to help them initiate the correspondence with the astronomy students. For subsequent letters the genetics students were given oral instructions on expectations, rather than specific guide sheets. Questions about the letters or their format were discussed in class as needed, and occasionally specific discussions were necessary when the letters got ahead of the lecture material or topics required clarification. These discussions were sometimes initiated by students, but in most cases initiated by the instructors in anticipation of prob-

lems.

Following the initial laboratory exercises, students in the genetics class composed letters introducing themselves and their projects. After introducing themselves, they gave a brief overview of the fruit fly experiment. Explanations of their results would be forthcoming in additional letters. The letters were distributed to the correspondents in the astronomy class, with photocopies to the instructors for evaluation. The astronomy students responded to these letters, offering information about their own work. The resulting series of response/report/inquiry letters presented an interactive forum through which observation and analysis were shared—a dialogue was established between members of the corresponding classes.

The Fall 2000 astronomy class was taught as a "Great Works" course modeled on the history of our understanding of the universe, and the laboratory and observing exercises were built around this concept. They included measurement of Earth's circumference, observation of the seasonal variation of time and position of sunset, detailed sunspot observations (with a co-reading of Galileo's *Letters on Sunspots*), observations with homemade telescopes and position-measuring devices, and analyses of planetary motions and moon phases. Topics for the correspondence were limited to these projects, with emphasis placed on the solar observations.

The genetics laboratory experiments were divided into three areas: Mendelian genetics, cellular genetics, and molecular genetics. Extended laboratory experiments in which the students were to write letters included fruit fly matings and DNA electrophoresis. In the first extended lab, fruit fly matings were conducted to observe genetic inheritance of eye color and wing structure. After successful completion of the matings, student correspondence consisted of explanations of the statistical analysis conducted on the results. The second extended lab consisted of isolation and digestion of bacterial plasmids which were characterized via DNA electrophoresis. Explanations covering procedures and interpretation of DNA gel results were the major topics for later correspondence.

The criteria for evaluating the letters included clarity, interpretation and analysis, and response. We looked for clarity of explanation of concepts, procedures, results, and conclusions for the experiments and observations reported. It was necessary for the letter-writers to provide introductory information for their correspondents, who were assumed (with good reason) to have little background, so that the objectives of the lab

exercises could be understood. Interpretation and analysis of the data were included as a basic requirement of the laboratory exercise, allowing the instructors to gauge the student understanding of the basic science being carried out. Finally, the students were instructed to interact with their correspondents about the materials in the letters. We wanted them to ask questions and make comments about the information they received. Scoring of the letters for the project grade depended on the individual instructor, but each included these three criteria as the major evaluation points.

### **Results: The Letters**

The students were asked to introduce themselves in the first letters, but many were reluctant to talk much about themselves at first and instead dove right into the experiments and observations. There were a few exceptions, and one student even went so far as to indicate how he could be spotted on campus. The letters did get more conversational later as the connection was established between correspondents.

The old adage that “misery loves company” was borne out, as many took the opportunity to express sympathy and echo frustrations when experiments went awry or struggles with difficult concepts were indicated. “Don’t be discouraged,” one astronomy student wrote after learning of problems with the fruit flies, “now that you have the female flies, I am confident that you will figure out your results soon.” Troubles with the fruit flies led the genetics class to pool their data for part of the studies, and brought many sympathetic responses from the astronomy students. “I’m disappointed to announce that our fly experiment has failed,” one genetics student wrote, before detailing some of the partial successes and offering extensive error analysis. “I’m sorry that the second half of your experiment was unfortunately termed a failure,” came the response. “It is obvious to me that you were up against many complicating factors... Still, it seems we learn from mistakes, though what we learn is not necessarily what we were searching after.”

Some correspondents were familiar with the experiments the other classes were undertaking, and thus could comment without being led along. For instance, one astronomy student wrote, “You seemed to be having trouble with your electrophoresis! I’ve done that experiment before so I know how difficult it is. That was a great idea to put the child’s DNA in between Father 1 and Father 2! I’ll bet it made it a lot easier to compare

the lines."

Sometimes frustration was expressed from the receiving end: "In your latest letter I found Chi Square analysis very confusing to try to comprehend without some form of explanation to go along with it. In your next letter if you could attempt to include at least some minimal explanation I would appreciate it a great deal." Many general questions appeared throughout the letters, for example: "It seems like the cross breeding of fruit flies is a pretty interesting experiment. My first question to you is, by how much do the vestigial wing types vary from the wild wing types? This observation sounds like it would be very difficult to make with the naked eye, because I wouldn't imagine these flies to be very big."

Some students, after struggling to provide their explanations, even expressed their own recognition of the difficulty involved in presenting the concepts clearly. "Wow, that is a difficult procedure and kind of difficult to explain," one student penned before adding that she'd be happy to answer any related questions. The connections between correspondents extended beyond information exchange and sympathy/frustration to include recognition of the general connections between the courses. One student reflected in his second letter, "Your class experiments seem to parallel ours in that both are hands-on explorations made in the same manner as those done in the formative stages of each discipline. Both of us, it seems, are acquiring an appreciation of the difficulty and peculiar frustrations of these pioneering experiments."

Most correspondents attempted to address the questions posed, typically with success: "I enjoyed reading your letter, and I understand what you are doing a lot better now." Occasionally, however, the exchange brought us into uncharted territory.

Since the astronomy class took the historical approach, we didn't really get into the cause of sunspots early on, but rather explored Galileo's arguments about their nature. So when the genetics students inevitably inquired, "I'm curious about what a sunspot really is...", there was a flurry research and in-class questions from the astronomy students. There were similar unexpected twists in the genetics class. One astronomy student conjectured, "Is it possible that a 'bottleneck effect' will occur, resulting in an abnormal representation of mutations because of the limited number of flies?" Upon reading this the genetics student was visibly shocked. She had not heard of such a thing, and did not know how to

respond without doing further research. A class discussion unfolded from this inquiry, necessitating coverage of population genetics a few weeks earlier than planned.

Some students soldiered on without bringing questions from the letters into the class discussions. When one student was asked if Earth's motion influences the results for measured solar rotation, she thought the matter through and produced a lengthy (and correct) discussion of parallax effects. The exchange unfolded before the planned introduction of this particular wrinkle into the general course presentation. A few of the astronomy students took advantage of the letters to talk about other things they had learned in the class, such as meteor showers or eclipses. For instance, one student shared, "I want to make sure that you are aware of the eclipse on Christmas day this year. It should occur around lunchtime on the 25<sup>th</sup>."

The letters also provided opportunities for the instructors to catch and correct misconceptions. After receiving feedback about a miscue in an earlier letter, one student wrote, "The method I mentioned in the last letter was the correct one, but the diagram was not completed...." The letters thus transformed the standard method of feedback and revision by allowing both instructor and peer to interact with the material in a different format. In the traditional lab reports used before this project was introduced, there was little opportunity for such interchange.

### **Discussion: General**

As can be seen from the samples above, results from our first attempt at this project were promising. Students had to deal with inquiries coming from different viewpoints, thus they were challenged to confront concepts in new ways. Some found themselves conducting additional research to answer the questions posed. The pressure to impress an audience apart from their instructors helped drive the students to make sure they had good observations and data to exchange. The sequence of letters also helped the instructors give feedback on the progress of the observations and experiments. As a result the students prepared more complete interpretations of their results and observations, helping themselves and their correspondents to better understand their experiments.

This was a popular assignment, as most participants freely admitted that it was a refreshing twist on the traditional laboratory report approach. Students compared their responses, and as the semester progressed they



eagerly anticipated responses from their peers, as demonstrated by an interesting incident in the genetics class. Roughly mid-semester the students received the results from a recent test, followed immediately by the distribution of the letters from the astronomy students. One student had become so interested in the correspondence that she bypassed the test grade to look at the latest letter.

The need to communicate forced the students to confront aspects of the material or details of the observation/experimental processes that they may have glossed over in the past. This was especially evident in regard to the terminology related to the various projects. Faced with the necessity of explaining the details of a procedure, students made sure they had a firm grasp of the vocabulary associated with the projects at hand, and some even provided glossaries of terms with their letters.

### **Discussion: Astronomy**

The observing projects that were reported in the letters were generally successful when compared with prior experiences. Though some students were still somewhat lacking in their observations, there was no episode like the variable star experience of the previous class.

The sunset observation program, which had been assigned in several earlier editions of the honors course, generated more and better observations in fall 2000 than in any other year. Given the wealth of observational data, the students were able to predict future behavior, explore the reasons behind the observed phenomena in detail, and communicate the nature of the phenomena.

In the case of the sunspot data, which required daily observation in order to gain a clear understanding of the phenomena at hand, the observing duties were split up during the week and data were shared among the students. Certain students claimed ownership of the project to such an extent that they participated in observations even on days they were not assigned. On several occasions, when observing opportunities were missed by other students, the data collected by these conscientious students helped make the letters successful for all astronomy participants.

As a whole, the class performed much better on the final summary assignments related to each of the observing projects than had been seen in the past. Having to keep on top of these projects all semester long so as to produce informative letters certainly played a role in this success.



### **Discussion: Genetics**

The letter writing assignment also proved to be a successful tool to assist the genetics students in completing their assignments with greater understanding. The students were more focused on lab work and worked harder to complete their assignments. Most of the lab groups completed the fruit fly matings, allowing students to share data to conduct statistical analysis on their results. In a few groups, when the results did not agree with the expected hypothesis, the students were able to contribute reasons for these disagreements. One popular mistake made by several students was mating flies to get results that matched their hypothesis. Since the hypothesis was wrong, they would never successfully complete this mating. A few of the students realized this only after trying to write letters to explain what happened. They discovered they needed to change the hypothesis about what happens in the matings and not try to get the data to fit that hypothesis. Rarely has this level of critical thinking occurred in previous years when students conducted fruit fly matings. Successes extended beyond the fruit flies. The students' discussions concerning molecular genetics were quite thorough and organized. The students also were more enthusiastic about their interpretations of the gel electrophoresis than in previous years.

### **Conclusion**

The scientific correspondence was a positive experience for all involved. Both the students and the instructors looked forward to reading the letters discussing the successes and failures that were occurring during the extended lab assignments. The correspondence provided an additional opportunity to observe student understanding and depth of exploration of the topics.

There is certainly room for improvement in this assignment. Students did not always adhere to the general instructions for content of the letters. We tried not to be so rigid that creativity was inhibited, but sometimes the students avoided certain issues or topics. For instance, many did not properly introduce themselves in the initial letters, and despite the occasional insightful question, many letters tended to be short on inquiry and long on explanation of specific results. Providing more detailed information on the expected interaction might help alleviate these shortcomings.

We were fortunate to have the same number of students in each class,

allowing one-to-one partnerships for the letter-writing program. Before the semester we discussed potential strategies for dealing with unmatched numbers, such as working in small groups, allowing an instructor to participate as a mock student, or not having permanent partners. None of these options, however, would have worked as well as the matched partnerships we were able to apply.

In summary, the interdisciplinary correspondence project was worthwhile because it transformed the reporting of scientific results from the traditional dry lab report style to an interactive format that emphasized communication and inquiry. With expansion of the audience to include peers as well as instructors, we saw more thorough explanation and attention to detail in the analysis than in past editions of the courses (where the students wrote for the eyes of the instructors only). Students seemed to enjoy the new approach and even took the extended assignments more seriously. In addition, they were exposed to, and inquired about, topics from fields outside the disciplines of the courses in which they were enrolled, thus broadening their horizons.

### Works Cited

- Herschel, Mary Cornwalis. *Memoir and Correspondence of Caroline Herschel*. New York: Appleton, 1876.
- Iltis, Hugo, *Life of Mendel*. New York: Hafner, 1966. 224.
- Lubbock, Constance, ed. *The Herschel Chronicle: The Life-Story of William Herschel and His Sister Caroline Herschel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933.
- Marchant, James. *Alfred Russell Wallace: Letters and Reminiscences*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1916. 120-140.
- Wright, Helen, John Warnow, and Charles Warner, ed. *The Legacy of George Ellery Hale*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972. 66.

## **Appendix: Sample Guide Sheet for the Letter-writing assignment**

### ***Honors Astronomy Writing Project: Scientific Correspondence***

#### *The First Letter*

Objectives:

- A) Introduce yourself.
- B) React to the information you found in the letter to you.
- C) Describe how you found the circumference of the earth.
- D) Briefly discuss your plans to observe sunspots and sunsets.
- E) Describe how our solar observations are made.

A) No long-winded introductions are necessary here - you will be given a letter from a student in the genetics class, so you'll already know the identity of the person with whom you will be corresponding. In addition to telling who you are it might be informative to say something about the nature of this class.

B) Read the letter you received from the geneticist. It should tell about an experiment they are working on this semester in such a way that you can follow what they are doing (and why they are doing it). Feel free to comment and inquire about the material in the letter. It is perfectly appropriate to ask questions about matters that you don't understand. If you're curious about anything that they're doing - ask about it!

C) By the time you write the letter we will have attempted to make observations associated with our effort to measure the circumference of the earth. Describe the observations we made and how we use them to find our result.

D) Introduce our two long-range solar observing projects: (1) the sunset observations, and (2) the proposed sunspot observations. Discuss them in general as you see fit. You'll have an opportunity to go into more detail regarding the sunsets in a later letter.

E) Adapt the sunspot observation description you turned in to me last week to describe for your correspondent the details of how the solar observations are made and what is visible.

Make sure that your discussion/description allows the reader to get a clear picture of what’s going on. They should be able to understand enough of what you’re doing to allow them to ask a few questions about your observations in their next letter.

Our letters should be a little longer than the ones we received from the genetics class - not only do we need to tell about our observations, but we also need to respond to the material sent to us. You should be able to generate about 2-3 single-spaced typed pages.

It might be informative to include sketches and diagrams with your descriptions. If you choose to do so, make sure that they are explained clearly.

It is also instructive to include discussion of any problems you are having making the observations or analyzing the data. Not only will this give your correspondent something to inquire about, but it can inform the instructor about any troubles that you are having.

---

# Establishing Author-Editor Interdisciplinary Learning Communities

*Donna A. Gessell and Irene Kokkala,  
North Georgia College & State University*

---

Imagine undergraduate students gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to write and publish peer-reviewed journal articles. Conceive of student interactions across disciplines that foster conversations about writing. In the process, envision students internalizing rhetorical and editorial skills, including evaluation and critique. Establishing author-editor interdisciplinary learning communities is the way we have attempted to accomplish these goals.

Starting in 1998, we have connected a total of eight different courses between the department of Biology and the department of Language and Literature in order to expose science majors to a unique opportunity to improve their writing and to provide English majors an opportunity to serve on something resembling an editorial board. The premise is that the biology students generate manuscripts using directions to authors found in peer-reviewed journals in the field of biology. The pretense is that their “laboratory reports” are products of authentic research. Meanwhile, the English students take on the role of expert editors. Though not content experts, the English students represent an educated audience that expects clear writing, the kind of writing that the biology students should be able to achieve. The courses we connected in these learning communities range from senior down to first-year levels, courses such as BIOL4480: Developmental Biology, BIOL3430: Cell Biology, BIOL1260H: Honors Environmental Science, ENGL4901: Teaching English, ENGL3050: Applied English Grammar, ENGL3100: Advanced Composition, ENGL1102:

English Composition II, and ENGL1101: English Composition I.

It is important that the collaborating colleagues share similar pedagogical goals. Together they draw up a detailed project design, including the choice of appropriate courses in both disciplines and appropriate procedures and tools of assessment. These choices are not static; they can actually be quite flexible, responding to specific needs of specific courses. For instance, the type of writing assignments may vary: a laboratory-based course could generate experimental data to produce an authentic research manuscript, while other courses could be better suited for the production of literature-based review articles. In other words, in any given semester student authors may submit three or four laboratory reports in the form of manuscripts, or they may write essays in the form of review articles. The step-by-step outline of the experience during a semester involves careful planning and timing of each assignment. Multiple assignments need to be scheduled far enough apart to allow for a sequence of reviews, feedback, and revisions. Technology is also critical. Although we form the learning communities, members of which share experiences, individual identities are kept secret across the disciplines through the use of technology.

The directions to the biology student authors are an imitation of standard academic science journal directions. They are an amalgam of guidelines assembled from various journals in the field of biology and include directions for writing each segment, such as the abstract, introduction, methods and materials, results, discussion, and list of references, as well as overall requirements for formatting, language use, and length. The directions to English-student editors mirror those given to the biology students, with additional emphasis on specific language usage appropriate to scientific journals.

Biology students work individually or in groups of three or four, depending on class enrollment, producing manuscripts that are submitted electronically, identified only through a code word or phrase. Editorial comments and proposed grades are returned electronically by the English students' groups of four or five, which are also identified by code words or phrases. For instance, names of groups have been as esoteric as "EDVOTEK" and as obvious as "BioBuddies." The only individuals who are aware of the membership of groups are the two instructors. The groups are formed randomly early in the semester and they are maintained throughout all assignments. One group of English students edits and comments

on all of the products of one group of biology students, maintaining the continuity of editorial observations and allowing the accurate recording of errors and improvements in writing.

Instructors act as conduits, responsible for properly distributing papers and comments and for maintaining continuity of the anonymous communication. During the exchanges, each instructor reviews the work of each group, checking to make sure that the work is done according to directions. Furthermore, the biology instructor critiques the content of the biology papers and returns those comments along with those of the English students, whose comments and evaluations are based solely on rhetoric, logic, and grammar. The grades awarded by the English students are considered as recommendations—ultimately grading is the sole responsibility of the biology instructor. Grades for the biology students are determined by their drafts and final papers on a twenty-five to seventy-five percent ratio. The biology students are expected to make a choice of which recommended changes to incorporate in order to improve their manuscripts. After all, not all editorial comments are useful.

