

WAC Today and Tomorrow: Composing in Many Modes and Media

Art Young
Clemson University
apyoung@clemson.edu
<http://www.clemson.edu/~apyoung/>

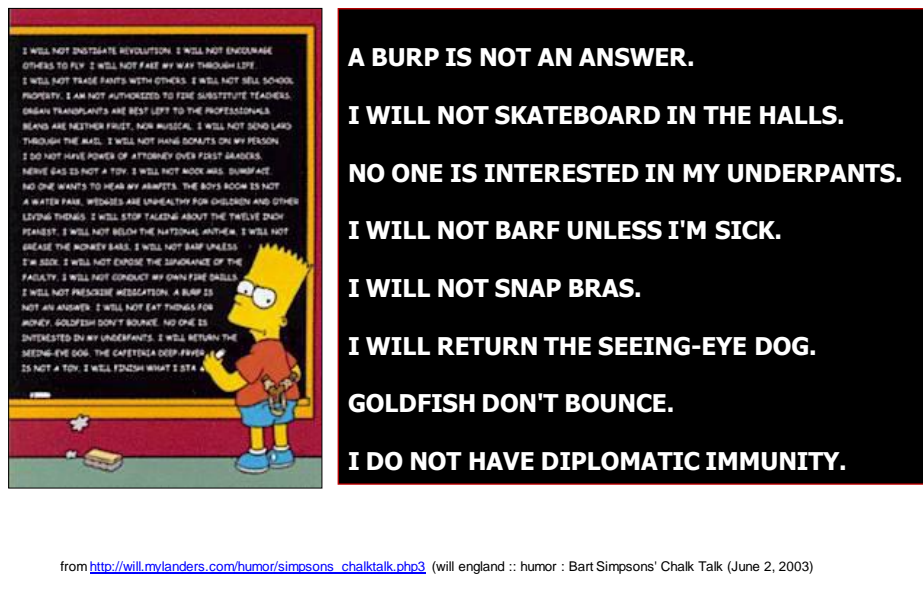
IWAC 10

10th International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference
Bloomington, Indiana
May 20-22, 2010

I would like to give a hearty thank you to all the folks at Indiana University who have organized this conference and hosted us so well here in Bloomington, especially Laura Plummer, Jo Ann Vogt, John Peterson, Holly Schreiber, and Judy Warner. For me, it has been a productive and splendid experience. As some may know, in 1993, I joined with colleagues at Clemson University, College of Charleston, and The Citadel, three colleges in South Carolina, to launch the first national WAC conference and also to host the next two WAC conferences in 1995 and 1997. And now in 2010, amidst difficult economic times for WAC and for education generally across the nation and the globe, it's heartening to learn from the research of Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter in their International WAC/WID Mapping Project that WAC has continued to grow since that first WAC conference in 1993. I'm delighted to speak to you today about WAC: Past, Present, and Future—focusing particularly on writing on- and off-line for reflection, collaboration, conversation, and creativity.

I hope what I say will contrast with “the writing as punishment” motif that many of us will recognize from this familiar example of Bart Simpson:

Writing as Punishment



You don't have to be a viewer of *The Simpsons* to know that writing remains today a form of punishment in our schools and colleges; indeed, disciplinary infractions for unruly behavior at my university continue to require that guilty parties compose a writing assignment as part of their penance in order to receive forgiveness. No wonder so many students today resist writing, and often when writing is assigned in a non-writing course, students perceive it as a form of teacher harassment, similar to being forced to write "I won't chew gum in class" a hundred times. The student writing that I will talk about today is not this negative kind but rather an invitation to active engagement and learning. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is attempting to measure descriptors for engaged student learning and thus far has found a strong connection between student writing and engaged learning.

“further support for the movement to infuse quality writing experiences throughout the curriculum.”

The screenshot shows a USA Today news article. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, News, Travel, Money, Sports, Life, Tech, and We. Below this is the 'News » Education' section. The main headline is 'Writing leads to deeper learning, study finds'. Underneath the headline, it says 'Updated 2d 15h ago | Comment | Recommend | E-mail | Save | Print | Reprints & Permissions | RSS'. The article is by Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY. The main text starts with 'It's pretty hard to get through college without ever having to compose a paper. Now, the National Survey of Student Engagement puts a number on just how much students write:'. To the left of the main text is a sidebar with a section titled 'STUDENT ENGAGEMENT'. It contains two items: 'The database: Search scores of participating U.S. schools' with a small image of a search results page, and 'Blog: USA TODAY's Mary Beth Marklein gives details in reporter's notebook' with a small portrait of Mary Beth Marklein. To the right of the main text is a list of statistics: '92 pages on average for first-year students.', '146 pages on average for seniors.', and '114 for seniors studying the physical sciences.' There are also social media sharing options like Mixx it, Yahoo! Buzz, Digg, Newsvine, and Reddit.