English students are responsible for capturing the entire experience in reflective essays at the end of this multifaceted project. These essays must contain, as supportive evidence, examples of the kinds of textual, marginal, and end comments they have made. The English students' grades are determined by the quality of their comments as well as their reflections. The instructor evaluates the specificity and accuracy of the intertextual notations, as well as the perceptiveness and usefulness of the marginal and end feedback. Students are encouraged to suggest the existence of problems with the texts rather than merely correct or edit them. For instance, if there is an unclear referent, the English students need to identify the problem by demonstrating their confusion rather than correct the problem by supplying a concrete noun.

At the end of the project, all of the students evaluate the experience, answering discipline-specific questionnaires. Students also do intra-group peer review to clarify the role and individual effort each member has contributed to the group work. Upon completion of the assignment, each group is awarded a grade by the instructor. However, students are given the opportunity to adjust grades within a twenty percent point range. In this process, each member of a group anonymously recommends a weighted grade for each of the other members of the group. The instructor averages those recommended grades to calculate each student's final

grade. Further qualitative intra-group peer review is performed through the use of an evaluation tool, which includes questions relating to the amount of work performed by each member of the group, availability of the individuals, and overall participation in the project.

The key part of the process for establishing author-editor interdisciplinary learning communities is the instructors' detailed preparation of the students by outlining expectations and clearly articulating specific demands of manuscript writing and editing. The biology instructor gives her students extensive instructions on manuscript preparation, outlining characteristics that are used for assessment, such as format—including figures, tables, and citations—and the specific type of content found in each individual portion of the manuscript. She further prepares them by explaining the need for anonymity, and by discussing acceptance and evaluation of peer feedback. Additionally, the instructor monitors students' attitudes and progress throughout the project. Meanwhile, the English instructor informs English students of all the expectations given to the biology students and teaches them how to critique, and how to weigh equally the three areas of rhetoric, logic, and grammar in determining a grade. The English class discusses appropriate content and tone for the textual, marginal, and end comments.

We give students in both courses extensive guidelines for how to work effectively in groups. Both of us (an English and a biology instructor) predicate the discussion by pointing out that everyone will have to work in groups in their future careers. We also discuss with our respective students the importance of working in groups, emphasizing the need for each individual to participate fully. Students are asked to resolve group problems among themselves, and we suggest that they will have failed in the project if they cannot. We anticipate the most common problem that groups will have—establishing meeting times—by suggesting students meet electronically through email or WebCT environments.

We ask the biology students to rotate roles every assignment so that each member experiences each role and the workload is evenly distributed. These roles include searching for relevant literature, performing statistical analysis of the results, presenting final results in the forms of tables and figures, and drafting the various segments of the manuscript. All members of each group are expected to participate in the final review of each draft or manuscript.

A significant part of the preparation is to make all students aware of



the purpose of the project, which is to develop their skills as authors and editors. In almost any assignment, if students do not grasp its purpose they will not perform as well as if they fully comprehend the outcomes. Though students often display apprehension at the beginning of the project, they eventually comprehend the effects of the process, respond to the demanding tasks, and recognize the ultimate benefits.

Throughout our collaboration, we have made adjustments based on our observations, both anecdotal and assessment-based, with the ultimate goal of making a change in the writing performances of our students. Initially, we exchanged three assignments between our courses, with first drafts written by the biology students, submitted for comments, and returned for revision. The final report was then awarded a grade by the biology instructor. By the third assignment, we became sensitive to the fact that the biology students minimized their efforts put forward to write the first drafts; they were expecting to receive excessive feedback from the English students and then perform massive revisions and additions to produce their final reports. That observation prompted the reconfiguring of the grades the following semester: a percentage of the grade for each report was given to the first draft and a greater percentage value awarded to the final report. Our recommendation would be 25 to 40 percent for the draft and 60 to 75 percent to the final report, depending on the type of assignment.

Another variation to this process was introduced based on the way papers were written—whether by individuals or in groups. Occasionally we had classes with small numbers of students, and we decided to require individual papers instead of group reports. This change reminded us of the advantages of group work. We noticed a reduction in the average grades of the individually composed papers compared to those awarded to papers composed by groups. Although we cannot yet statistically support this comment, we believe that group work on average results in better products. The lower average performance levels in individual products could be a random phenomenon of one class, but we don't think so as we observed that group work protects against individual weaknesses, delays, and lack of electronic fluency. Among the students who performed individually, there were serious problems regarding students who were weak in writing skills, inconsistent in meeting deadlines, and unable or unwilling to learn how to use email or WebCT. In all the other courses, where group work was expected, these symptoms, although present, were

mitigated through the strength of group performance. Not until we observed these individual performances did we realize how much intra-group interaction improved performance. Students who were assigned individual projects tended to communicate only with the instructors, despite our encouragement to seek advice from other students. This lack of peer communication extended to every aspect of the assignment: students asked the instructors for assistance in everything from writing, to content, to technology, to revision. However, students given the same assignments in groups relied on one another for information, ideas, and support.

The exception to what is now our policy of requiring group work is the writing of the final self-reflective essay for the English students. This assignment was completed as a group activity the first semester, and student evaluations suggested that the exercise would be more meaningful if each one of them could explore individually the differences the project made in their editing and revision skills. In all subsequent semesters this final reflective essay has been an individual assignment, and each student has extensively critiqued improvements in these writing skills.

When we assign group work, each group does all three assignments throughout the semester. We ask students to rotate individual contributions and duties among themselves, but we expect them to perform final integration of the report together. Everyone has input and responsibility for the grammatical and stylistic integrity of the final project. Therefore, this synthesis can be achieved only by groups with strong group skills.

Our future plans include further investigation of the benefits of intra-group interaction. We are accumulating evidence that most of the time weaker students paired with stronger students benefit from this peer-based learning and improve their grades. Students' individual talents and interests complement one another to improve the composite performance of the group. We also plan to conduct a longitudinal study to determine how students have subsequently incorporated the experience—particularly in writing, editing, and group work—in their personal and professional lives.

In fact, the benefits of group work are not specific to the students. We, as instructors, have gained from the collaborative nature of the experience, particularly because of the extensive assessment methods we have employed and the subsequent self-examinations and continual discussions between us. A vital and exhilarating point of our process is the constant scrutiny and revision of our methodology. Since the first semester we engaged in this collaboration, we have made modifications based on in-

put from our students: perceptions from our interactions with students during the semester, information gained through assessment tools, and overall student performance. However, assessment has extended beyond our teaching experiences to include our professional development activities. We have continually researched the existing literature—from sources such as the *Journal of College Science Teaching* and the *English Journal*—and discussed the project with our peers within our disciplines and with colleagues at various conferences. Colleagues have been generally enthusiastic, valuing our project as an innovative use of writing and considering it as a model for implementation in their own teaching. Like our students, we have grown immensely with the self-reflective essays we have written for presentations and publication. We too have learned from our interdisciplinary author-editor community.

---

---

# Scaffolding Writing Skills for ESL Students in an Education Class at a Community College

*Diane D'Alessio and Margaret Riley,  
Bronx Community College, City University of New York*

---

## **Introduction**

During the spring 2000 semester, the writers of this article, an Education Program faculty member and a CUNY Writing Fellow at Bronx Community College (BCC), collaborated on converting a core Education course into one of the College's newly designated writing intensive courses. We planned to integrate familiar WAC approaches, such as learning logs and reflective journals, into the course's traditional high stakes writing assignments, which included a formal lesson plan, a summary of a journal article, and a research paper. Along with improving writing skills, we hoped that the aspiring teachers enrolled in the course would use writing-to-learn exercises to become more reflective about their own learning processes as well as to master the course material.

Our experience was notably successful by several measures: grades were significantly higher and writing in formal writing situations improved greatly. Student evaluations affirmed that students found the additional writing assignments helpful both for enhancing writing skills and understanding the content of the course. In this article we want to share our findings and examine what we think made this initiative effective. Chief among them:

- *Scaffolding assignments, including low stakes writing, that supported students in preparing formal high stakes assignments, improved outcomes dramatically.*
- *Low stakes writing assignments were particularly helpful for teachers of non-native speakers of English. Fully 98% of students enrolled in*

the class were ESL students. Several times during the semester a low stakes writing assignment revealed that students seriously misunderstood key words and concepts. Once the language issues were clarified, which sometimes involved simply defining a single word, students were able to successfully complete the assignment.

- *The correlation between the disciplinary context and WAC activities advanced student learning.* The course focused on methods of teaching reading to elementary school students. Just as children learn to read through a dynamic and developmental process, writers gain skills from opportunities to experiment and practice. Students viewed class writing activities as paralleling the reading process they were studying. In this class writing was not the “sudden death” experience associated with traditional academic assignments like a midterm exam or a term paper. As one student remarked in her evaluation, “I learned that people learn to write by writing. Writing is not such a frightening experience to me.”

### **Background and Context**

BCC’s WAC Program is part of the City University of New York’s (CUNY) WAC Initiative, which aims to improve student writing by encouraging faculty from all disciplines to incorporate more writing assignments into the classroom. All 26 CUNY campuses are involved in the Initiative, and university administrators have allocated significant resources to the effort: faculty development seminars were funded on each campus, and writing fellows, doctoral students from the City University Graduate Center, were assigned to work directly with faculty in developing discipline-related writing assignments.

BCC’s WAC Plan focuses on developing writing intensive courses in the disciplines. Writing intensive courses are disciplinary courses that require students to complete several “high stakes” writing assignments as a major component of their grade; it is planned that eventually all BCC students would be required to enroll in at least two writing intensive courses prior to graduation. In spring 2000 we focused on converting Education 16 (Methods of Teaching Reading) into a writing intensive course.

Education 16 (ED 16) is at the center of the Education curriculum, which is a five-course sequence that prepares students to work as para-professionals in the public school system or to transfer to a four-year baccalaureate program in the field. It focuses on teaching reading in the primary school grades and requires that students complete discipline-spe-

cific assignments, such as a formal lesson plan, and demonstrate facility in interpreting disciplinary discourse by preparing a summary of a professional journal article. Students enrolled are often involved in some form of experiential learning, such as field placements and internships, in which they work directly with elementary school children. Many are also parenting a child who is learning to read and bring their personal experiences to classroom discussions.

BCC's Education Program attracts many adult students, especially women with children who are returning to school primarily to prepare for the workforce. In spring 2000, ED 16's enrollment was 26 students. Twenty-four spoke Spanish rather than English as a first language, but students' relative fluency with English varied radically: some students had attended high school in New York City and had at least four years of exposure to written and oral English; others were recent immigrants to the United States, with limited vocabulary and facility with the language. Highly motivated students, they brought passion and energy to the classroom—participating eagerly in discussions, engaging with avid interest in class group work, and bringing personal impressions to classroom discussions. Education Program faculty members often expressed frustration with the great disparity between students' understanding of the content as evidenced in classroom discussions and group activities and their ability to convey that knowledge in writing.

We set out with the obvious goal of improving student writing, but we also hoped to use written assignments to support student learning of disciplinary content. The intent was to help students integrate knowledge throughout the course, relating what they were learning during that session to prior knowledge. Through the use of reflective journals, we hoped to help students acquire a greater understanding of how children learn to read. Students were asked to write in their reflective journals about a weekly session for ten to fifteen minutes in class. However, if time was needed for an engaging class discussion to continue, this low stakes writing assignment was completed out of class.

At times, the students were asked to respond to a structured question encouraging the integration of content covered earlier in the course. For example, after students had spent several weeks reading, discussing, and viewing videos on the value of read-alouds, shared readings, independent and guided reading, and reading strategies, they were asked to write a response to the following question, "How can a teacher help support the

use of strategies for good reading?” Very often the students were asked to write a response to a less structured question, “How did the material we discussed today increase your understanding of how children learn to read?” At other times, students were given the opportunity for free writing. As students wrote their responses, the instructor and writing fellow also wrote in their journals, hoping to give the students an understanding of why people write.

For all required reading assignments, students were asked to keep learning logs in which they summarized information or responded to important questions. At the beginning of the second session, the writing fellow modeled a learning log technique, which many students adopted. She extracted a meaningful statement from the text, recorded it on the left-hand side of the page and wrote an explanation of the significance of the statement on the right-hand side of the paper. Through the use of learning logs, we expected that students would assume greater responsibility for having the material read before class, enabling them to actively engage in meaningful cooperative learning group activities and large group discussion.

In this article we want to focus on several key points in the semester, look closely at what worked and what didn’t work in the classroom, and then examine class outcomes, including grades, course completion data, and student evaluations.

### **The Importance of Scaffolding**

*The Goodman Quote:* We thought we had prepared students for a low stakes writing assignment by the third week of the semester. They had written several entries in their reflective journals focusing on their observations about how children learn to read and kept learning logs of their reading assignments, which covered similar material. The instructor had distributed material that discussed “Cues, Strategies, Behaviors and Skills,” and the students had engaged in activities where they applied their learning about strategies for using the three cueing systems. There were also meaningful small and large group discussions that focused on the importance of observing children as they read.

Fifteen minutes before the end of one class session, students were given a low stakes writing assignment: to respond to Kenneth Goodman’s statement “children’s reading behavior gives us ‘a window on the reading process.’” Expecting students to discuss how good readers self-moni-

tor and problem-solve when reading, we were puzzled by the responses. The following were typical:

*Student A:* I agree with Kenneth. I had learn a lot in these class. I learned that different kinds of behavior and strategies children develop through their reading, and how teacher can develop the reading process.

Children reading behavior change according their knowledge and experience they have. When they those element they use strategies that would held them to understand they reading they may use self correction.

*Student B:* Kenneth Goodman is saying in this quotes is that children are very careful in the way they talk and have many different strategies going thru there minds. Every child has a reading method and use different technique to understand the passage better.

In the first response, Student A struggles with basic English syntax to at least show that she has some understanding of the topic and knows the materials well enough to refer to strategies like self-correction. Student B gives a pleasing answer that does not focus on the quotation itself, suggesting that she does not understand how the phrase “reading behavior” is used in its disciplinary context.

The responses from the class did not demonstrate an understanding of Goodman’s statement. Yet during class discussions they talked easily about a range of reading behaviors—self-monitoring, crosschecking, sounding out, and confirming. We looked at the assignment and realized that it was both cognitively and linguistically demanding for second language readers and writers: it required a subtle understanding of how the word “behavior” was used in an educational context, one that students did not yet grasp.

Their responses led us to provide students with additional scaffolding activities to assist them in interpreting Goodman’s statement. They were asked to write responses to the following two literal comprehension questions:

- 1) List and explain strategies good readers use in their reading.
- 2) Why is it important to teach children how to use the three cueing systems in their reading?

In a related activity, the students read in their text about a young boy’s “Journey to Literacy.” In this “journey”—and we were careful to point out the metaphoric use of the familiar word, clarifying that there was no



actual traveling involved in the text—the child’s teachers continually assessed his reading behavior by watching and listening to the child while he read. The child’s instructors observed and supported his use of problem-solving reading strategies, such as re-reading and sounding out unfamiliar words. Students completed learning log entries on the “Journey” assignment, giving them opportunities to experiment with the use of disciplinary discourse.

A week later, we reviewed Goodman’s statement and asked students to discuss the quotation and what they had learned about the strategies that good readers use. Their responses demonstrated a greater understanding of the term: “reading behavior” as well as greater fluency and ease with their discipline’s vocabulary.

*Student A:* When children are reading they send signs that teachers should pay attention for a better assessing and support. These signs can be fluency in reading, decoding words, linking new words to prior knowledge and the ability to predict when the learner is reading a story.

*Student B:* If a student is reading and having problems pronouncing many words in the passage we know that the student is having problems with the graph phonic cueing system. The students are unable to pronounce every word because he or she does not understand the letter. Another reading behavior is when the student reads a passage over and over because they do not understand. This action shows that the student is having problems understanding the meaning of the sentence. On the other hand, good readers show good reading behavior. They can maintain fluency. They do not get bogged down in words, they monitor their own reading and correct errors. Good readers know how to find the meaning of a new word through reading the passage.

Scaffolding activities—low-stakes writing assignments as well as small and large group discussions—assisted students in writing about higher order questions. Writing was used as a tool to support and strengthen critical thinking. We began to see how scaffolding activities helped these students perform at a level beyond their initial capability. This was clearly demonstrated when students were asked to create a literacy lesson plan.

*The Lesson Plan:* Education 16’s first formal high stakes writing assignment was a literacy lesson plan, an assignment that had often challenged students who had difficulties with its formal requirements and with

writing learning outcomes. After careful consideration as to how this assignment could be scaffolded, the instructor first modeled a literacy lesson plan using chart paper. We then turned the college classroom into a print-rich environment filled with Big Books, children's books of various genres, chart paper filled with children's stories, markers, magnetic letters, and alphabet charts. The students worked with members of their cooperative learning groups examining materials, selecting books, and discussing a literacy lesson plan each of them would want to create and implement. We circulated among the groups encouraging students to focus on defining learning outcomes. Using several language skills in scaffolding activities as preparation for the formal writing assignment clearly assisted students. The lesson plans were creative, well-planned, and well-written. It was obvious that students were becoming more confident about their writing and less anxious about their writing assignments.