From *National Study of Student Engagement, USA Today, November 2008*

I'm grateful to the people who have been working on NSSE for the past ten years. I understand that their latest survey will ask even more questions to better understand the connection between what *USA Today* calls "quality writing experiences" and "deeper learning." Many people at this conference are working on the writing portion of NSSE, including Paul Anderson, Chris Anson, Bob Gonyea, Chuck Paine, and others. We owe them our gratitude.

I'd like to begin with examples of students' interactive conversational writing. Dan McAuliff, in his electrical engineering circuit analysis course at Clemson University, required students in pairs to write informal notes back and forth about the subject matter covered on an upcoming test.

Bill,

I find the sign convention **can be confusing** because it treats a voltage drop as a positive quality in the direction of current flow.

After all when one considers a drop one usually thinks of a negative quality. The voltage source provides a voltage rise, **yet**, using the established sign convention a voltage source must be considered as a negative drop and hence a negative quantity.

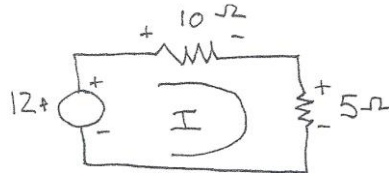
Terry

Each note was a homework assignment, and in the first note, students described difficulties with the course material or asked specific questions of a peer. In the note below, Terry has questions for Bill about sign conventions. (It's not necessary to understand sign conventions to follow the point I wish to make.)

The students exchanged these handwritten notes on a Tuesday, and for Thursday's class they wrote a second note of about 250 words addressed to their partner, providing explanations to issues raised in the partner's first note. Students repeated this process three times over the semester, usually the week before a major exam.

Terry,

I completely empathize with your position. It's a shame that such a fundamental concept stumps us all, but recently **I stumbled across our explanation.**



We may write:

$$12 = 10I + 5I$$

or as we usually write:

$$0 = 10I + 5I - 12$$

So we can see that the sign convention is dependent upon the mathematical manipulator not electrical concepts.

Bill

In this excerpt from a longer note, Bill sympathizes with his class partner Terry, a nice rhetorical touch, and explains sign conventions with a technical sketch and an explanation that suggests focusing on the mathematical manipulator rather than the electrical concepts that were unfamiliar at this early point in the course. The audience for these notes is real and immediate, a peer that is requesting timely assistance.

At the end of the semester, Dan McAuliff asked students to write an informal note to him explaining their experience with these “note assignments.” The informal reflection below was written by Susan at the end of the fall semester in 1988. Dan and I read hundreds of these reflections over the 5 or 6 years we worked together on this assignment, and this is one of my favorites. Here, in part, is what Susan wrote in her note:

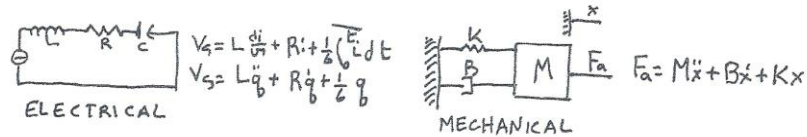
Mr. McAuliff,

These homework assignments have **contributed greatly to my understanding electrical engineering concepts**. I must admit, at first, I was very skeptical and viewed them as more “busy work.”

Before I took this class, I did not know anything about electrical engineering. These assignments proved that I was not alone in my fears. This **put me more at ease and less reluctant to ask questions. In addition, I developed a much better attitude** toward this class which in turn helped my grades....

Susan’s reference to “busy work” reminds us about some students’ attitudes toward school writing, seeing it as a kind of harassment or what we might call the Bart Simpson syndrome. Susan, a mechanical engineering major, admits she knows little about electrical engineering, which was true of most students since circuit analysis was the one electrical engineering course required of all engineering majors. Dan McAuliff believes that once he introduced the written notes assignment, students were indeed less reluctant to ask questions orally during class. Susan continues:

From reading several of my classmates' assignments, I finally realized the physical meaning of electric circuits and I was able to make analogies with mechanical systems and their equations of motion.



This example shows that the voltage acts like an applied force, inductance like a mass, resistance like a damper, capacitance like a spring, and charge like displacement.

Susan

From reading several of her classmates' assignments, and not the textbook or teacher's lecture notes, Susan develops an analogy in which she compares the familiar, her knowledge of mechanical systems, with the unfamiliar, motions of electric circuits. She doesn't just "please the teacher" with generalities, but she gives specific verbal and visual evidence to support her claim that the assignments are beneficial. This analogical problem-solving demonstrates the kind of higher order thinking that I heard faculty from Quinnipiac University talk about earlier in this conference.

Written reflections like Susan's not only engage students in creative thinking, but the student-teacher communication they engender plays an important role in involving students in a collaborative, active learning community. In addition to their value for individual teachers and students, such written reflections are an essential component of the ongoing monitoring, innovating, and evolving of Clemson's WAC program.

At Clemson, we have four premises for teaching with writing across the curriculum.

The first three premises are familiar to this audience: writing to learn; writing to communicate; and writing in the disciplines.

Writing Across the Curriculum: 4 Premises for Teaching

1. We use writing to learn new and difficult material, to make connections and discoveries, and to solve problems.
2. We use writing to communicate to others what we know and what we have learned.
3. We become engineers or historians by learning to read, write, speak, think, and solve problems like engineers or historians.

Today, I will focus on the fourth premise: conversational writing. Conversational writing is a strategic written discussion that occurs through interactive writing with others.

Writing Across the Curriculum: 4 Premises for Teaching

4. We use writing **conversationally** in academic and workplace settings to
 - develop knowledge
 - generate fresh perspectives, and
 - explore creativity and innovation.

From the paper-based engineering example from 1988 that I just showed you, I'd like to move to a web-based example of conversational writing in the humanities from 2006.

International Online Conversation: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"



American Literature, Clemson University,
South Carolina, US: Donna Reiss



Victorian Literature, Clemson University,
South Carolina, US: Art Young



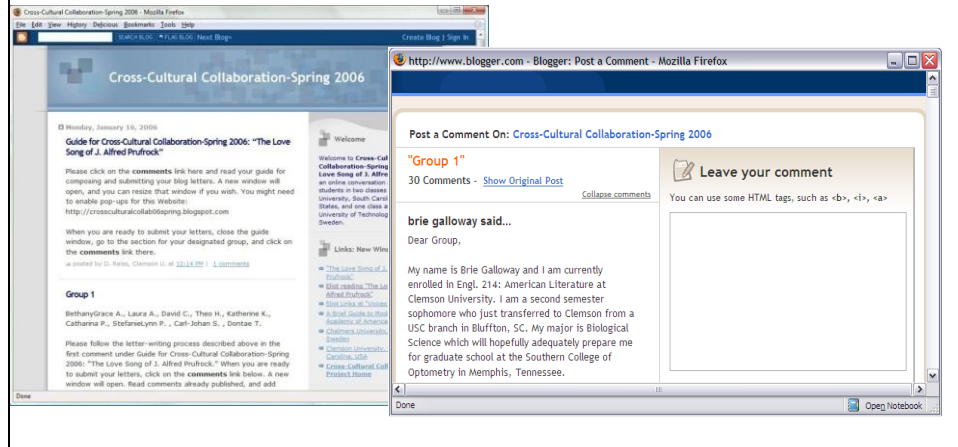
Fiction for Engineers, Chalmers University,
Göteborg, SE: Magnus Gustafsson



On a weblog or blog, students in three different classes on two continents discussed T. S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. (You won't need to know any more about this poem than you did about engineering sign conventions.) One class was composed of engineering graduate students in a modern literature course at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Sweden, taught by Magnus Gustafsson, a conference participant here in Bloomington. One was an American literature sophomore survey at Clemson taught by Donna Reiss, also a conference participant, and one was a Victorian Poetry Masters-level seminar taught by me.

Weblogs can facilitate a **collaborative, social process of meaning making**, leading us to believe that weblogs ...enable a comfort zone, a social environment where anxiety about the teacher and of school writing is reduced, while also drawing on other **benefits of writing publicly**....

(Charles Lowe and Terra Williams)



Students in groups of nine, roughly three from each course, wrote three “letters” back and forth to group members for one week of the semester. Magnus, Donna, and I introduced this web conversation to our successive classes each year from 2003-2008. All teacher assignments and students’ letters are available on the web and the address is on your handout (the handout is at the end of this pdf version of my talk). As facilitating teachers, we did not participate in the blog conversations.

"Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?..."

Hello group! Thanks for your feedback.... :))

I am glad that **Matt found my thoughts**, on the "In the room women come and go talking of Michelangelo" verse, rather good. I've been thinking a lot about that verse. I think that the use of mermaids and the fact that they will never sing to him, also might suggest that he feels very separate from society. He can't get that magical love and freedom, which mermaids have. **The idea that he is not "one with" society does seem to exist within the poem. For another example he only "watches" the lonely men smoking, indicating that he is not even a part of that group.** He feels like he doesn't belong anywhere.

I hope you all will have a great week! Best regards,
Ana-Marija (Chalmers, Fiction for Engineers)

Above is an excerpt from a student at Chalmers in Sweden, Anna Marija. This is her Letter 2, a response to Matt and the rest of her group about imagery in *Prufrock*: Michelangelo, mermaids, and men smoking. I notice many things as I read this letter: the engaging salutation to the whole group and the cross-cultural symbol of the "smiley face," the specific reference to a group member by name, a quotation from the poem, an exploration of a possible theme—Prufrock feeling separate from society—and a tumbling out of images that might support this theme: mermaids that don't sing and lonely men who smoke together, perhaps evidence that the poem itself has been reread in preparation for writing this letter. Anna Mariija then concludes with the friendly, familiar "have a great week."

Anna Mariija's letter is robustly academic, rhetorical, and collaborative, and although conversational in tone, it suggests critical engagement with the poem and with the international group discussion. It displays a close reading and rereading of *Prufrock* as well as of the letters from eight other discussants.

*"And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep."*



[Houses of Parliament,
Effects of Sunlight in the
Fog, Claude Monet,
1904](#)

After reading everyone's responses, a lot of my original questions were cleared. A lot of people focused on the main points of the poem; that is, that Prufrock is an extremely insecure and needy man. However other students chose to write about topics such as the setting of the poem and try to draw conclusions from there.

Erin noted that the setting reflects parts of Prufrock's personality; the settings are dark and dreary, much like Prufrock himself.

Marigrace mentioned that Eliot chose to set his poem in October, a season when nature changes. This could possibly reflect Prufrock's insecure personality....Prufrock is as indecisive as the leaves changing in the fall. **Again, [thanks] to all of your responses! I think we're all helping each other fully understand** this poem.

(Allie, Victorian Literature, Clemson)

What I like about Allie's Letter 2 above is the way she recognizes the contributions of the rest of the group to answering her questions, her summary of what seems to be the group's consensus—Prufrock is insecure—with specific references to two classmates' contributions—Erin and Marigrace—and a furthering of the conversation by suggesting that Erin's and Marigrace's contributions might actually fit the same thematic context. I also note the conditional language "This could possibly reflect," which is the language of speculation and imagination rather than thesis-driven argument. Allie's language encourages further conversation rather than attempting to preclude it.



I've always admired the painting by Salvador Dali: *The Persistence of Memory*. I think it is **representative of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by the melting away of time**. The entire poem reflects on time in some form. The word is seen 11 times in lines 23-48. **Also, in the song Time** by Hootie and the Blowfish the question is asked: "Time, why you punish me? Like a wave bashing into the shore, you wash away my dreams." The **song personifies time** and its overwhelming presence.

Time, in a sense, controls everything and we must learn to make the best of what little we have. **Prufrock does not understand this—he is unable to take a stand and do something** about his situation. (Marigrace, *American Literature*, Clemson)

Above is part of Letter 3 by Marigrace, the last letter the students wrote as part of the assignment. In Letter 3 we asked students to find some other artwork (painting, music, photography, etc.) that might help illuminate their understanding of *Prufrock*.

In Marigrace's excerpt we can see her selection of Salvador Dalí's painting *Persistence of Memory* and her observation that "time" is a major word and theme in *Prufrock*. She even has counted how many times Eliot uses the word "time" in 25 lines, eleven. Marigrace also quotes from a song by Hootie and the Blowfish, a South Carolina rock band, entitled "Time."

Using knowledge and experience she has gained from outside this particular course, Marigrace is able to make connections with T. S. Eliot's canonical modernist poem to popular music and to European art. She shares her insights with peers that she has never met and probably never will. I believe that most of the students who wrote on this blog had a quality writing experience that led to deeper learning, the kind of writing and learning we all want for our students and that NSSE is attempting to describe in its annual surveys.