*The Essay Question:* Prior to midterm examinations, we reviewed student performance in previous midterm and final examinations, finding that students tended to provide a "data dump," in John Bean's (1996) memorable description, rather than a focused answer to the particular question. To help students prepare for the midterm, we decided to incorporate a brief scaffolding assignment into midterm preparation. In the midterm review session, after the instructor reviewed course content, the writing fellow gave a 10 minute presentation on typical essay questions and effective approaches to answering them. Students then worked in groups to review and classify several sample essay questions. As a low stakes assignment, they then wrote introductory sentences appropriate for each. Basic and brief, this exercise resulted in students' notably confident approach to writing midterm essay questions. They wrote with greater clarity and purposefulness, which was reflected in higher grades.

*The Summary:* Students' performance on another high stakes assignment was improved through a brief intervention and a low stakes writing assignment. In reviewing previous summary assignments, we observed that students seemed confused about the imagined audience for such an assignment. Presuming that they had to explain every technical phrase used in an article led them to fill pages with unnecessary explanations and definitions. We developed another scaffolding assignment to address this problem.

After initiating a classroom discussion on the summary and reviewing its basic components, the writing fellow asked students to consider

their audience for the writing assignment, asking such questions as “Do you think you have to explain what a Venn Diagram is to Prof. D’Alessio, or can you assume that she knows what it is?” To help them further focus, she asked: “Do you think your *opinion* is central for this writing task?” Modeling appropriate ways of presenting information seemed to help students greatly. Students approached the assignment with great confidence, and the results were greatly improved in comparison to previous responses. We also found it remarkable that every student in the class turned in the assignment on the day it was due, especially since it was assigned late in the semester, when students were juggling many demands for papers and reports in other classes. It was as if once students felt confident that they fully understood a writing assignment, they were eager to attempt it.

### **WAC in an ESL Environment**

*The Woven Incident:* While both the course instructor and the writing fellow had years of experience working with BCC’s multi-lingual student population, we both were taken aback by our occasional inability to anticipate students’ linguistic difficulties. Low stakes assignments proved to be very helpful in alerting us to misunderstandings that stemmed from language differences. An earlier example cited demonstrated this: in writing about the Goodman quotation, students did not understand the use of the word “behavior” in a disciplinary context; when they wrote about “reading behavior,” they described the child’s outward physical behavior, whether they were restless or paying attention. Another example is what we both now refer to in a sort of shorthand as the “woven incident.”

During one class session, students were engrossed in watching a videotape that showed a New York City elementary school teacher working with a series of third grade students in individual reading conferences. While she encouraged the child to read aloud, the teacher kept a “running record,” noting when the child hesitated over a word or self-corrected an error, skillfully incorporating assessment into the reading session. The students eagerly volunteered comments and insights when their instructor paused the tape for discussion.

The videotape prompted so much discussion that the instructor had to hurry through the last moments of the class session, giving a low stakes writing assignment as homework rather than as an in-class assignment. They were asked to respond briefly to a question related to the videotape:

“How was assessment woven into the teaching process in the videotape?”

Several hours later several students from the class arrived at the writing fellow’s office asking for help with the assignment. The three were so anxious that they were nearly mute. One handed the fellow a hand-written answer to the assessment question; the others watched intently to gauge her response. It was a nearly incoherent paragraph. Preceded by commentary about how hard it is to be a teacher in New York City owing to large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms, it related how the teacher in the videotape had to rush around to get to all her students. The paragraph ended with a platitude about the importance of education for all children. The puzzled fellow, who had attended the class and seen the videotape, asked the student questions to determine why she had perceived the teacher, who appeared supremely serene and confident on the tape, as being harried and rushed. The student wordlessly pointed to a definition of “weave” in the battered and barely adequate Spanish-English dictionary she had with her: the definition described how one uses “rushes” to “weave.” A few more questions clarified the situation: the student had written down the homework question that asks how assessment was woven into the teaching process, realized she did not know what “woven” meant, managed to find the root verb “weave” from the irregular participle “woven” in her dictionary, but could not decipher the dictionary’s strange use of what for her was the familiar verb “rush.” Out of desperation she seized on the concept of “rushing” as she understood it and applied it to the situation she had seen on the videotape. She knew she was wrong, just as her two silent companions knew they had seriously misunderstood the question. They were both worried and dismayed for they had understood the videotape and participated enthusiastically in the classroom discussion that followed.

Once the “woven” problem was resolved by brief consultations with another dictionary and a few clarifying questions, the fellow conferred with the instructor. At the beginning of the next session, the instructor reviewed the homework question, eliciting from the students their understanding of its meaning. Many of students had similar problems with the metaphoric use of “weave”; once they understood the word in the context of the sentence, they were able to rewrite their answers to the question. Not surprisingly the rewritten answers were a great improvement over the homework assignments. The low stakes assignment disclosed the confusion, which could then be clarified. Had such a question been

given in a midterm examination, many students would have written about overburdened NYC teachers, and the instructor would have been bewildered by their responses.

### **The Disciplinary Connection**

Introducing WAC techniques into this particular education course proved to be an excellent decision. Since the content area focused closely on the acquisition of language skills, there was a clear correspondence between ED 16 students developing their own successful writing strategies and the early learners described in their textbooks. In addition, there was a dynamic combination of elements in the ED 16 classroom that made it an excellent environment not only to improve writing skills but also to stimulate higher order and critical thinking. ED 16 was a multi-modal class: students were asked to speak, read, listen, write, and manipulate the materials they might use in an elementary school classroom. Students could activate their own prior and personal knowledge of the subject with the theories about which they were reading and writing. They remembered their own struggles with reading, especially in an unfamiliar language. Since many were interns or involved in field placements, they were often witnessing early reading activities and participating in literacy lessons in elementary school classrooms while they were enrolled in the class. Their own children's experiences as learners was often foremost in their minds when they read. Students had many ideas and observations to contribute, and the ground was well-prepared to encourage them to express their thoughts.

### **Outcomes**

Students' enhanced understanding of subject matter and improved writing skills were reflected in their performances on midterm and final examinations and in high stakes, formal, graded writing assignments. Improvements in student grades and class completion rates were striking when compared to the previous semester: all enrolled students passed the course (20% failed in the previous semester), and 56% earned either an A or a B (compared to 31% in fall 1999). All students completed class requirements; there were no incomplete grades.

Students were asked to comment on course writing assignments, and their responses were universally positive. (Please note: these are verbatim responses given in an in-class low stakes writing assignment.)

“The writing in this course helped me to self-examine myself in writing lesson plans on how effective I am each time I teach.”

“The writing in this course has affected my performance by helping me in thinking and writing more abstractly . . . Critical thinking was something I’ve learned in Education 16. The writing has enhanced my understanding of what’s to be expected of me in a workplace. My writing in this course has advanced to a level I thought wasn’t possible.

“This practice had impact on my performance in more than one way. Now my writing flows more easily. The way I read for my own enjoyment is full of critical thinking. I learned that people learn to write by writing. Writing is not such a frightening experience to me.”

“The writing in this course affected my performance a great deal. I know how to express my ideas better and I have a better understanding of the articles I read.”

“I try to use my words and not plagiarize. I know what to do when I have to write a summary.”

### **Next Steps**

Of course, we are curious to examine whether or not the improvements we saw in the ED 16 students are sustained over time: whether or not they have developed the habit of mind” to keep learning logs, analyze the audience for each writing task, and “self-examine” their own teaching and learning. There is anecdotal evidence that many have; many Education students take a capstone course, ED 40, and instructors teaching that course have reported improvements, especially in the writing skills of former ED 16 students. We hope to find a way to follow these students as they pursue careers or continue their education to observe whether this ED 16 experience continues to influence their writing and thinking.

### **Reference**

Bean, J.C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

---

# Writing in the Age of Technology: Plundering Art for Ideas about Writing

*Cara Murray, The Graduate Center of CUNY*

---



This is a picture of the Web Design class that I worked in as a Writing Fellow<sup>1</sup> at Lehman College in the Bronx, New York. What we are doing is at the heart of all art classes; it is what art teachers call the “critique.” In the two art classes that I worked with in the Fall of 2000 and the Spring



of 2001, Web Design and Life Drawing, the critique happened two to three times in the semester, and involved students evaluating other students' cumulative work in a public setting. All art classes use critique, from painting and sculpting to 3d imaging and computer animation. In the classes that I observed, the process of critique depended upon a sense of staging: there was a clear delineation between the work and the reception of the work, the work and the audience. I would argue that the critique is the performance center of art class, and as such it dramatizes the contours, borders and boundaries of art as a discipline. And I want to suggest that there is much to learn from this age-old performance. We can gain from crossing over the disciplinary divide and adapting learning techniques developed and perfected in Art to our own needs. Art is one of the few fields in which students are encouraged and, more importantly, trusted to master the material on their own, while they are shown how to form tight and long-lasting learning bonds with their fellow classmates. Critique facilitates both the sense of mastery and the community-building skills necessary for a continuation of life-long learning. In this paper, I will discuss the role of what I perceive to be the two most important pedagogical tools of the art class: critique and play. And I will suggest that we think about ways of incorporating more critique and more play into our writing classes.

Take one more look at the photo. Something about this picture does not belong. The smiling faces? No. The look of deep engagement with the material? No. Both are characteristic of critique. It is something else. Look at the edge of the photo; look at what is bleeding out of the frame. You see two bulbous computers; in fact, the room is full of computers. If you were in there, you would notice that each and every computer screen in the room displays the student-constructed web site that is the object of the critique. So what is wrong with the picture? For an entire semester, as I participated in the class and took part in critique, it never occurred to me that we didn't have to gather around one computer. Instead, we could comfortably sit in front of our own computer, as we perused the web site along with its author. That would have been far more comfortable, but for some reason, and it is not for the sake of the picture, we opted for the less convenient and more unreasonable way of viewing each other's work. We crammed into the north-west corner of the room, propping ourselves up against the wall, leaning over a desk, jockeying each other for space and a view. What dawned on me in my



last class as a Writing Fellow is the conundrum that this picture points to: why in the most technologically advanced class taught at Lehman were the professor and class joyfully flouting the most obvious benefit of technology, simultaneous exchange? Here students were designing their own web pages and fluently using HTML, Adobe Photoshop, Dreamweaver and Illustrator. And here they were participating in one of the most old-fashioned practices of all: grouping.

I have two hypotheses about why we “grouped”: one has to do with community, the second has to do with movement, and together they tell us something about the nature of critique. Communities can be created in many ways, and I am not arguing that an on-line community is not a community. I am suggesting that critique needs community, and that Art recognizes that students’ growth depends upon communal input into their work. I have seen critique done in three ways: the first is where one student is chosen to discuss another’s work. All names are put into a hat, and from that hat a name is withdrawn. That student sits in front of the computer and navigates through the site of another student’s, whose name is also drawn from the hat. She makes constructive comments about the student’s work. In the picture, this is what is being done. The student directly in front is discussing the student to her right’s work. Those gathered around her are listening to her critique. The second way that I’ve seen it done is that all students are expected to say something about the student’s work, in a directed free-for-all. I think that this way is less productive, because not every student will talk, and it doesn’t teach students the art of sustaining a critique over a period of time, as does the first option. In the process, a certain depth of critique is lost. And the third involves the professor critiquing the student’s work, with everybody listening. This is my least favorite approach to critique because it only teaches the students how to listen to critique, if that. It doesn’t give students practice in producing a critique.

Critique is like portfolio review with a twist. Portfolio review in art classes, as in writing classes, usually involves a closed-door, one-on-one review of the students’ work from the point of view of the professor. Imagine portfolio review done publicly by and for the entire class, rather than privately by, and perhaps for, the professor. Critique often depends upon a body of work: in a design class, this means that a web site consisting of five or six web pages is reviewed. In a life drawing class this means that eight to ten pictures that represent a student’s movement

throughout a period of the semester is reviewed. Reviewing a body of work focuses students' attention away from the grammar of a piece and away from a close textual analysis. Instead they are asked to recognize a broad body of work and develop a way of talking about work that goes beyond a close reading. It is important that this process be communal. Art already recognizes the conventional nature of critique, and that recognition is built into the process of critique. In other words, critique unveils criticism to be a conglomeration of socially constructed voices. If students can begin to see the constructed nature of critique, then they are more likely to feel licensed to participate in or invent their own forums for critique and consensus making.

Critique is something that is more easily done in art than in composition, and that is because artwork is more immediate in its appeal. It is readily read. If we were to do a critique of a student's written body of work, it would have to be incorporated as a homework assignment, rather than as simply an in-class activity. Over the Web, or on the blackboard, or in manuscript, students would have to read five or six works of another student and then comment upon that work in an open forum. Every student would have to do the reading to enforce the communal nature of the critique. If the class size is thirty students, then students must read about 150 works a piece. Is this viable? Are we willing to make room for this kind of activity? From what I've seen, art classes would be unimaginable without critique; how can we imagine critique happening in a composition class? This imagining process is worthwhile, for through critique, students learn to make judgments and detect the connection between making judgment and making work. They are taught that judgment at heart is communal.

Here is a model of critique that may work. The professor divides the classroom into distinct "critique communities" at the beginning of the term. If the class has thirty students, she could create six communities with five students each. The professor should have five targeted "critique community" writing assignments identified on the syllabus at the beginning of the semester. The "targeted" assignments would be spread throughout the semester: perhaps one in September, two in October, and two in November. For these assignments, students would have to turn in one copy to the professor, and one to each of their group members; thus each group member would be responsible for reading four other students' work once or twice a month. Needless to say, assignments should be short, two

pages in length, for this to work. For the following week, each student in a community would have to write a half-page narrative critical response to the four works that he received from his community members. All four of the reports would be copied and returned to the professor and to each member of the community. Students would also keep a copy for themselves, along with the writing that prompted the narrative response, so that each student would eventually accumulate five portfolios, her own and the four other members of her community, and five critique sets. All of this pre-work would be in preparation for the final critique, which would happen in the last month of the semester. Before this critique takes place, students would have had practice writing and reading critiques, and they would have developed a common body of knowledge within their communities. They would begin to see what it means to create and recognize a body of work. The final month of the class would be reserved for the staging of the critiques. In this staging, the class would be split into three groups, with two communities combined per class, so that one community would be in the know, and the other would not. The object of the critique would be for each student in each group to create a cohesive, interesting narrative that could appeal to both their own community, familiar with the student's work that is being critiqued, and to a wider audience, who is aware of the method but not familiar with the particular work. In other words, she would invent a narrative that would captivate a wider audience. The student performing the critique would have to read all five pieces again, but would have her accumulated responses to guide her through the process. Each student would critique only one other student's work, but would have had the opportunity to have written about four different writing styles throughout the semester. It is important in this final critique to stress its performative nature. This can be done by holding the critique in a different space: a hall, another classroom, a stage, a gym, an office. The student performing the critique should be encouraged to bring props: slides, overheads, home-made movie clips, PowerPoint displays, pointers, chalk, or just a stage voice, elevated style, or grandiose manner. But whatever they do, students must attempt to make others feel moved by their critiques.

When we think about community, we think about settlement, even stasis. But recently, travel theorists, such as James Clifford, have revealed the traveling nature of community. I want to dwell for a minute on critique, community and movement. Nothing is harder than to move around

in a room full of computers. They engulf the desk, leaving little room for a notebook. They weigh more than a small child and are more difficult to carry. In a classroom full of computers, the act of moving into a circle is impossible. Seeing the teacher is also impossible, as I learned when I sat in the back of the classroom and found myself shifting in my seat to glimpse the teacher. Seeing other students is nearly impossible. Thus, movement is as important to critique as is community.

For any movement to happen at all, we had to literally get up out of our seats and move, walking around whole rows of tables rather than through desks and chairs. In the life drawing class, the entire class got up out of their seats and moved into the hall. What was dramatized was that we were moving physically from one space, a large, open, classroom, to another, a hallway. It would have been much easier to stay. To make this move, students had to put down their charcoal, pens, and watercolors, wash their hands, and close their drawing pads. Outside in the hallway, students' works from the past five years or so decorated the walls. We seemed to be moving from a space of production to a space of critique. In the web design class, we moved from our anchored, individual work stations, to one that now was symbolically embodying the communal workspace, one that it would appear to us all work was moving through, even though all computers could potentially be the sites of all work. I want to suggest that we were acting out the movement from individualized space to communal space, and that this built-in performance is what critique dramatizes.

When I asked to take the picture in the art class, the professor said, "Take two." In the first picture, he said, "Let's all look serious." In the second picture, he said, "Ok, let's all look like we're having fun." Since for most people in the art class serious work was fun, the result is that the two pictures look about the same in terms of people smiling and laughing. I'd like to use this metaphor as a bridge to the second half of my paper. Critique itself works this way – it is not all seriousness as we think it is. And play, the second subject of my paper, is not all fun and games. In the life drawing class, this struck me. Play was ninety per cent of what went on in the class, and play was very serious. Each class was like the other: a nude model sat in the center and students encircling him or her drew. For four hours they drew, and as the pose varied, they varied their drawings. Students did nothing but draw. They drew and drew and drew. By the end of the class each student had produced as many as forty draw-

ings, and as few as five. One may ask, what did the teacher do? Absolutely nothing. As we all know from being children, the best play happened far from the supervision of our parents. Of course, the filial analogy invites anxiety. What is to prevent play from descending into a free-for-all? Play in art classes is bounded by clear and challenging goals. Can you draw this body without using outlines, starting from the center? Can you draw this body using only cylinders, triangles and ovals? Can you capture this gesture in a minute? Give an art student a specific goal, and he will become enraptured by that goal, continuously trying to perform up to his best ability, drawing until he has captured it, and then changing the goal, and starting the process all over again. Play is the lifeblood of art classes. Not much has changed in drawing pedagogy since the beginning of life drawing classes. Life drawing classes are simply about drawing, and rely completely on students' sense of play. A student without a sense of play doesn't learn.