This multi-modal, international weblog project was a rich collaboration with Magnus Gustafsson, Donna Reiss, and all our students who participated by writing letters and searching their experiences to make insightful connections for themselves, for their peers, and for us, their teachers.

“**Letters**.... may appear humble, because they are so **overtly tied to particular social relations of particular writers and readers**, but that only means they reveal to us so clearly and explicitly **the sociality that is part of all writing.**”

(Charles Bazerman)



The Love Letter by Vermeer

“language alone cannot give us access to the meaning of the **multimodally constituted message....**”

(Gunther Kress)

We asked the students to write letters because letters are familiar as a genre, because they often are congenial and expressive, and because the social context creates an authentic academic audience for interpretations, queries, diverse perspectives, and sometimes consensus.

We asked students to not only write but to create multi-modal connections within their letters that would extend interpretive practices from written to aural to visual. We hoped these e-letters would enhance intercultural understanding, as our students made references to numerous countries and cultures, from Sweden to Spain to South Carolina, as Marigrace demonstrated in her letter.

Did you notice that the speaker measures time by the stirring of coffee? ... And those words can be linked as in “tea time” or “time for tea.” Do these images stand out to anyone else?
(Marigrace in South Carolina)

Marigrace, your remark actually gave me a somewhat deeper understanding. Especially after reading Amanda’s comment....T. S. Eliot himself reads the coffee and tea episode in a dissatisfied, bored tone.
(Andreas in Sweden)

We used a blog for its convenience across international borders, because it is asynchronous, allowing time between drafting and posting of letters for reflection, rereading, and revision, and because it is independent of place. Students participated in this online conversation even when they physically left the campuses of Clemson and Chalmers to distant locations for work or pleasure.

My thoughts on this kind of web-based, interactive writing in a WAC context are influenced by many scholars, but especially the pioneering work of James Britton, Nancy Martin, and their colleagues at the University of London in the 1970s. Building on their conceptual foundation that writing is an important tool for learning, I believe computer-mediated discourse has created new pedagogical opportunities for expanding students’ academic and communicative abilities. Let me provide you with a quick overview of how I see conversational discourse in the world of WAC theory and practice.



**Personal
and
Expressive
Writing**

Personal and expressive writing is what writers do for themselves and for trusted others. They may never show this writing to others, as with a private journal, or they may share with selected friends, colleagues, or classmates. This writer-based prose makes sense to the writer—but may not make sense to others.

Below is a page from Thomas Edison's notebooks in which he is speculating on how to run a cable across the Atlantic. This is just one page of millions in Edison's notebooks. I've highlighted his conditional, speculative writing, similar to that on the students' blogs.

Notebook Page of Thomas Edison

[London, c. June 10, 1873]

Thus



Charge & discharge a large Condenser or several large Condsrs. Through a very delicate high R Engine—Revolving Armature = so as to get. a perpetual revolution in the Engine = ^b

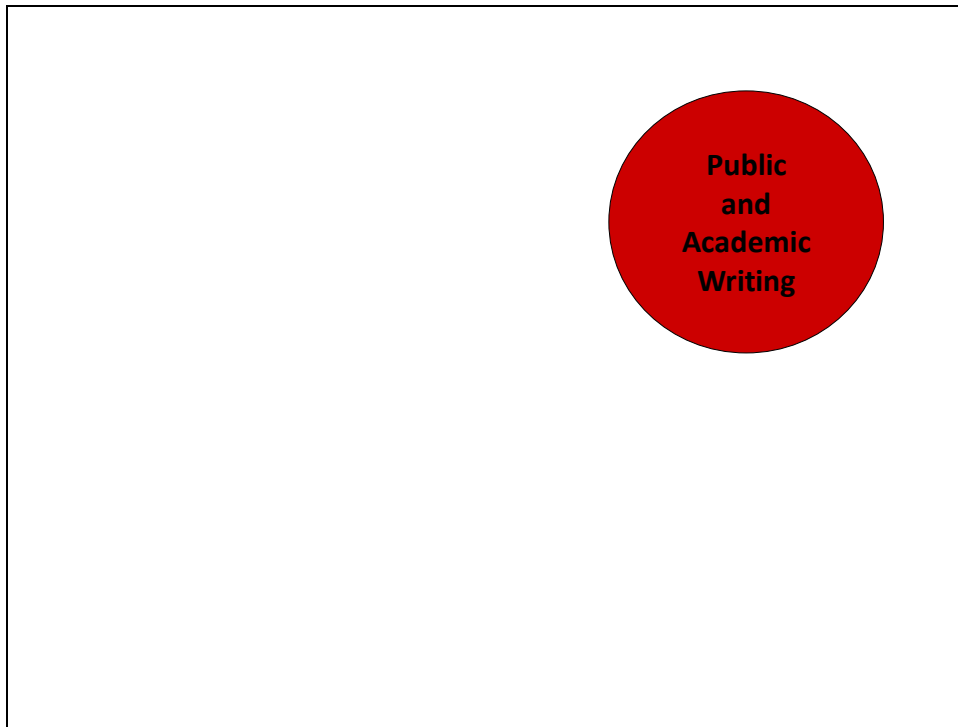
ascertain if some magnetic arrangement might not be made so as to be included within the circuit^c ~~to-wor~~ so that it would exactly neutralize the static charge in So many knots³ of Ca-ble if these devices Could be put in the Cable & their Ca-pacity would remain as Constant as the Capacity of the Cable = it would be valuable =

Try two ~~insulated~~ disks of rubber on which is a strip of Zinc & of Copper Connected together = This stands still now another disk IOOth of an inch from it revolves slowly & also^d with immense rapidity This disk has one Strip Copper. See if influence would generate E. & Connect to Sensitive Gal-vanometer =

-331-
Notebook Entry: Miscellaneous¹
Pgs. 612-613
The Papers of Thomas Edison Vol. 1
R. V. Jenkins et al
John Hopkins Press, 1989

Expressive writing is valuable because writers make words and drawings visible to themselves so they can examine them, change them, play with them—or discard them. Familiar genres are journals, including e-journals, notebooks, freewrites, and discovery drafts.

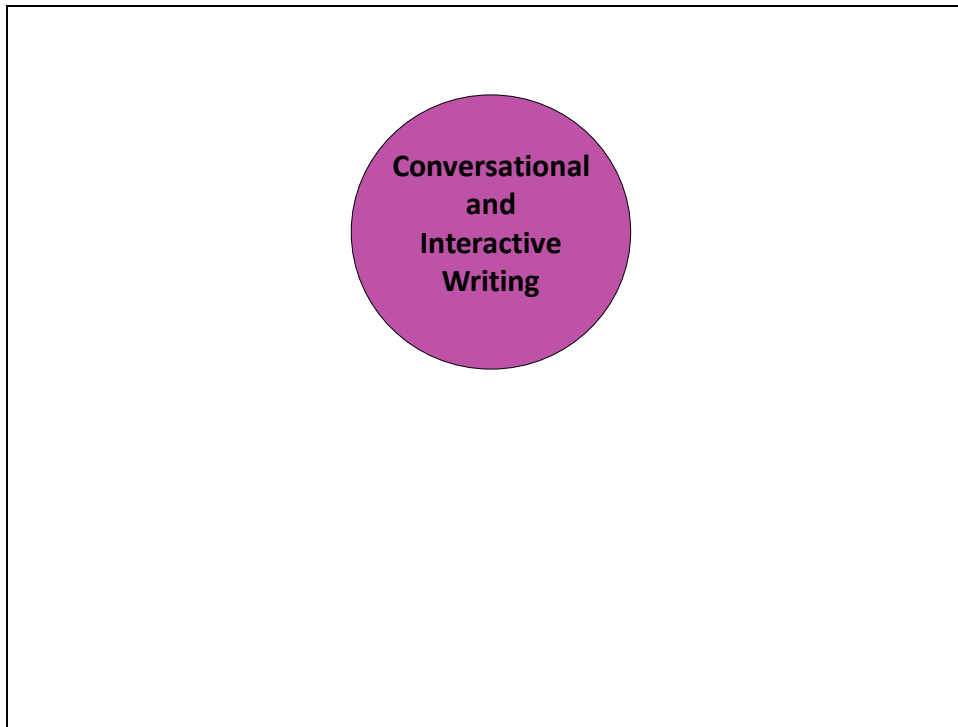
In contrast to expressive writing, public and academic writing is what writers do to communicate to their readers—to inform, entertain, or persuade.