What would happen if we were to conduct a writing class in the same way that life drawing classes were conducted? What would that look like? Perhaps we would place something in the middle of the room, a text, a flower arrangement, a nude student, and students would be asked to write about it. And write and write and write. Impossible. Again we fear the descent into free-for-all. They would chat, complain to somebody about their no-good teacher, eat, or go to the bathroom and never come back. What stands in the way of creating a classroom in which play is possible? Is it the students? No, these were the same Lehman students as appeared in my composition classes. Three of them were literally the same. Looking to add a component of writing to the class, I asked the professor if students could take a break from drawing to write. Aghast, he responded, "What? They'd have no preparation. Our students can't write without preparation. It scares them." I would suggest that what stands in their way is not their fear, but their underdeveloped sense of writing as play. And this is what I attempted to develop in these very competent drawing students. I built small, in-class writing assignments that mirrored their drawing exercises. After students had spent twenty minutes trying to capture the intricacies of a human skeleton that the professor had placed in the middle of the room, I asked them to write for seven minutes from the point of view of the skeleton, and to limit their writing to observations, but to use those observations and those observations alone to develop the skeleton as a character. Another time at the end

of class, I asked students to plunder their neighbor's collection of drawings from the day and choose a piece that they wished that they had drawn. From there I asked them to write about two of the foremost skills that the drawer needed to produce the piece. Once the professor had asked students to visit a Chinese calligraphy exhibit that was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and write a mid-term review of the show. Students came back from their visit mumbling complaints that "everything looked the same." Of course, they had no training in calligraphy, so it was difficult for them to distinguish one master's stroke, style, tone and gesture from the next. I began to develop writing assignments around calligraphy designed to have students play in writing with the characters. Once I asked them to choose one character, from a source of ten, and redraw it and then write a possible explanation for why it looked the way it did. I asked them to write its history. Then, I provided them with its history and asked them to revise. Another time I asked them to analyze three characters written in the script of three different masters, comparing and contrasting what they saw, and paying specific attention to the words that they used in writing about the characters. What I found is that the more strictly I defined the assignment, the more likely students rose to the challenge of "play." When the professor asked the students to write about Chinese Calligraphy, they were at sea, but when I asked for short, crisp pieces about one letter only, they were able to play with the object. By scrutinizing it, turning it sidewise and upside down and pairing it with a friend or an enemy, they were able to finally "see" a distinct style and voice and develop one of their own.

I want to close with an observation about play and critique that I made when I compared the two different web design courses in which I worked. In the first class, on a regular basis the teacher spent ten to twenty minutes explaining a concept or introducing a new technological task. She then allowed the class to play for the next hour and a half. Then she introduced a new concept or technology, then asked the class to play for another hour. In the second class, the teacher introduced three or four concepts during the first three hours of the class, and then asked students to play for the remaining hour. In the first class the attrition rate was lower than in the second class, beginning with twenty five students and ending with twenty three. The second class began with twenty-five and ended with thirteen. Theoretically, the teacher had covered more content in the second class—nearly twice as much; however, the final web sites

of the first class were no less technologically savvy. In the first class what happened during playtime is that students were playing alone and playing with others, using that time to move around, ask neighbors for help, and admire their work. In short, they were forging their own critical spaces. In the second class, they didn't play, they didn't move. When the teacher allowed open lab after three hours of lecturing, they gathered their coats and book bags and left. By mid-semester the second class dwindled to a near half its original size, and those who came to the class already techno-savvy left the class a little more so. The rest either produced unsophisticated sites, paid their fellow-classmates to construct their sites, or dropped out.

When I suggested to the teacher of the second class that students should be encouraged to play more, he said: "But then I won't be able to cover as much material. They already have too much to learn in this class. They have to be proficient in technology and design here." I want to stress that students in the first class used technology in their projects that they were not taught by the teacher. I know that they used play time to ask students whose work they liked how they achieved certain effects. Because critique was a staple of the class, students knew that it was right to move around and use each other as resources. I learned from the two Art courses in which I acted as a Writing Fellow that critique and play work together, reinforcing learning techniques that will enable students to learn in and out of the classroom. But most importantly, I saw that what students learned in their art classes was to take joy in forging learning communities—a joy that would long out-last their four years within the University walls.

**endnote:**

1) In the Fall of 1999 the City University of New York implemented a program in which one hundred graduate students were hired and trained in WAC pedagogies. The Writing Fellows worked with professors on all CUNY campuses in all disciplines in order to help professors incorporate more writing and better writing assignments into their classes.

---

WAC  
and  
Writing Theory



---

---

# Teaching Audience Post-Process: Recognizing the Complexity of Audiences in Disciplinary Contexts<sup>1</sup>

*Mary Jo Reiff, University of Tennessee*

---

In a recent critique of writing across the curriculum that appeared in *Business Communication Quarterly*—an article aptly entitled “Whacking WAC”—Mary Munter proposes that business schools abandon WAC programs altogether. Topping her list of concerns are writing assignments that fail to address “defined business context[s] and audience[s],” envisioning instead the instructor as the primary audience (108). Professional communication scholars have long complained that writing in the academy assumes a monolithic audience instead of envisioning multiple readers with different needs and uses for information. Distinguishing between classroom views of audience and audience perspectives in professional or disciplinary organizations, Elizabeth Huettman agrees with Munter, noting that “academic writing assignments which place the teacher as the primary audience are atypical contexts for writing...[and] fail to account for the input that multiple audiences located within and outside the organization have on the creation of text” (270). Without going so far as “whacking WAC,” how can we reconcile this vision of the monolithic audience (usually the instructor) with the potentially multiple and conflicting readers and reading roles students will encounter in various professional and disciplinary contexts? In this article, I argue that the answer lies in a shift from traditional process views of writing that stabilize audience to post-process views that focus attention on the multiplicity of audiences, perspectives more in keeping with the complex communication that goes on in various disciplinary contexts.

The process view of writing has dominated our teaching of writing in the academy, from first-year composition courses to workshops on writ-

ing across the curriculum. Currently, process views of audience inform one of the central tenets of WAC, “writing to learn.” The concept of writing to learn, with its emphasis on writing as a tool for learning and problem solving, has its basis in early cognitive process models. Susan McLeod and Elaine Maimon explain the function of the writing-to-learn approach and its limited conception of audience:

The purpose of writing to learn assignments—journals, discovery drafts, in-class writing—is to use writing as a tool for learning rather than a test of that learning, to have writers explain concepts or ideas to themselves, to ask questions, to make connections, to speculate, to engage in critical thinking and problem solving. The audience for this kind of writing is the student him- or herself; it is writer-based prose. (579)

The process-oriented, writer-based nature of “writing to learn,” however, may be incompatible with its WAC counterpart, “learning to write” in multiple disciplinary contexts and for multiple audiences. McLeod and Maimon remind us that “writing across the curriculum includes both writing to learn and learning to write in the disciplines” and that “assignments that encourage students to learn disciplinary discourse can expand students’ notions of audience” (580). In the remainder of this article, I will explore how the movement from a process approach to writing to a post-process view challenges the cognitive constructs of an imagined or invoked audience and, with its emphasis on public, situated communicative interactions, shifts the attention to multiple audiences who co-construct meaning. I will also examine writing assignments from across the curriculum that envision audience as a more dynamic, interactive concept and acknowledge the potentially multiple and conflicting audiences writers will encounter in various disciplinary and professional contexts. Finally, I will explore the implications of post-process perspectives for our teaching of writing and audience. By challenging the stable, monolithic audience of the classroom (the instructor or writer as sole audience), a post-process approach offers an alternative to “whacking WAC.”

Writing specialists—particularly those who lead WAC workshops and assist in WAC curriculum development and assignment design—would do well to challenge the perspective of audience aligned with the process tradition, which posits an abstract, generalizable collectivity. Much of the discussion of audience in the field of rhetoric-composition during the 1970s and early 1980s comes out of the process tradition and focuses on

“audience analysis” as an initial step in planning to write or as a prewriting activity. Audience analysis is primarily a writer-based activity that involves collecting facts about the potential audience imagined by the writer. Often following heuristic models, writers are taught strategies for identifying audience based on the description of demographic variables and analysis of shared beliefs, values and background knowledge. The process is very linear, with writers first defining audience in response to questions such as, “What is the audience’s physical, social, and economic status?” and then trying to adapt the discourse (through organization, stylistic devices and tone) to the audience. This approach has several limitations, such as the failure to acknowledge the co-constructive role of the readers who interact with writer and text. In the process tradition, audience analysis comes at the beginning of the process while audience participation comes at the end, casting readers in roles of passive recipients who exist apart from the discourse.

This fixed and linear process approach has been challenged recently by post-process theories that call such stabilizing strategies into question. A leading proponent of the post-process movement, Thomas Kent, identifies three main tenets of post-process perspectives: that writing is public, that writing is interpretive, and that writing is situated. Communicative interactions, according to post-process theory, are dynamic, relational and situated in shifting contexts and thus cannot be reduced to a generalizable process. As Kent (1999) explains, “writing requires interpretation, and interpretation cannot be reduced to a process” (3). What, then, does this mean for our approaches to audience in writing instruction? For one thing, it means that our writing-to-learn approaches—process-based approaches that emphasize the production of discourse and envision the writer or instructor as the sole audience—need to be balanced by an emphasis on the reception of discourse. A post-process approach shifts the focal point from the writer’s process of analyzing audiences to the roles of readers who participate in and, along with writers, construct meaning. It is this more complex approach to audience that Munter calls for, an approach that situates communication and defines the various audiences and contexts that shape writers’ responses.

Traditional writing process perspectives—what Kent labels “Big Theories”—cannot capture the complex and shifting roles of readers who meet writers halfway and participate in these acts of communication. These “Big Theories,” such as cognitive process perspectives, envision the au-

dience as a mental construct of the writer—a unified image of readers that exists in the writer’s head, prior to discourse. This mental picture of audience is often described as the writer’s “sense of audience.” For example, in her study of actively publishing writers, Carol Berkenkotter notes that “the internal representation or mental sketch a writer makes of audience is an essential part of the writing process” (396). Typical of the writing process movement’s emphasis on the writer’s control over the text, it is the writer alone who imagines an audience and invokes the reader, a view that ignores the public and interpretive nature of communication in the post-process perspective. A post-process view would acknowledge that the writer participates in communication with multiple language users and that, given the situated nature of the interaction, the writer’s internal representation of those readers may not match up perfectly with the actual roles that multiple readers play.

The process movement’s privileging of the individual writer over the interactions between writers and readers is continued in later expressivist process theories, where the audience is envisioned as a heuristic used by the writer to motivate expression or, in contrast, is seen as a hindrance to the writer’s “authentic voice”—a concept the writer is better off ignoring, as Peter Elbow has argued.<sup>2</sup> Elbow advises writers to push audience into the background during the composing process so as not to impede the creative act. As a result, in the process movement, whether manifested in cognitive or expressivist perspectives, the audience is an abstraction created by the writer—a static component of communication that can be isolated and even tossed aside when it is not conducive to writing.

We need look no further than writing process textbooks to see instances of homogeneous and monolithic conceptions of audiences in the academy. For example, in a popular and widely used writing process textbook, Lisa Ede’s *Work in Progress*, student writers are given the following advice on ways to stabilize their various academic readers:

No matter what their discipline, your instructors are members of an academic community. As such, they share a number of intellectual commitments and values. . . . Although they might disagree about specifics, those who teach in colleges and universities generally agree about what it means to be a well-educated, thoughtful, knowledgeable person. (249-50)

Ede goes on to describe the shared values and beliefs of college instructors, who—regardless of discipline—expect well-developed and well-

organized papers with adequate details and evidence, and appropriate and concise language. However, such descriptions posit a unified, stable group of academic readers. Why not focus instead on the “specifics” about which the instructors disagree? This knowledge—that different instructors read with different disciplinary expectations and thus value different writing conventions and styles—could potentially empower students more than knowing what traits and values are shared. Instead of giving writers a “one-size-fits-all-readers” approach to audience, we need to enable them to navigate the multiple reading roles that they will likely encounter as communicators in various disciplinary and professional contexts.

To illustrate that these more complex views of audience do, in fact, exist in various disciplinary contexts, I examined sample writing assignments from across the curriculum. The assignments, which were collected as part of a recent WAC study,<sup>3</sup> indicate that instructors are already embracing more complicated notions of audience coinciding with post-process perspectives. It is not unusual, for example, to find writing assignments that challenge the abstract, unified audience of process perspectives and that instead identify multiple, layered audiences. For example, an engineering report assignment identifies multiple readers, including internal industry reviewers as well as external readers. Student writers are given the following description of audience:

Professional reports in industry will be read and used by many people with various backgrounds. Some will be engineers and others may not. Do not write your reports to the instructor . . . The beginning of the report should be written to a general audience with later stages of the report getting more technical in nature. The president of a company who may be a non-engineer should be able to read the beginning of the report and get a general idea of what was done and any conclusions or recommendations reached. Engineering personnel should be addressed in the report where specific technical points are developed.

The assignment identifies roles outside of the monolithic audience of the instructor as reader; in fact, students are cautioned to “not write . . . to the instructor.” The assignment then goes on to identify multiple audiences with various levels of experience, such as the non-expert company president and the expert readers consisting of engineering personnel. When it is no longer just the teacher who is defined as reader and when the context for the writing is defined outside the academic context, student writ-

ers must more carefully consider their readers' input and how that input shapes their responses. For instance, in the report assignment mentioned above, writers may need to define technical terms in the introduction while shifting to incorporate more technical terms, descriptions and illustrations as they draft the body of the report, which gets "more technical in nature." The assignment acknowledges that there is no generalizable process that describes the complex interactions of writers and readers. As readers' roles shift (from expert readers to nonexpert readers), their expectations also shift, thus creating a more dynamic interplay between writers' and readers' interpretive interactions.

In another assignment, an advertising professor assigns a magazine ad which will be "placed in *People* magazine for a national client, AT&T," indicating varying and conflicting reading roles of the primary readership for the ad (the readers of *People* magazine, who make decisions about the service) and a secondary audience (the client, who is affected by the decisions). Like the engineering assignment, this assignment challenges the monolithic audience and one-way communication between writer and reader in process perspectives and calls on student writers to negotiate among multiple and conflicting reading roles. This assignment illustrates how, from a post-process perspective, interpretation shifts with context and audience as writers strive to meet both the needs of the general readers of *People* and the needs of corporate clients of AT&T. Kent notes that "when we write, we interpret our readers, our situations, our and other people's motivations, the appropriate genres to employ in specific circumstances and so forth" (2). As writers consider various rhetorical strategies that they will need to employ to communicate with multiple readers—as in the assignments described above—they better understand the interactive and public nature of communication.

Robert Roth notes that having students envision multiple reading roles is "a way of opening up the possibilities of the text" (182). An openness to a wide range of potential readers, Roth argues, can expand reflection, exploration and development of ideas. Thus, while juggling multiple notions of audience may complicate the communicative act for students, such an approach allows more flexibility than following a rigid definition of audience and responding to a set of heuristics designed to describe this monolithic audience through analysis of character traits and demographic variables. The multiple-audience situation—which reflects the dynamic, interactive communication in post-process approaches—is much more

dynamic and fluid than prevailing audience- adaptation models, process-based models that portray readers as static and homogeneous.

Since, from a post-process perspective, moments of communication cannot be codified and communicative interactions are shifting and contingent, what matters is not the writer's consideration of audience prior to writing or the writer's guesses about what textual conventions will best invoke readers. What matters is the actual interaction between writers and readers as they enter into a "relation of understanding." Kent, drawing on the work of language philosopher Donald Davidson, distinguishes between what he calls "prior theories" (interpretive strategies like analyzing the audience's background or guessing their demographic makeup) and "passing theories" or strategies that writers and readers employ in the actual moment of interaction. All readers and writers, in order to communicate effectively, call on "codifiable shortcuts" like their knowledge of textual cues or disciplinary conventions, but more significant are the "passing theories"—the interpretive guesses that readers and writers make as they seek to match up interpretations during the actual moment of communication.<sup>4</sup> If entering into communication means entering into shifting relations with other language users in particular contexts, how can we create opportunities for student writers to engage in such interactions?

One answer to this question is to provide students with opportunities for encounters with readers who approximate their real readers (instructors who are members of the disciplinary community) but whose "prior theories" might not match up exactly with the writer's. For instance, consider the following description of audience for a Geology 505 assignment, a scientific paper describing rock formations:

An important consideration in a scientific paper is your audience. Who will be reading this paper? Assume that you work for a private/government agency and that your paper is going to be a technical report to your boss. You can further assume that the reader is familiar with basic (Geology 505 level) terminology. However, be sure to explain any advanced terminology that may be unfamiliar to anyone but an expert in your field.

In this case, the reader has a basic grasp of terminology used to describe rock formations but may not share in the writer's more expert understanding of "advanced terminology." Therefore, the writer, in constructing "passing theories" or interpretive strategies, must negotiate the boundary between an expert and non-expert audience. Put a different



way, the writer must negotiate between the teacher who will read as a member of the disciplinary community and the teacher who will evaluate the writer's knowledge of basic geology, thus mediating between writing to learn (in the classroom context) and learning to write (in the disciplinary context). A similar approach can be seen in this description of audience for a chemistry report assignment:

Write as though your report is to be read by a person knowledgeable in mass spectrometry but not familiar with this particular article, somewhat as if you were a referee reviewing a manuscript submitted for publication and you were reporting to the journal editor.

Once again, while writer and reader share some prior theories (knowledge of mass spectrometry), the reader is unfamiliar with the writer's particular subject of the report. As a result, the writer must develop strategies or "passing theories" that address these gaps. Since writers in various disciplines will very rarely encounter a unified audience with shared prior theories, practice with negotiating the audience's various levels of knowledge will better prepare writers to perform in various disciplinary, professional or public contexts.

Another way to give student writers experience with negotiating prior and passing theories is to focus class time on "passing theories" and the strategies that writers employ during actual moments of interaction with real readers. Marilyn Cooper emphasizes the importance of interacting with real readers in her 1986 article, "The Ecology of Writing," a precursor to post-process perspectives. Cooper critiques the process view of audience as originating with the writer and offers a perspective on audience that can be aligned with post-process theories—a perspective of audience based on the readers writers know through real social encounters and receive actual feedback from. Cooper agrees with the distinction between prior and passing theories, noting that "writers not only analyze or invent audiences, they, more significantly, communicate with and know their audiences" (10-11). She would transform the cognitive constructs of "invoked" or "addressed" audiences (based on process theories) into "real readers"—friends, colleagues, and roommates who actually read and respond to drafts. Cooper shifts the focus from the abstract "general audience" to a focus on "readers as real social beings," (11), which is in keeping with post-process perspectives.

Other assignments across the curriculum that bring students into direct contact with the shifting relations within communities of readers and



writers help to emphasize the public, situated nature of writing. An assignment in dental hygiene asks students to carry out a case study report that brings student writers into direct contact with members of these social organizations. The goals are “to provide students with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned...to actual settings” and “to provide actual clinical experience for students at a public health center.” Unlike the private act of writing in the process tradition, this assignment brings writers into direct relation and communicative interaction with others. Writers develop a case study that describes a problem and recommends a program to solve the problem (such as access to dental care for rural residents or provision of dental services to veterans). As a result, writing becomes a situated and public act, an act “that requires interpretive interaction with others” and that ensures that writers “always write from some position or some place” (Kent 3).

In addition, ethnographic assignments that allow student writers to directly observe and participate in the rhetorical interactions within particular communities and cultures, are increasingly being used as pedagogical tools in a variety of disciplines, from clinical psychology, social work, women’s studies and ethnic studies to education, journalism, speech communication and even business. Having student writers observe and participate in a community’s actions exposes them to the public, situated nature of discourse and the conflicting interpretations and shifting relations within communities. Through their observation and participation in a culture, students come in contact with multiple, conflicting reader identities that are always in flux, challenging a unified and stable audience. According to James Zebroski, “Ethnographic writing encourages writing for multiple audiences” (33). In addition, instead of learning a static set of writing skills (including heuristics for analyzing audience), students take with them an awareness of contingent interpretative strategies, which better prepares them to move to other contexts and communicate effectively within them.

This attempt to situate writing by focusing on public acts of communication does not negate the importance of one very real communicative situation, the classroom. A post-process approach might acknowledge that the classroom is a “public” too and includes its own multiplicity of audiences, whether peer reviewers, instructors or members of the disciplinary community. While Munter argues that writing assignments are geared too much toward an academic audience of one, the instructor, writ-

ers cannot afford to overlook this very powerful real reader—what professional writers might call the “watchdog” audience, the reader who is evaluating the writing and observing the writer’s success in meeting the expectations of the assigned audience. Instead of trying to ignore these multiple audiences or trying to reconcile them by pretending to “become” the president of the engineering company or the AT&T client that students are addressing in their papers, teachers might begin to acknowledge the existence of multiple readers and reading roles—not just in disciplinary contexts but in classroom contexts—and to be upfront with students regarding the challenging task of negotiating these audiences. In this way, teachers would not have to deny the fact that an actual audience exists—the teacher as reader—a reader who belongs to the academic community and evaluates texts according to the conventions of this community. In addition, teachers could acknowledge the valuable input of another group of real readers, peer readers, defined by Cooper as “real readers, not just stand-ins for a general audience” (11). At the same time, writing teachers would not have to ignore the benefits of giving students practice in “learning to write” for other public situations—for a variety of disciplinary contexts that have their own multiple and layered audiences. A post-process perspective recognizes that communicative interactions are complex and that “writing is a thoroughly interpretive act” (Kent 2). Because this interpretive act is shared with multiple readers who play multiple reading roles, there is no one generalizable process that can describe this act, whether carried out in the classroom context or in contexts beyond the classroom.

Instead of “whacking WAC,” as Munter proposes, we should instead shift our thinking from process views of simplified, one-way reader-writer exchanges to more complex post-process views. Whether focusing on writing to learn in the classroom context or learning to write in disciplinary contexts, post-process perspectives emphasize the public, interpretive and situated nature of communication. Consider Munter’s explanation for abandoning WAC in her discipline, business:

Business writing is about writing performed in business—with a defined business audience and context. Writing in most business school courses, on the other hand, is about writing performed in academia. The audience is the instructor, who is trying to evaluate student understanding. . . . Except in those rare cases where instructors . . . not only give writing assignments with a defined business

audience and context but also grade those assignments from the point of view of a business reader, not a professor, teaching writing in other courses serves only to confuse and frustrate students. (108)

As writing teachers, we need to make the cases for situating writing and recognizing multiple audiences less “rare.” Student writers should recognize that audience is not a collectivity that they can easily generalize about and define but is instead a dynamic social interaction that often involves multiple and conflicting reader roles. In addition, writers should have opportunities to develop rhetorical strategies (passing theories) that mediate among multiple reader expectations (prior theories). Furthermore, we can address what Munter describes as students’ frustration and confusion about audience by acknowledging that the classroom is also a “public” with its own multiple audiences, including the teacher and peers as real readers who engage the text along with “external” audiences that might be identified in the assignment. In this way, writers might see beyond “writing for the teacher” and begin to envision audience as a dynamic, interactive concept—rather than the answer to a set of questions that writers fill out or an abstract sketch the writer makes in his or her head. It is especially important that WAC instructors embrace this more complex, post-process view of audience because it “expands students’ notions of audience” (McLeod and Maimon 580) and recognizes the potentially multiple and conflicting audiences writers will encounter in various disciplinary contexts and in public and professional contexts beyond the classroom.

### **Endnotes**

1. The current article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Fifth National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference held during May 2001 at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

2. See Peter Elbow’s article, “Closing My Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience.” *College English* 49 (1987): 50-69.

3. The writing assignments from teachers across the curriculum were collected as part of a 1997 study carried out at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. Most teachers submitted their assignments anonymously. The study, entitled “Going Online with WAC: Enlisting

Campus-Wide Participation in a Computer-Supported Writing Curriculum,” was funded by a grant from the Council of Writing Program Administrators and was carried out in collaboration with Dr. Kelly Belanger (University of Wyoming) and Dr. Clyde Moneyhun (University of Delaware).

4. For a fuller discussion of Donald Davidson’s philosophical perspectives on communication and their implications for rhetorical theories, see Thomas Kent’s *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative Interaction*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993.

### Works Cited

- Berkenkotter, Carol. “Understanding a Writer’s Awareness of Audience.” *College Composition and Communication* 32 (1981): 388-99.
- Cooper, Marilyn. “The Ecology of Writing.” *College English* 48 (1986): 364-75. Rpt. In *Writing in Social Action*. Ed. Marilyn M. Cooper and Michael Holzman. New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook, 1989.1-13.
- Ede, Lisa. *Work in Progress: A Guide to Writing and Revising*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995.
- Huettman, Elizabeth. “Writing for Multiple Audiences: An Examination of Audience Concerns in a Hospitality Consulting Firm.” *The Journal of Business Communication* 33 (1996): 257-73.
- Kent, Thomas. “On the Very Idea of a Discourse Community.” *College Composition and Communication* 42 (Dec. 1991): 425-445.
- . *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- McLeod, Susan and Elaine Maimon. “Clearing the Air: WAC Myths and Realities.” *College English* 62 (May 2000): 573-83.
- Munter, Mary. “Whacking WAC.” *Business Communication Quarterly* 62 (March 1999): 108-111.
- Roth, Robert. “Deconstructing Audience: A Post-Structuralist Rereading.” *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*. Ed. Gesa Kirsch and Duane Roen. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1990. 175-87.
- Zebroski, James. *Thinking through Theory: Vygotskian Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1994.

---

WAC  
and  
Writing Centers

---

---

# How a Writing Tutor Can Help When Unfamiliar with the Content: A Case Study

*Kate Chanock, La Trobe University*

---

Writing Across the Curriculum places considerable demands not only upon the students in writing intensive courses, but also on the writing center staff to whom they go for help. This paper looks at some of the problems raised by tutors in this situation, and presents a case study in which such problems are negotiated in the course of a consultation between a student and a tutor. The kinds of revision resulting from this process are explored for the light they can throw on the relationship between language and content, as well as the relationships among discipline teachers, tutors, students, and the students' texts.

One aim of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement is that every teacher should be a writing teacher. However, while WAC assignments provide opportunities to write, the work of helping students to do it often falls to tutors in writing centers; and both tutors and teachers have expressed uneasiness about such consultations for a number of reasons. First, WAC assignments can challenge the tutors' priority of respecting students' ownership of their texts. What does it mean to own your text if you are writing on a topic set by somebody else, drawing on other people's ideas, and conforming to conventions of structure and voice imposed by a discipline? Conventions of one sort or another have always surrounded writing, and even students' "personal" writing is often largely a matter of reproducing commonplaces (see, e.g., Bartholemae). However, it is in the context of writing for unfamiliar disciplines that students and tutors are forced to confront these issues, identify the constraints and opportunities peculiar to writing in each discipline, and work within them. This brings

us to the second problem, that tutors may hesitate to advise on those conventions. The methods, forms, and voices favored by the disciplines are so various (Herrington and Moran 239-41; Odell 86) that some writing specialists have felt that it is better not to venture there (Larson 815-16; Spack 29), while others decide they must learn much more about the discourse of the disciplines before they can “make useful suggestions” (Kaufer and Young, 80; cf. Chanock, *Native Speaker*). Thirdly, when tutors do have the expertise to help, they may be suspected of overstepping the boundaries between language and content, and giving students “the answers they should find themselves” (Harris 18; cf. Clark 87; Sunstein 9; North, *Idea* 441; Stahlnecker 2).

For these reasons, writing tutors continue to debate where, or whether, they should draw boundaries based on the view, which Russell has traced through most of the last century in education, that writing is a matter of language, while content is a matter of knowing. In this view, as Odell puts it, “*writing well* means observing conventions of diction, usage, syntax, and organization, conventions that are presumed to apply to all good writing and that can be identified even if one knows little about the subject matter being discussed” (86-87). When working with students who are writing for the disciplines, however, it soon becomes apparent that writing well is more than that. An essay is not a list of facts, but a coherently argued answer to a question generated by a discipline; and, to be successful, it must show an understanding of why that question is asked and of what kind of discussion constitutes an answer, in the eyes of that discipline. This has a bearing on what information is selected and what omitted and on how the information is organized. At the same time, this understanding bears upon the use of language, for many students’ expression deteriorates when they are uncertain about the purpose of writing.

When inadequate expression is the result of uncertainty about the purpose of a particular discussion, surface corrections will do little to improve the work, while clarification of the approach of the discipline may do a great deal. This might seem to be the province of the discipline teacher rather than the writing tutor. “[T]hose who have the clearest view of the target, those who are most familiar with the particular relationships the students are trying to articulate, are those who are in the best positions to help the students write more clearly – the discipline specialists themselves” (Taylor 171). However, students are often not aware, when they come for help with a paper, that their problem is in handling the discourse

of their discipline. This emerges as they talk about their drafts, which they are unlikely to have an opportunity to do with their discipline teachers. Moreover, even if they take the draft to their teachers first, there is the problem that the characteristics of the discourse “are rarely articulated by the teachers involved”, who are so thoroughly enculturated into the disciplines that, for them, the discourse has become transparent with use (Langer 72; Chanock, *Introduction*).

How, then, can writing tutors help, if they are not in the relevant disciplines themselves? Even without being familiar with a discipline, a writing tutor can often draw out the students’ latent knowledge of how things are done in the books they are reading and the classes they are in, get them to articulate this, and help them to see how it may relate to the task at hand. I would like to offer a detailed case study from my context in Australia, where, because we have no English requirement and no Freshman composition course, this sort of teaching is the norm.

In 1984 North wrote that “Much more is known... about what people *want* to happen in and as a result of tutorials than about what *does* happen” (*Research* 29). Much research has been done since then; in particular, there have been transcriptions and analyses of writing conferences (e.g., Clerehan; Blau, Hall and Strauss), which give an idea of what happens *in* tutorials. The present paper seeks to complement these by looking at what happens *as a result of* a tutorial in which form was addressed through an initial focus on content. It will look closely at one student’s drafts of an essay in Art History, and the consultation process that helped the student move from the first to the second draft, and prepare to tackle a third.

The student (whom I’ll call “Megan”) dropped her first draft in my box and signed up for an appointment two days later, according to the procedures for working with our unit. Megan had not been referred for help, but came because she was unhappy about the draft herself. This draft is reproduced in full in Appendix 1 (and I have added paragraph numbers for ease of reference); I ask readers to go there now, to experience the problems I am about to discuss.

This draft provides an excellent example of the sort of writing that presents problems of both language and content. It contains 32 errors (not counting spelling, capitalization, or missing words, which I regard as proof-reading rather than learning matters, at least in a paper as literate as this one). They break down as follows: unclear pronoun reference (4); com-



mas (12, if we count a parenthetical pair as a single error); incomplete sentences (3); agreement (1); apostrophes needed (5); tenses (7; this is a gray area, when discussing what a dead artist “did” or “does”; but I have looked for consistency). Would I be considered to have acquitted myself adequately if I had taught Megan to recognize and correct those errors, with no substantial discussion of what the essay said? But then, what about paragraphing and topic sentences? If it were not for the **content** of these unfocussed, incoherent paragraphs, we would not know that there was anything wrong with them. The grammar of the propositions they contain is generally all right; whether or not writing makes a point is rarely a matter of its grammar. (In Megan’s draft, for example, my marginal notes told us that the things in paragraph 2 were not apparently related; the end of paragraph 7 did not connect with its beginning; paragraph 12 had no focus; paragraph 13 did not explain how and why the portrait of Richelieu differed from others by Bernini; paragraph 13 split in the middle, but remained one paragraph; and paragraph 15 did not explain why the buttons were carefully rendered, but not the fabric.)

Could we, then, have pared each paragraph down to one of the points within it and fashioned a topic sentence for that? This would have been an improvement, but it would not have made a good essay, and in that case, how worthwhile could Megan have felt it to be? The unsatisfactory character of several of these paragraphs went beyond paragraph level, to the problem with the argument of the essay as a whole; and they were only going to get better if Megan could decide what her argument was.

This did not mean, however, that I was going to tell her the answer. As it happens, I do not know the answer to this essay question. I have never studied Art History, and although I have read enough students’ essays in that discipline, and their teachers’ comments, to gain an impression of the kinds of things Art History students do, I had never seen an essay on this topic before. However, I did not need to know anything about Houdon or Bernini to know that the essay did not work, nor to know why it did not. The questions I asked Megan came out of the inconsistencies in the essay itself, but they led her to go back to the material she had read and think her way to a coherent answer.

I marked up the errors for my own reference, but did not ask Megan to work on them in this draft. Instead, I asked her questions about the content. The draft began by describing the style of the period within which each artist worked; she said this would be “necessary” to the comparison

of the busts. Immediately she was in difficulties, because her characterization of the period style did not mesh well with the work in either case, so that, in writing of the period and of the artist together, she was saying unrelated and apparently contradictory things. “It doesn’t seem that either of these busts looks like the style you’ve described for that period,” I pointed out, “so why is it necessary to know about the period style?” “That’s exactly what I’ve been worrying about!” said Megan, sounding exasperated, but also relieved. If it bothered me too, that did not help the essay, but at least it confirmed her doubts. She had tried, she said, to make sense of her own observations in terms of the secondary reading, but she could not. Some of them fit, but others didn’t. “I started it this way because that’s how you start Art History essays — you give the historical context and then you do your visual analysis of the art works.” The main problem around paragraph 7, she saw, occurred for the same reason: “When you analyze a work you have to look at the circumstances of how it was created.” “Ok,” I agreed, “but why, in *this* case?” What was important about the circumstances of these busts’ production? The answer was not to be found in that paragraph, at any rate. “Is there,” I asked Megan, “some overall way you could characterize the differences between these busts?” She found it in her observation in paragraphs 5 and 6, that the bust by Voltaire shows us **who** the man is, while the one by Richelieu shows us **what** he is. Taking this back to the question, we found that was what it asked about. It was not a question about period styles as such, but about what the style of each bust communicated about the sitter.