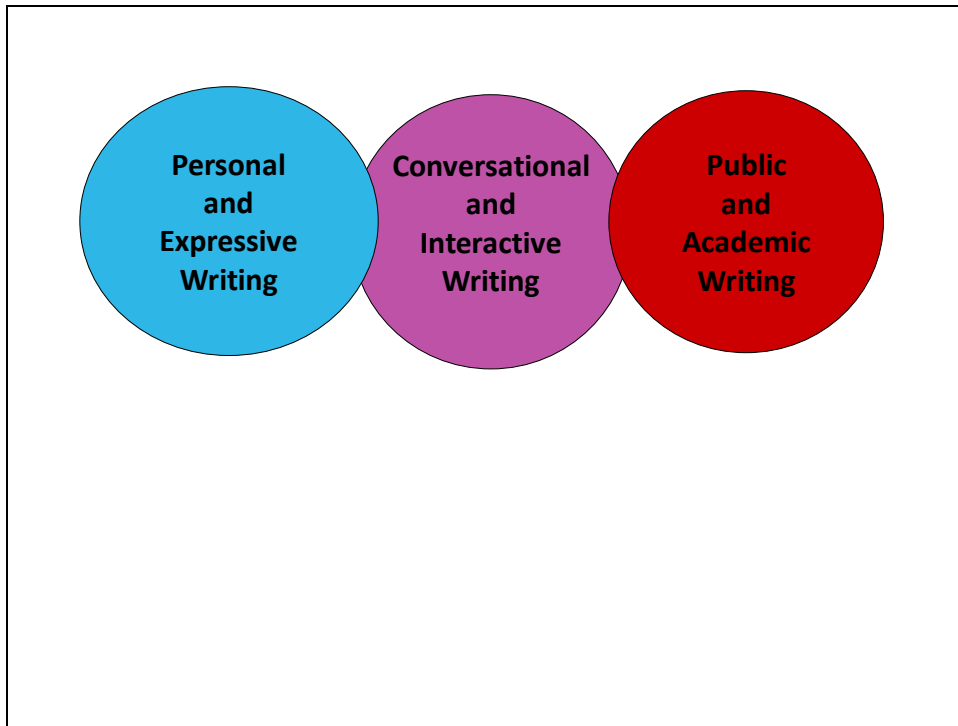
While expressive writing primarily assists writers, public or academic writing is meant for readers, as when a scholar composes a critical essay for publication in a professional journal. As James Britton has said, while expressive writing is an opportunity “to explain the matter to oneself,” as we just saw Thomas Edison doing, the challenge of public discourse is “to explain the matter to others,” as Edison did when he wrote a patent application. Composed in reader-based prose rather than writer-based prose, public writing aims for the audience to process information effectively and efficiently.

Because readers of academic writing are often distant and judgmental, writers face additional demands to conform to reader expectations about structure, usage, and disciplinary and genre conventions.

The middle ground between personal, expressive writing and public, academic writing is conversational and interactive writing.



Conversational and interactive writing is one way for novices in a discipline to learn to write, think, theorize, contextualize, and solve problems like professionals in a discipline. Conversational writing in educational settings assumes a relatively safe and engaged audience of classmates and teachers. Although conversational writing does have greater demands than freewrites or personal notes, it doesn't have as rigorous expectations as a critical essay meant for publication or for summative evaluation by a teacher. In some ways, conversational writing is a middle ground between informal writing and formal writing, between "low stakes" writing and "high stakes" writing.