Megan’s problem in this draft throws an interesting light, I think, on the debate about whether, and how far, acculturation into a disciplinary genre constrains a writer’s exploration of her subject. Brannon and Knoblauch, for example, have expressed concern about students working with “prefabricated structures which writers simply select and ‘fill up’ with content” (39), and Dixon sees academic genres as “mind-forged manacles” that limit creativity (9). In the American context, writing tutors place great emphasis on non-directive dialogue with students, respecting their “ownership” of their texts (Clark, “Maintaining Chaos”, 86; Clark, “Perspectives”; Thonus, 60). It is possible to talk about a student’s “own purpose” or “what she wants to say” in the context of personal writing, or of “persuasive writing on public issues” (Lauer 62). But in the context of writing for the disciplines (and in my university, students do no other kind), the student’s “own purpose” becomes compli-

cated. Part of Megan's purpose was to make sense of her observations, to her own satisfaction; the other part was to write an Art History essay to her teacher's satisfaction. And this is rarely a matter of idiosyncratic preferences. Brannon and Knoblauch are concerned that "teachers commonly allow their models of the Ideal Text, their private notions of formal propriety, to deprive writers of control over their own purposes, interpreting any deviation from the Ideal Text as a skill deficiency" (40). However, there is nothing private about the models of a discipline's discourse community; they may be internalized, and they may be tacit, but they are held communally and they can be articulated. It is probably better to help students understand how the things they want to say mesh or do not mesh with these models, and why, than to ignore them. Bazerman thinks that "it is not the serious attention to disciplinary discourses that restricts our intellectual options, but the refusal to attend that fosters the hegemony of narrow discourses" (66). It is better for students to know consciously what these genres are than to know it unconsciously; and as they gain more conscious control, they may find that, as Berkenkotter and Huckin argue, "far from being rigid templates, genres can be modified according to the rhetorical circumstances" (160).

So it proved in this case. Megan's draft was in trouble largely because she was trying to apply the disciplinary template she knew about – making sense of a work of art by relating it to its historical context – too rigidly, to uncooperative subject matter. In order to solve her problem, she had to articulate her understanding of this template and to see the problems of applying it to this essay. Instead of writing the kind of essay that demonstrates how a work of art is characteristic of a period style – one disciplinary form – she needed to write another kind, demonstrating how an artist's choices of method work together to produce a particular effect. (These essays often take the form of a comparison because students are likely to notice more about the techniques an artist has used in one work if they compare it with another that was done differently. The contrast between the works stimulates the writer to wonder how each result was achieved.)

Thus, Megan's solution did not involve rejecting the patterns of writing in Art History, but feeling her way to a different one of these patterns suited to another of the purposes of this discipline. Her second draft did not break the mold; indeed, as we shall see, it conformed more closely to the preferred structure of essays in the discipline. Her second draft dis-

plays that socialization into her academic discourse community that social constructionists perceive as necessary to a student's success (for a survey of this position, see Nystrand et al. 288-291). Megan achieved this, however, not by unreflectively imitating the literacy practices of the discourse community, but by wondering why the ones she was attempting to use did not work to organize her meaning in this particular essay.

At this point Megan went away to write her second draft. (This one had footnotes, which I have not included, but I have indicated where they were placed.) Again, this draft is reproduced in Appendix 2 and readers are asked to visit it before proceeding.

I do not think there is any doubt that this is a much better essay than the first. It is interesting, therefore, that in terms of the purpose for which students are ostensibly referred to me—to get help with their “English expression”—it is actually worse. This draft contains 38 errors, 6 more than the first draft. Moreover, a whole new class of error has appeared: this draft has 9 run-on sentences, where the previous draft had none. In fact, it is these sentences that account for the apparent decline in expression, for the errors of fragmented thinking—the unclear pronoun reference and the incomplete sentences—have simply disappeared, which I think makes sense in terms of the greater coherence of the argument this time.

It is also possible that the greater coherence is itself responsible for the appearance of run-on sentences (I include comma splices here, as I treat the two together). Taking Mina Shaughnessy's view of error, I have come to regard these run-ons as a sign of progress in writing. They tend to be found in well-argued essays, and the writers appear to be using them to give coherence to the argument. They know that a sentence contains one idea, and apparently, if their idea is not yet finished, they carry on the sentence until it is. (Indeed, if we look at the run-on sentences in Megan's essay, we find that each of them connects ideas that are so closely related that Megan thought they should be read together.) When I discuss run-on sentences with students in these terms, I have met with ready comprehension and rapid improvement. It is still necessary to show them, in terms of subject and verb units, how to tell a sentence from a non-sentence, but the whole operation seems to make better sense to them. It seems helpful, therefore, to look at run-on sentences as an instance of “interlanguage”, in the linguists' sense of an error which shows that something has been learned about the target language (Selinker; Ellis 47, 173-4; Kutz 388).

While it may seem odd that the use of language appears to have improved even though there are more errors, this makes sense in terms of Odell's comment that "judgements about the quality of writing cannot be separated from judgements about the quality of meaning making reflected in that writing" (98). What has Megan done, then, to improve her meaning making to such an extent? In reorganizing her material, she has attended to two important matters: she has eliminated the inconsistencies that stemmed from her misconception of the essay's purpose; and she has chosen a structure that keeps her argument clearly visible throughout.

To see how this is done, we need to look at how the arrangement of each draft is related to the purpose Megan was pursuing. Megan's first draft was designed to show how a work is typical of a period style. The first six paragraphs present a contradiction, as Megan begins by describing the style of each period, but then finds that neither of the works she is examining conforms to the style of the period in which it was created. Without resolving this problem, she moves on to the visual analysis, dealing with the bust of Voltaire in paragraphs 7-12, then with the bust of Richelieu in paragraphs 13-17. In each of these paragraphs, she looks at a particular technique used by the artist and discusses its effect. The things she looks at—scale, costume, pose, and features—are roughly the same for each bust, but because she deals with the busts separately, she does not use the common points to construct a comparison.

In the second draft, Megan has gone from 17 paragraphs, with no conclusion, to 10 paragraphs that include a conclusion. This is because she has reorganized the material to serve a different purpose. Here, she is focussing on the nature of the works. She has not abandoned the "history" component of Art History, but this time she has correctly identified the part that history plays in these works. Instead of establishing the historical context of the works in terms of period styles, she begins by focusing on the role of the subject in historical events, linking this to the character of each one's bust. Richelieu's is the portrait of a statesman; Voltaire's, the portrait of an intellectual. Her first two paragraphs thus replace the first six in the previous draft, eliminate the contradiction they contained, and set up a clear basis for contrast between the works. This is then carried through in a series of paragraphs that bring together the contrasts that were separated in the first draft. She looks at how the scale works in each bust, the effect in each case of including or excluding costume from the portrait, each subject's pose, the different rendering of the eyes, and the

use of illusion or naturalism to give expression to the features in each portrait. The artist's contrasting methods of working then get a paragraph each, noting what effect the method had on the character of the work, and the final paragraph recalls the main points of the analysis. While the visual analysis makes the same points in both drafts, the structure of the second draft keeps the comparison in view throughout. The improvement in meaning making, then, is the result of a more consistent argument and a more coherent presentation. The essay reads better because it says more sensible things.

Of course, it was still going to be necessary to work with Megan on her run-on sentences, commas, and apostrophes, and for her to correct her spelling. Nonetheless, I think that this draft, had she submitted it in the present form, would have engaged her reader and been quite successful. Indeed, it might have been successful enough to make a reader of the previous draft uneasy. However, it was not because Megan did not have the right answer that our discussion took the turn it did. It was because she did not have a **sensible** answer. And this may help us mediate between teachers' and tutors' understandings of the boundaries of their work. Megan and I did not treat language separately from content, and in several ways her language improved as a result of thinking further about content. So did her text structure, in terms of the approach normally adopted in her discipline, for Art History students are usually advised to compare two works by examining them side by side with reference to a series of features (e.g. modeling, color, brushwork) or considerations (e.g. purpose, function, circumstances of production). Megan had chosen, in her first draft, a structure which dealt with all features of the one work first, and then all features of the other; the second, more effective way of organizing her observations came naturally out of her recognition of what kind of sense her observations made.

Talking about content, however, did not mean that I gave her information or ideas about the period or the works she was examining; it meant talking about why she was having difficulty making sense of what she knew about them. If this misled her as to the right answer to her question, not a great deal could have been at stake, since the original draft could not have been successful in any case. Thus, although I am aware of the limits to my expertise, I do not think they should stop me from discussing content; when the discussion throws up a question that depends on subject information or the approach of the discipline, I ask the student to think

about what she has already learned about this, and if that proves inadequate, I can send her back to the sources or her teacher, having helped her to work out what she needs to ask about. This traffic back and forth is one way in which trust is established so that boundaries between my work and the discipline teachers' are not a problem; in addition, I ask students to keep all the drafts we have worked on together in case their teachers want to see what we have been doing, and I keep a brief record of each session as well.

It often turns out that my lesser familiarity with the subject matter is an advantage in this situation, as a student can learn more by having to explain the topic to me than she would by having it explained to her. This advantage has been noted recently by Geiger and Rickard, who teach in a department as well as tutoring in a writing center:

In instructor-student conferences, we are completely aware of what the writing assignment involves, and we know what we expect from our students. In writing center tutorials, the student must provide us with all of this information, arriving at a clearer understanding of the writing assignment through their own cognitive abilities (7).

An instructor may have to hold back, when a student comes to ask about a problem with an assignment, because the instructor *is* in a position to "hand them...answers"; the tutor is not, and may be able to help the students to "find [the answers] themselves".

### Works Cited

- Bartholemae, David. "Inventing the University." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems*. Ed. M. Rose. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985. 134-165.
- Bazerman, Charles. "From Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words." *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*. Eds. A. Herrington and C. Moran. New York: LA, 1992. 61-68.
- Berkenkotter, Carol and Thomas Huckin. *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1995.
- Blau, Susan, John Hall and Tracy Strauss. "Exploring the Tutor/Client Conversation: A Linguistic Analysis." *The Writing Center Journal* 19.1 (1998). 19-48.



- Brannon, Lil and Cy Knoblauch. "A Philosophical Perspective on Writing Centers and the Teaching of Writing." *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Ed. G. Olson. Urbana: NCTE, 1984. 46-47
- Chanock, Kate. "Introduction to the Conference: Disciplinary Subcultures and the Teaching of Academic Writing." *Integrating the Teaching of Academic Discourse into Courses in the Disciplines: Conference Proceedings*. Ed. K.Chanock. Melbourne: La Trobe University, 1995. 9-15.
- "The Only Native Speaker in the Room." *ACSC '98: Teaching Communication Skills in the Disciplines: The Proceedings of the Australian Communication Skills Conference*. Eds. J. Tapper and P. Gruber. Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1998. 45-59.
- Clark, Irene. "Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma." *The Writing Center Journal* 11.1 (1990). 81-94.
- "Perspectives on the Directive/Non-Directive Continuum in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 22.1 (2001). 32-58.
- Clerehan, Rosemary. "How does Dialogic Learning Work?" *What do We Learn from Teaching One-to-One that Informs Our Work with Larger Numbers? Proceedings of the Conference Held at La Trobe University November 18-19, 1996*. . Eds. K. Chanock, V. Burley, and S. Davies. Melbourne: Language and Academic Skills Units of La Trobe University, 1996. 69-81.
- Dixon, John. "The Question of Genres." *The Place of Genre in Learning: Current Debates*. Ed. I. Reid. Geelong Deakin UP, 1987. 9-21.
- Ellis, Rod. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Faigley, Lester. "Writing Centers in Times of Whitewater." *The Writing Center Journal* 19.1 (1998). 7-18.
- Geiger, Barbara and Kristian Rickard. "Utilizing the Writing Center to Empower Student Writers." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 23, 10 (1999). 6-8.
- Harris, Muriel. "What's Up and What's In: Trends and Traditions in Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal* 11.1 (1990). 15-26.
- Herrington, Anne and Charles Moran. "Writing in the Disciplines: A Prospect." *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*. Eds. A. Herrington and C. Moran. New York: MLA, 1992. 231- 244.



- Kaufers, David and Richard Young. "Writing in the Content Areas: Some Theoretical Complexities." *Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing: Rethinking the Discipline*. Ed. L. Odell. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993. 71-104.
- Kutz, Eleanor. "Between Students' Language and Academic Discourse: Interlanguage as Middle Ground." *College English* 48.4 (1986). 385-396.
- Langer, Judith. "Speaking of Knowing: Conceptions of Understanding in Academic Disciplines." *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*. Eds. A. Herrington and C. Moran. New York: MLA, 1992. 69-85.
- Larson, Richard. "The 'Research Paper' in the Writing Course: a Non-form of Writing." *College English* 44.8 (1982). 811-816.
- Lauer, Janice. "Persuasive Writing on Public Issues." *Composition in Context*. Eds. W. Winterowd and V Gillespie. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1994. 62-72.
- North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46 (1984). 433-446.
- "Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions." *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Ed. G. Olson. Urbana: NCTE, 1984. 24-35.
- Nystrand, Martin, Stuart Greene and Jeffrey Wiemelt. "Where did Composition Studies Come From? Intellectual History." *Written Communication* 10.3 (1993). 267-333.
- Odell, Lee. "Context-Specific Ways of Knowing and the Evaluation of Writing." *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*. Eds. A. Herrington and C. Moran. New York: The MLA, 1992. 86-98.
- Russell, David. *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Selinker, Larry. "Interlanguage." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10.3 (1972). 208-231.
- Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Spack, Ruth. "Initiating ESL Students into the Academic Discourse Community: How Far Should We Go?" *TESOL Quarterly* 22.1 (1988). 29-51.
- Stalhnacker, Katie. "Virtually Transforming the Writing Center: On-line Conversation, Collaboration, and Connection." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 23.2 (1998). 1-4.

- Sunstein, Bonnie. "Moveable Feasts, Liminal Spaces: Writing Centers and the State of In-betweenness." *The Writing Center Journal* 18.2 (1998). 7-26.
- Taylor, Gordon. "Not Mechanics but Meaning: Error in Tertiary Students' Writing." *Higher Education Research and Development* 9.2 (1990). 161-175.
- Thonus, Terese. "Triangulation in the Writing Center: Tutor, Tutee, and Instructor Perceptions of the Tutor's Role." *The Writing Center Journal* 22.1 (2001). 59-82.

## Appendix 1

**QU: Compare and contrast the style of J.A. Houdon's portrait bust of Voltaire (1788; N.G.V.) with that of G.L. Bernini's Cardinal Richelieu (mid 17th C; N.G.V.) Describe if and how these stylistic features are in each case related to the personality and/or social, political or cultural significance of the sitter.**

1. In comparing these two busts it is necessary to look at the style of the period within which these two artists worked.

2. Bernini belongs to the Baroque period 1580 - early 18th century. This was a period which was essentially, emotional, expressive, with an interest in dynamic movement. It was a reaction against mannerism and its intellectualism, elitism and emotional coldness. There was also a desire to communicate religious themes to the masses. Bernini's portraits present a great likeness to the sitter, but in most cases his main objective is to portray something of the social or political status of the subject.

3. The Neo-classical period was a time of political and social revolution which saw the abolition of the monarch and the proclamation of a republic in 1792. The French revolution was dedicated to the restoration of harmonious society, with unaltered principles and classic perfection. According to Thames and Hudson..... it is a style of decoration, based on Ancient Greek and Roman example or inspired by classical models. 1775-1815. It is a term which developed in the 19th century, for what was

thought, to be a cold, lifeless imitation of Greco-Roman art. In fact in the 18th century it was referred to as the “true-style”. A revival of the arts- a new renaissance. Neo-classicism was a reaction against the over-decorative, flamboyant, fashion of the Rococo period.

4. Houdon's Voltaire in some books appears in the Rococo period, others in the classical. He seems to be a synthesis of Baroque, Rococo and Neo-classicism.

5. Houdon's Voltaire cannot be seen as a decorative, lifeless or impersonal revival of antique art. On the contrary it is a work full of expression, which conveys to us the peculiarities of the sitter. Allowing the viewer to see who this man is.

6. On the other hand Bernini's bust of Cardinal Richelieu, mid 17c, indicates the power of the man, possibly someone of influence and superiority, a politician, a statesman. We see what the man is, but not who he is.

7. In comparing the two portraits it is important to examine the circumstances under which the works came into existence. Voltaire, a philosopher and historian, had been imprisoned in the Bastille, and later spent most of his life living away from Paris. Houdon admired the philosophers of the enlightenment who were the intellectual base of the revolution. Voltaire returned to Paris on the eve of his death in 1788. He went to Houdon's studio where the sculptor was able to observe him. However, most of the work was done from the death mask which he took after May 30, 1788. Houdon studied anatomy closely, and did not disdain the use of plaster casts. His modelling and scientific precision does not however rob the work of life, but gives him the framework within which to instill life.

8. The scale is slightly under life size. Inviting the viewers attention without intruding on their space. it indicates a humble person who does not desire to overshadow the viewer.

9. He uses the classical-realist formula without shoulders, truncated, and undraped. There is nothing to indicate the status or career of the man, but are left to ponder the facial expression and personal qualities of the subject.

10. Houdon tilts Voltaires head down, with the large cranium facing towards the viewer, suggesting a head full of ideas, an intellectual mind.

11. The technique he uses for rendering the eyes, gives them a degree of naturalism. He cut out the whole iris, bored a deeper hole for the pupil and, by allowing a small fragment of material to overhang the iris, estab-

lished an illusionistic effect of the light falling on the surface of the eyeball. Houdon like his Greek and Roman predecessors placed an importance on the rendering of the eye to create a sense of life and personality in the portrait.

12. Although Voltaire has little hair Houdon's treatment of it is almost impressionistic. His brow displays the wrinkles of an old man and his skin appears to be a thin cover over the bone structure. Voltaire had had several sittings at the studio but most of the work was done from the death mask. This was also a common practice in Republican Roman portraiture. See diagram.

13. Bernini's, Cardinal Richelieu, a French statesman became Chief minister to Louis XIII. He helped consolidate centralised power in France by crushing the protestants and weakening the nobility. He lived in imperial state, and commissioned leading painters such as Philippe de Champaigne to paint his portrait. Cardinal Richelieu apparently begged Cardinal Barberini to approach Bernini requesting him to make his portrait. Bernini usually had his subjects sit for him many times, and allowed them to pursue their normal activities, moving and talking, so that he could observe their natural mannerisms. He would then create the sculpture in their absence integrating the individual characteristics into the work, and creating a vivid naturalism. For the Cardinal's portrait he used the triple portrait by Philippe de Champaigne as reference.

14. Cardinal Richelieu's scale is slightly over life size, giving it an impressive, imposing appearance. Being a little larger than life allows the sculptures presence to dominate and demand attention. The cardinal was a man who held a powerful position which would have demanded respect.

15. The upper part of his body is draped in his official robes, the cross around his neck indicating his status. The drapery is treated in a stylized manner. The folds are simplified and symmetrically balanced with one side mirroring the other. Bernini models the material in a plain manner with no reference to the texture of the fabric. The buttons however are carefully rendered in detail, as are the ties and medallion, which contrast against the smooth surface of the material.

16. Bernini has chosen a pose which places the head looking slightly to one side, held high, looking straight ahead. This gives the Cardinal a superior look as he stares not at us but somewhere above and beyond.

17. His face is actually quite crooked, and this is accentuated by plac-

ing the nose slightly off centre, and the very thick broad eyes at slightly different heights. The effect is a crooked face within a symmetrical setting. These devices give the viewer a sense of uneasiness, and result in presenting a portrait of a superior aristocratic type.

18. [need to write a conclusion.]

## Appendix 2

1. Cardinal Richelieu was a French statesman who became Chief Minister to Louis XIII. He helped to consolidate centralised power in France by crushing the protestants and weakening the nobility. The arts were powerful tools in the hands of absolutism, and Richelieu understood their value as instruments of propaganda, and a means of glorifying the state and himself. He was a master of political survival, who attempted to accumulate as many sources of power as possible, and was not opposed to using his position as Cardinal to help him achieve his political aims (1). Bernini in his bust of Richelieu has used a large triangular form with an angular broken outline, in which strong diagonals and deep carving give the work an energy and power, and portray Richelieu as a powerful, superior political figure.

2. Voltaire is also a political figure, a philosopher of the Enlightenment, which was the intellectual basis of the French Revolution. He was born in 1694, his father was a middle class lawyer his mother a noble and he was introduced to the free thinking elements of the aristocracy at an early age. He had great wit and social skills, he was a poet, historian and an intellectual. Voltaire detested feudal society, attacked religion and often defended victims of injustice. He was concerned with affirmation of values, reason, tolerance, social harmony, equality before law, scientific progress, classical canons of culture and taste (2). He had been imprisoned in the Bastille and later spent most of his life in exile. He returned on the eve of his death to Paris, where he met Houdon at his studio. Houdon uses a classical form with clear outline, and a distinct absence of diagonals to capture the peculiarities of this subject. The work is full of expression and allows the viewer to see who this man is, without revealing his status or political views.

3. The size of these two works is quite different and reflects the purpose of the works. Bernini has made his portrait of Richelieu slightly over life-size, with a large upper body and broad shoulders, giving it an impressive, imposing appearance. Being a little larger than life allows the sculpture to dominate and demand attention, very much as the Cardinal himself would have done in his position as statesman in the court of Louis XIII. Houdon's Voltaire on the other hand is slightly under life-size, inviting the viewers attention without intruding on their space. It indicates a more humble man who does not desire to overshadow his viewer.

4. There is a strong use made of the upper body and drapery in one sculpture and none in the other. Cardinal Richelieu is shown in his ecclesiastical robes with his cross around his neck indicating his status. His cloak is large with the folds being deeply carved and symmetrically balanced, one side mirroring the other. Bernini's use of strong diagonal lines in the drapery give a sense of vigour, and power, to the work. Bernini models the material in a plain manner, using modulating forms, with no reference to the texture of the fabric. The buttons, ties and cross are modelled in sharp detail, contrasting with the smooth surface of the material, and allows the cross to stand out against the smooth background, highlighting the fact that here we have a statesman, and a senior figure in the Catholic Church. Voltaire's bust on the other hand is undraped. The body is truncated and it is without shoulders, in the classical-realist style (3). Houdon has not given us any drapery to distract our attention from the face of Voltaire. He is not interested in conveying to us the status of the man, but seeks to focus all the attention on the head and face, to reveal the expression, emotions, and intelligence of this subject.

5. The poses also contrast the differences in character of the two subjects. Bernini has chosen a pose which places the head held high, looking straight ahead. This gives the Cardinal a superior look as he stares not at us, but somewhere above and beyond. Houdon has tilted Voltaire's head downwards, and his eyes look slightly to the right, the fact that they do not stare directly at us creates an invisible barrier between us and the sitter. As a result there's a certain quality of withdrawal or reserve, which makes us search more intensely for the inner nature of the image. The large cranium which faces the viewer also suggests a head which may be full of ideas or an intellectual mind.

6. These two artists have used very different methods for rendering the eyes. Bernini does not attempt to make them look naturalistic, rather

he leaves them as a blank surface, staring out vacantly past the viewer. If the eyes are the window of the soul, we have no view here. Houdon, like his Greek and Roman predecessors, placed an importance on the rendering of the eye to create a sense of life and personality in the portrait. The technique he used gives them a great degree of naturalism. He has cut out the whole eye, bored a deeper hole for the pupil, and by allowing a small fragment of the material to overhang the iris established an illusionistic effect of the light falling on the surface of the eyeball. In his naturalistic rendering of the eyes an insight into the characteristic, personality, and emotions of Voltaire is achieved.

7. Bernini has used some illusionistic devices to give expression in Richelieu's face, Houdon on the other hand has used increased naturalism to emphasise Voltaire's facial characteristics. Cardinal Richelieu's face is actually quite crooked, Bernini has accentuated this by placing the nose slightly off centre, and the very thick broad eyes at slightly different heights. The effect of this crooked face within the symmetrical setting of the drapery, gives the viewer a certain uneasiness, which results in presenting a portrait of an awe inspiring diplomat, maybe someone you could not trust. Voltaire's facial characteristics, on the other hand, are fairly naturalistic. For this portrait much of the work was done from the death mask taken after Voltaire's death. Houdon studied anatomy closely and he didn't disdain the use of plaster casts or masks, a technique which had been used in Roman Republican sculpture to present a very realistic,warts and all, impression of the person. Voltaire's skin appears to be a thin cover over the bone structure, and the brow displays the wrinkles of an old man. Voltaire has little hair, but what he does have is given a very soft texture, closely resembling actual hair. If we compare that to the Bernini, we see that he carves the hair, with deep grooves and diagonal lines, resulting in a less naturalistic effect.

8. The art of the Baroque period was commissioned mainly by the aristocracy and the church, Cardinal Richelieu had a colleague approach Bernini for this commission. Bernini used a painting by Philip de Champaigne as the reference, which wasn't the way Bernini usually worked. In most cases he would have the subjects sit for him many times and would allow them to pursue their normal activities, moving, talking, so that he could observe their natural mannerisms. He would then create the sculpture in their absence integrating the individual characteristics into the work. In this work he has established from the painting the sub-

jects religious position, and appears to be aware of his political status, but not the personality and individual characteristics of the subject.

9. Houdon had been commissioned by the Comedie Francaise to make a portrait of Voltaire, and they had many sittings before Voltaire died. This close contact enabled Houdon to capture the spirit that was alive in this old man. The National Gallery of Victoria's is only one of many versions, Houdon often re-interpreted his works many times, casting them in different materials, to cater for his growing market amongst the bourgeoisie.

10. Both Bernini, Houdon and the sitters were very much men who were in tune with their Eras. The art of Bernini's period was commissioned mainly by the aristocracy and church, the portrait of Cardinal Richelieu fits both of these categories. Bernini being a deeply religious man, and part of the aristocracy, enjoyed using his illusionistic devices as a means of glorifying the church and the subjects of courtly life. Houdon on the other hand belonged to an era which saw a growth in the bourgeoisie, and an increasing interest in portraiture which showed ordinary people in everyday scenes. The themes of the art took on a moralising tone, and became rational and stoic in tone (4). Houdon's portrait has returned to classical form with no diagonals or broken lines. Anything that may detract from the rational truth of the subject is discarded. Houdon attempts to present us with a truthful portrait of Voltaire, who like himself, upheld the Neo-classical thoughts of the period.



---

WAC  
and  
WID

---

---

# A Writing-to-Learn Approach to Writing in the Discipline in the Introductory Linguistics Classroom

*Peter R. Petrucci, The University of Texas at Brownsville*

---

In a recent article published in *College English*, McLeod and Maimon note that some researchers have claimed that writing to learn is contrary to writing in the discipline and that time spent on the former does not necessarily contribute to success in the latter (e.g., Knoblauch and Brannon 1983 and Mahala 1991). McLeod and Maimon take issue with this:

Writing to learn is not different from or in opposition to learning to write in the disciplines, nor is it superior. Writing across the curriculum includes both writing to learn and learning to write in the disciplines. (580)

This paper supports McLeod and Maimon's position. In particular, it demonstrates that a variety of writing-to-learn assignments (in this case, from a course in introductory linguistics) can contribute to the student's ability to write in the discipline with greater fluency and confidence.

Writing an effective research paper in an introductory survey course like linguistics can be a daunting task because the student needs a thorough understanding of subject matter often consisting of abstract concepts and discipline-specific terminology. In addition to this, the research paper in introductory linguistics generally requires an examination of specialized literature followed by a detailed analysis of a given set of language data cited in earlier research or, better yet, collected firsthand by the student. For these reasons, the best that some linguistics instructors dare hope for by the end of a one-semester course are summaries of recent research of linguistic topics, for example, the differences between men's and women's speech or characteristics of Spanish as it is spoken in the United States.

When I first started teaching undergraduates, I too felt that writing in the discipline in the introductory linguistics course was unattainable. So I lectured, and my students took notes and exams, and completed homework assignments in linguistic problem-solving. However, assuming a new position at the University of Texas at Brownsville, I was informed that campus-wide the university was making an effort to provide students with more writing opportunities in content courses like linguistics. I greeted this news with trepidation. What kind of writing could I expect of my linguistics students? A few days later, I attended a faculty development workshop in WAC to try to answer this question. The workshop and later conversations with colleagues showed me that writing-to-learn activities may have a positive effect on both students and instructor, allowing them to explore the subject matter together in a new way.

With this insight and after further consideration, I altered my expectations of what student writing in my introductory linguistics course should be and how that writing should be achieved. That is, I first decided that assigning a final research paper was inappropriate. With so much material to be covered in the course, I did not have the time to teach my students how to find and read linguistic literature, cite and analyze data, and write a credible linguistic argument. To avoid teaching these skills and simply require my students to write the research paper entirely on their own seemed, quite honestly, cruel. Consequently, instead of a final research paper written in one fell swoop, I devised a multi-task approach comprising a variety of informal writing-to-learn assignments which led to a formal but brief writing-in-the-discipline assignment submitted towards the end of the semester. Linked and assigned gradually across the semester, the writing-to-learn tasks have allowed my students to cite their own language data for the sake of making and supporting the linguistic arguments found in their writing-in-the-discipline activity, something I never could have imagined a few years ago.

The first writing task, given on the second day of class, asks students to select a common language myth from a list provided and write their initial “gut reaction” to that myth. Three representative language myths are listed below:

Myth A: *Spanish, as it is spoken in the Rio Grande Valley, is ungrammatical.*

Myth B: *Children learn to speak their native language by direct imitation of and instruction from their parents and caregivers.*

Myth C: *Some languages are more difficult to learn than other languages.*

At this stage, the language myth assignment neither requires nor encourages a linguistic background. Rather, students are told to let their emotions take over in their responses. (However, the students are told that later in the semester they will reexamine their myths from a more reasoned linguistic framework.) Significantly, even in this beginning stage students generate some interesting discussion about the language myths they have selected. For example, discussing Myth A, Anel<sup>1</sup> notes:

Some Spanish teachers have told me that the Spanish we speak here is not wrong. It is a dialect of the language, and the Spanish from Spain or Mexico is not better than ours. I still have my doubts about that because people from Mexico think the contrary.

As for Myth B, Myra observes:

When we listen to a child's word, we know that he is saying a word that he has already heard before, either from his parents or some other person. Not very often do we hear a child making up a word.

And Dora notes the following about Myth C:

Whenever I encounter Asians and they are in the middle of a conversation, I tell my friends, "Sshhh, I wanna listen." And they point out to me the very obvious fact that I cannot understand a word they are saying.

These reactions and others like them indicate that students have strong opinions about language and that the linguistics course itself may have direct relevance in their lives.

Returned about a week later, the gut-reaction pieces constitute the first part of the language myth writing-in-the-discipline assignment.<sup>2</sup> Due towards the end of the semester, the second part of the assignment is a three to six page formal paper that completely or partially debunks the language myth in question.

To help students examine the myth by means of a linguistic framework, the returned gut-reaction pieces are accompanied by a number of guiding questions and a brief reading list. For instance, those students addressing the myth about Spanish are asked to consider the linguistic notions of grammatical and ungrammatical. Also, they are asked to read "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," a chapter from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, which examines the author's feelings about Spanish and English language usage in South Texas. When

the gut-reaction pieces are returned, students are also provided with the names of classmates addressing the same myth, and they are encouraged to work together in debunking their myths.

Since the goal of the formal paper is to present and support an argument with linguistic data, students are encouraged to use actual linguistic evidence that they encounter in classroom discussion or, preferably, in their speech community. Students are also told that, apart from the recommended reading list, library or on-line research is not necessary for the assignment. The crucial characteristic of the paper is a succinct argument supported by relevant linguistic data. Finally, students are allowed to argue that the myth is indeed correct, as long as they use linguistic argumentation to do so.

As previously noted, the language myth paper is assigned very early in the semester. In this way, students are able to collect data and think about their language myths for an extended time. Classroom lectures and course readings from Fromkin and Rodman's *Introduction to Language* also provide information useful for the final paper. More importantly, throughout the semester students complete five writing-to-learn activities – what I call homework writing response activities, because they are assigned with a homework exercise in linguistic problem-solving. The premise underlying these brief writing-to-learn activities is that the linguistic argumentation skills acquired in them are transferable to the language myth paper. In other words, by writing informal responses to novel linguistic situations, students are able to retain and apply the knowledge that they have gained from course lectures and readings.

Each homework writing response activity asks students to mention and analyze linguistic data in a brief argument. One such writing-to-learn activity for phonetics is given in Appendix A. For this activity, students are asked to use their knowledge of articulatory features and phonetic symbols to illustrate why English speakers, when they misunderstand the rather uncommon name *Chip*, invariably “hear” the name as *Jim*. In other words, students need to explain why *Chip* and *Jim* sound the same.

Addressing this task, Teresa states:

The most obvious correlation between the names *Chip* and *Jim* is the similar high front lax vowel [ɪ]. However, despite the fact that *Mitch* and *Rick* share the same vowel sound, *Jim* is the name people interpret, as the initial sounds [tʃ] and [dʒ], as well as the ultimate sounds [p] and [m], are so similar.

In discussing the characteristics of the sounds in question, Teresa demonstrates a precise use of the International Phonetic Alphabet, namely the symbols within square brackets, and of articulatory features, in this case, “high front lax vowel.” Furthermore, she gives a brief analysis of other data, namely, the names *Rick* and *Mitch*, to support her argument that *Jim* most naturally sounds like *Chip*.

Responding to the same assignment, José writes:

...Jim and Chip sound more similar than people think. The [ ch ] and [ j ] (*sic*) sounds at the beginning of each name are both ... palatal affricates.

José’s excerpt is instructive because, though the overall analysis is basically correct, the phonetic symbols used to support that analysis are incorrect. The initial consonant sounds in *Chip* and *Jim* should be transcribed as [ tʃ ] and [ dʒ ], respectively. José received full credit for the phonetics assignment, but his work was returned with a brief note explaining the important role the International Phonetic Alphabet plays in linguistics. Many students had similar difficulties representing linguistic data and terminology accurately in the informal writing-to-learn activities. Consequently, each activity was returned with comments about any inaccurate data and how to present the data in question more precisely. In this way, students could avoid similar errors in future assignments and support their analyses with greater success.

Significantly, such errors did not appear as frequently in the final draft of the language myth papers because writing-to-learn activities like the one above allow students to practice new material in a variety of situations, thus playing an important role in the acquisition and appropriate application of course material. As with other introductory survey courses, linguistics is challenging because of a large number of discipline-specific concepts and terminology, such as the International Phonetic Alphabet, an essential tool for anyone working in linguistics. Although one of the most challenging aspects of my course, I have noticed that since assigning the writing-to-learn activity above, students have had a better grasp of the International Phonetic Alphabet and a greater appreciation of its role in linguistics. This is especially interesting because the assignment itself only refers to a handful of the sounds and symbols that the students need to learn. Writing to learn allows students to explore material in a meaningful way that is not always provided by course lectures and textbooks, and, although it may be limited in scope, a writing-to-learn activity can



serve as a crucial aid in the acquisition of a broad range of material. Moreover, writing-to-learn activities that challenge students to express themselves adequately about discipline-specific issues ensure that the retention of the subject matter will be longer lasting than if the material has simply been acquired by rote for the sake of an examination.

A writing-to-learn activity is assigned in each major sub-field of linguistics covered in class: morphology (the study of word structure); phonetics (the study of sounds); phonology (the study of sound patterns); syntax/semantics (the study of sentence structure and meaning); and sociolinguistics (the study of language in relation to society). As the end of the semester nears, students have had enough practice writing short pieces that they can approach the final draft of their writing-in-the-discipline assignment with a greater understanding of what the task requires. Additionally, the five writing-to-learn experiences provide students with the confidence to accomplish the language myth paper, as the students have begun to acquire the argumentation skills necessary for linguistic discourse.

These skills are evident in the final draft of the language myth papers. Many of my students have been able to argue effectively against their language myth, correctly citing personal data and linguistic terminology to support their position. Addressing Myth B about child language acquisition, for example, Karina discusses her son's rather unusual and unfortunate mispronunciation of the word *coffee* and her own efforts to teach him the correct pronunciation:

What really convinced me that children learn language on their own was when I would try to correct Ricky with words or phrases that he uttered incorrectly. For example, when he was about two and a half, he saw a coffee commercial. From the commercial he "learned" how to say coffee. But he learned to say it in a very peculiar way. Until this day he pronounces "coffee" as [ f ʌ k i ] (rhymes with lucky). This of course was something that I immediately had to correct...

Mother: Ricky, say [ k ].

Ricky: [ k ].

Mother: [ a ].

Ricky: [ a ].

Mother: [ f i ].

Ricky: [ f i ].

Mother: Coffee.

Ricky: [ f Λ k i ] !

Karina concludes that Ricky will ultimately learn the correct pronunciation of words at his own pace:

... I always thought that correcting Ricky would help him improve his speech, but after my brief experiment with my son, I realized that he would eventually learn how to pronounce words correctly on his own.

Another example of successful linguistic argumentation comes from Dora's discussion of Myth C, that is, that some languages are easier to learn than others. Fluent in Spanish and English, Dora questions whether it would be easy for a Spanish speaker to learn Italian:

Italian is very similar to Spanish, yet this could work against the learner. An example of how cognates can create confusion is illustrated by the following excerpt, which is a conversation depicted between a mother and child in *Oggi in Italia* (Merlonghi et al. 1991: 137).

Child: Tornate presto! Non tardate!

'Return soon! Don't be late!'

Mother: Tu, intanto, sii buono! Non guardare la televisione!

'You, in the meantime, be good! Don't watch television!'

The conversation could be understood perfectly until the end of the last statement, which includes the word *guardare*. Since Italian and Spanish derive from the same language (*sic*), it would seem that this word would have the same, or at least similar, meaning in both languages. But, *guardar* in Spanish means 'to keep; put something away; protect'. In Italian, though, the word means 'to look' or 'to watch'.

Later, Dora notes that because Italian and Spanish are Romance languages, Spanish-speakers learning Italian as a second language may indeed have some special challenges *because of the languages' similarities*. Dora goes on to discuss Indonesian and suggests that, even though Indonesian is not related to Spanish, some of the structural aspects of Indonesian (e.g., pronunciation and subject-verb agreement) may be relatively easy to master for the native-speaker of Spanish.

Although a three to six page language myth paper cannot include all that is demanded for a full-fledged linguistics research paper, such as a detailed review of current literature, I was especially pleased by texts like those above. They demonstrate an effective attempt to use actual



linguistic data to support an argument, a challenging skill for students in an introductory linguistics course. Furthermore, the evidence cited to disprove, or at least partially disprove, the language myth is for the most part original language data observed by the student, as opposed to data cited by some other linguistic researcher.

At the end of the semester, I asked students to write anonymous impressions of the writing program they completed in introductory linguistics. Although there were no clear comments about how the writing-to-learn activities assigned across the semester helped contribute to their ultimate understanding of how to write in the discipline, overall students found the writing-to-learn tasks and the writing-in-the-discipline task to be favorable, as suggested by the following comments:

Writing is scary for me as a student... However, the writing of our gut-feeling for the myth was not nerve-wracking because I didn't have to be perfect. I was relieved and enjoyed the language myth activity. I think because the assignments were short, they were enjoyable.

After everything we had learned, I was able to do a better job on my language myth essay. I was able to find valid data that supported my theory.

All the writing assignments were very good because they make you think about exactly what you wanna say, and you have to say it right or else it could be ambiguous.

...the writing exercises and the language myth have helped me understand the foundations of linguistics.

These and other student comments suggest that, considered as a whole, the writing-to-learn activities had a positive effect on the writing-in-the-discipline activity.

The variety of writing-to-learn tasks and the short formal writing-in-the-discipline task benefited the students in two significant ways. First, as discussed above, the writing-to-learn activities, which were assigned throughout the semester and which addressed various linguistic sub-disciplines, provided some of the fundamental background necessary for quality writing in the discipline. Second, based on my observations in the classroom and student comments like those above, I believe that both types of writing assignments helped my students gain a more solid under-

standing of linguistics and linguistic argumentation. This second observation, that writing fosters learning, is supported by Langer and Applebee (1987) who, citing quantitative evidence from academic classrooms in the public schools, argue that “effective writing instruction provides carefully structured support or *scaffolding* as students undertake new and more difficult tasks.” And, as students complete those tasks, they “internalize information and strategies relevant to the tasks...” (139) Arguably, the writing-to-learn tasks that my students completed served as scaffolding for the writing-in-the-discipline task. Moreover, when taken together, all of the writing tasks served as scaffolding in the students’ overall understanding and retention of the course material, as well as the ability to apply their linguistic knowledge to situations involving language.

Of course, my approach comprising a formal medium-length writing-in-the-discipline task and a variety of brief writing-to-learn tasks was not without problems. Specifically, in order for students to benefit from and be able to apply the writing-to-learn activities to their writing-in-the-discipline assignment, student responses to these activities need to be read carefully and commented upon in considerable detail. Detailed assessment of writing-to-learn activities is very time-consuming, placing a special burden on instructors with heavy teaching loads and large classes. A partial remedy might be to teach writing in the discipline to the class as a whole before or after each writing-to-learn activity, something I tried when I returned a writing-to-learn assignment in phonology. This remedy presents its own problems, however, because lecturing on the specifics of writing in the discipline takes time away from lectures on course content. I presently see two solutions to this. The simpler solution, though only a partial one, is to include more explicit instructions and helpful notes on avoiding common problems with each writing assignment. Although more challenging, the second solution seems more appropriate: reformat my lectures so that course content and discipline-specific writing tips are presented simultaneously.

To summarize, my students’ experiences writing a variety of linked assignments in the introductory linguistics classroom support McLeod and Maimon’s observation that effective WAC entails writing to learn *College English* 62 (2000): 573-583.

and writing in the discipline. Although disciplines and course specifics will differ, I believe a sequenced combination of writing-to-learn tasks assigned throughout the semester can help students achieve quality writing in the discipline, preparing them for further coursework and research in the subject matter.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> All of the students mentioned in this paper have given their permission to cite their names and work.

<sup>2</sup> The assignment sheet, as well as all the other handouts mentioned in this paper, are available upon request from the author (prpetrucci@utb.edu)

### Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/aunt lute, 1987.
- Fromkin, Victoria, and Robert Rodman. *An Introduction to Language*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.
- Knoblauch, C. H., and Lil Brannon. "Writing as Learning Through the Curriculum." *College English* 45 (1983): 465-74.
- Langer, Judith A., and Arthur N. Applebee. *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning*. NCTE Research Report No. 22, 1987.
- Mahala, Daniel. "Writing Utopias: Writing Across the Curriculum and the Promise of Reform." *College English* 53 (1991): 773-89.
- McLeod, Susan, and Elaine Maimon. "Clearing the Air: WAC Myths and Realities." *College English* 62 (2000): 573-583.

**Appendix A**  
**Writing-to-Learn Assignment Sheet**

English 3319 – Dr. Petrucci

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Homework Writing Response #2 – Phonetics (Due Monday, February 12)**

Answer the writing prompt below. You should spend at least thirty minutes on this writing assignment. You will be graded on content only. Please write legibly.

**Writing prompt:** The other day Professor Chip Dameron of the English Department told me that people sometimes have trouble catching his first name in informal conversations. To be specific, although Professor Dameron introduces himself as “Chip”, he is often misunderstood as having uttered “Jim.” The most likely reason for the misunderstanding is that people are not accustomed to the first name Chip, which is not as common as, for instance, Bob or Jim or Paul. However, it is especially interesting to note that when Professor Dameron’s first name is misunderstood, people invariably “hear” the name as Jim, rather than, say, Mitch or Rick or Steve or Bill.

**Using your knowledge of the articulatory features of phonetics, explain why people would mistake the name Jim – as opposed to some other first name – for Chip. Be sure to use the appropriate phonetic terminology in your response.**

**HINT:** Since your answer should explain why Chip and Jim “sound the same,” you might want to begin this exercise by writing the two names phonetically.

Chip \_\_\_\_\_

Jim \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---



---

(use other side if necessary)

**NOTE:** Listed below are the four other WTL assignments addressing the following sub-disciplines and available, on request, from the author:

1. phonology (the study of sound patterns)
2. morphology (the study of word structure)
3. syntax-semantics (the study of sentence patterns and meaning)
4. sociolinguistics (the study of language in relation to society)

## Notes on Contributors

**Kate Chanock** is Director of the Academic Skills Unit in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. She is the author of three books, twenty articles and a video, on topics encompassing historiography, TESL, and the ways in which the cultures of the disciplines shape the academic skills needed by university students. **Bill Condon** has done writing assessment at several institutions. He is Director of Campus Writing Programs and Professor of English at Washington State University. Co-author of *Writing the Information Superhighway* (with Wayne Butler) and *Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Theory, Practice, and Research* (with Liz Hamp-Lyons), Bill has also published articles in the areas of writing assessment, program evaluation (see chapter two of *WAC for the New Millennium*), and computers and writing. **Diane D'Alessio** teaches Education and Reading courses at Bronx Community College. She is the Coordinator of the Education Associate Degree Program. **Patricia Donahue** is an Associate Professor of English at Lafayette College, where she directs the College Writing Program. She is co-author, with Mariolina Salvatori, of *Elements of Understanding* (forthcoming from Allyn and Bacon), and is co-editor, with Ellen Quandahl, of *Reclaiming Pedagogy*. **Tom English** is the Director of the Cline Observatory at Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, NC, where he also teaches courses in astronomy and physics. He was Director of the Williams Observatory and an Assistant Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Gardner-Webb University from 1989-2001. **Donna Gessell** is the Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning at North Georgia College & State University where she directs the Writing Across the Curriculum Program and teaches composition and literature courses. **Clara Shaw Hardy** is Associate Professor and Chair of the Classical Languages Dept. at Carleton College. She has been extensively involved with the assessment of writing at Carleton, and has presented on Carleton's Portfolio Project at WAC and Collaboration conferences. **Irene Kokkala** is the Director of the Student Technology Advisors Program at North Georgia College & State University and a Professor of Biology. **Susan Manahan** is an instructor in the Department of Natural Sciences at Gardner-Webb University where her focus is on teaching microbiology, genetics, and general biology. **Eric V. Martin** is the Assistant Provost/Director of the Center for Quality at Governors State University. He coordinates university assessment, faculty development, and writing across the curriculum. His experiences as a WAC di-

rector on two campuses were recently recounted in *WAC Paradoxes Revisited: A Program Director's Response*, *Pedagogy*, vol. 1.2 (2001), Duke University Press. **Cara Murray** teaches writing, literature, and technology at Lehman College and The City College. She is finishing a Ph.D. in the English program at the Graduate Center of CUNY, and is interested in theories of the novel, Victorian travel narratives, and the Victorian relationship to technology and imperialism. **Peter Petrucci** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Brownsville where he teaches courses in linguistics and developmental writing. His research interests include bilingualism, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics. In a current WAC project he is encouraging heritage language students to do some WAC assignments in English and other WAC assignments in Spanish in order to foster academic literacy in two languages. **Mary Jo Reiff** is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, where she teaches courses in writing, rhetoric, and technical and professional communication. She participates in writing outreach work with area schools, and her research interests include audience theory, WAC, and public/workplace literacy. **Margaret Riley** is a lecturer in the English Department at Bronx Community College. She is currently completing a doctorate at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. **Lisa Hale Rose** is an assistant professor in the Human Services Program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York, where she is also the newly appointed coordinator of Distance Learning. As a long-standing member of the college's WAC committee and a social work educator, she has recently published *Hands-on and Online: The Challenges, Rewards, and Trade-offs Involved in Teaching a Distance Learning Fieldwork Seminar*, which explores the intersection of WAC, distance learning, and human services education. **Carol Rutz** is director of the writing program at Carleton College, where she also teaches writing courses to undergraduates. She is co-editor of a volume of cases for faculty development, *Dilemmas in Teaching*, and has contributed to a number of scholarly collections, including Chris Anson's *The WAC Casebook*. **Rachel Theilheimer** is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education in the Department of Social Sciences at Borough of Manhattan Community College. She is a member of the college-wide WAC committee and, with Lisa Rose, chairs the Assessment sub-committee. She is particularly interested in students' perspectives on their classroom experiences.

# THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

**WHO?** Writing center directors, tutors, and others interested in one-to-one interaction with writers

**WHY?** *The Writing Lab Newsletter* is a forum for ideas and information on topics such as writing center theory, and administration, tutor training, funding, publicity, programs, websites and online tutoring, etc. A regular feature, the Tutors' Column, is written by and for tutors.

**WHEN?** The newsletter is published monthly from Sept. to June.

**HOW?**

- Visit our Web site for manuscript submission information.
- Subscriptions are \$15/year in the United States and U.S.\$20/year in Canada. Group rates are available upon request, as are rates for overseas mailing and a computerized index. Single back issues and sample issues are available for \$2.50 each.
- Prepayment requested.

**WHERE?** Send subscriptions and manuscripts to:  
Muriel Harris, editor (or) Mary Jo Turley, Managing Editor  
*Writing Lab Newsletter*  
Dept. of English  
Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356  
765-494-7268 Fax: 765-494-3780  
harrism@cc.purdue.edu  
mjturley@purdue

The *Writing Lab Newsletter* is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Visit our site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html>  
Past issues freely available online. Searchable index of past volumes.



## Language and Learning Across the Disciplines

*A forum for issues concerning interdisciplinarity, situated discourse  
communities, and writing/speaking across the curriculum programs*

### **LLAD Editorial Board:**

Chris Anson  
Charles Bazerman  
Barbara Couture  
Russell Durst  
Toby Fulwiler  
Anne Gere  
Stuart Greene  
Gail Hawisher  
Anne Herrington  
David Joliffe  
Kitty Locker  
Susan Peck MacDonald  
Elaine Maimon  
Lucille McCarthy  
Dierdre McCloskey  
Susan McLeod  
Charles Moran  
Barbra Morris  
Michael Palmquist  
Paul Prior  
David Russell  
Cynthia Selfe  
Sharon Stockton  
John Swales  
Chris Thaiss  
Barbara Walvoord  
Art Young  
Richard Young  
Jim Zappen

LLAD EDITOR:

**Subscription rate:**  
**\$20.00 for personal subscription**  
for Volume 6, Issues 1, 2, and 3

Special Issues Coming Soon:

**Guest Editor: Linda Driskill**  
**NWAC 2002: WRITING THE FUTURE:**  
**Leadership, Policies, and Classroom Practice (2002)**

**Guest Editor: Art Young**  
**Poetry Across the Curriculum (2003)**

**Guest Editor: Deanna Dannels**  
**"Speak Up! Scholarship and Practice in Oral  
Communication Across the Curriculum." (2003)**

Send your check made out to LLAD/IIT to  
LLAD/IIT  
ARC  
35 W. 33rd St. Chicago, IL 60616

Include Name, Address, and Contact Information



# *the* WAC *Journal*

## **How to Subscribe**

*The WAC Journal* is an annual collection of articles by educators about their WAC ideas and WAC experiences. It is a journal of both practical ideas and pertinent theory.

Subscriptions: \$8 for the next issue, \$15 for next two issues, \$20 for next three issues.

Make checks payable to Plymouth State College.

Please include your email address and mailing address.

Mail to: Jane Weber, Managing Editor  
MSC #56  
Plymouth State College  
Plymouth, NH 03264

email: [j\\_weber@mail.plymouth.edu](mailto:j_weber@mail.plymouth.edu)  
phone: (603) 535-2831

## **Publish in *The WAC Journal***

The editorial board of *The WAC Journal* seeks WAC-related articles from across the country. Our national review board welcomes inquiries, proposals, and 5-15 page double-spaced manuscripts on all WAC-related topics, including the following:

- WAC Techniques and Applications
- WAC Assessment
- Reflections on WAC
- WAC Literature Reviews
- Interviews with WAC Personalities
- WAC and Writing Centers

Send inquiries, proposals, or 5-15 page double-spaced manuscripts to Roy Andrews via email ([roya@mail.plymouth.edu](mailto:roya@mail.plymouth.edu)). Manuscripts are reviewed September through February. Any standard document style (MLA, APA, etc.) is acceptable.

*The WAC Journal* is peer-reviewed blind and approximately 130 pages long. It is published annually in the spring.

# *The WAC Journal*

**Volume 13**

*The WAC Journal*

Writing Across the Curriculum, MSC 56  
Plymouth State College  
17 High Street  
Plymouth, New Hampshire 03264

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 2  
Plymouth, NH  
03264