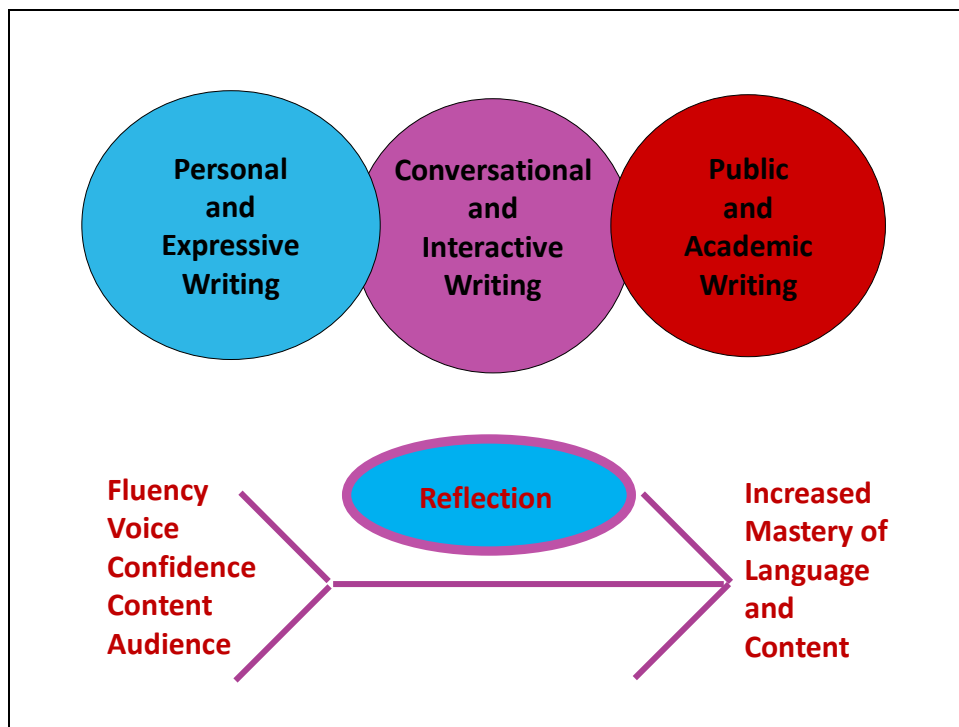
Conversational writing exists in the rhetorical space between personal and public writing, neither the unexamined personal response nor the carefully crafted public presentation, and in some instances these functions blend and blur—they are not absolute categories. However, conversational written discourse exhibits many characteristics of oral conversation: it's interactive, context dependent, reality based, rapid, colloquial, personal, audience-specific, and mutually enabling in order to move a conversation forward. Each classroom forms its own discourse community or joins with others to extend that community. This expanded community is nurtured by thoughtful interaction among members. Through openness, disclosure, risk taking, and trust in written conversation with unknown peers, student writers form a new, however temporary, community of critical and creative thinkers and communicators—like the students in three different classes in the United States and Sweden in the *Prufrock* blog example. Conversational writing shows up in letters, notes, and, increasingly, in email, instant messaging, discussion boards, blogs, facebook, twitter, and other online social networks.

Teaching disciplinary content in asynchronous online environments like web discussion boards and blogs offers an especially powerful way to engage students in academic discussions using conversational writing and helps to fulfill educational goals that have evolved from pre-web writing across the curriculum:

Goals for Conversational Writing

- Learning disciplinary content
- Creating disciplinary knowledge
- Developing critical and creative thinking
- Increasing competence with written language, rhetorical expectations, modes of expression, electronic communication

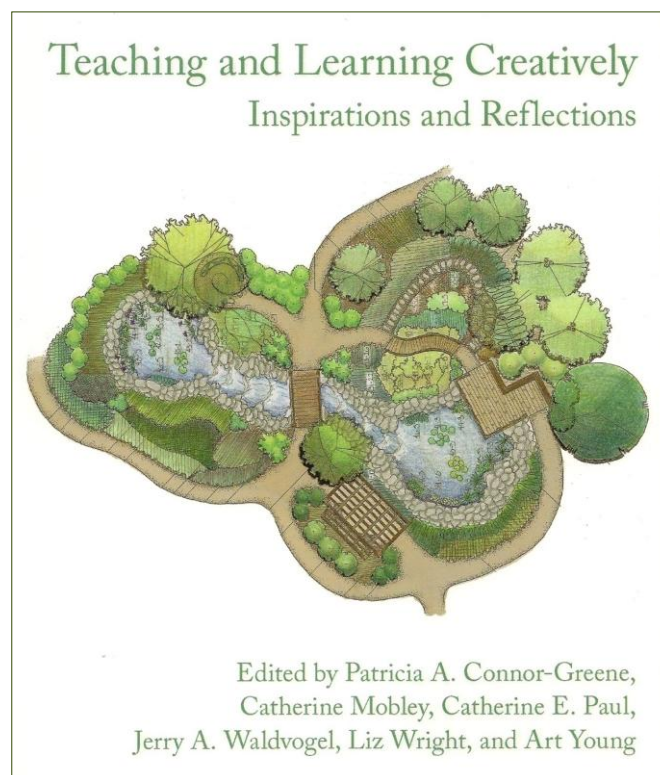
Key strategies for meeting these four goals are interactive language experience and reflection, and conversational writing can support both in a continuum from personal voice to increased mastery.



Of course, learning is not really linear but rather a recursive and dialogic process in which the cognitive and social inform each other. Within this process, the middle ground of conversational writing offers a powerful rhetorical space for students to establish the confidence and motivation to move from personal response, to collaborative knowledge making, to effective public presentation. And crucially, when students write to reflect on their own learning process, they develop self-awareness as language users and subject matter learners, as students did in the notes on engineering sign conventions and in the weblog letters on *Prufrock*.

There are various modes and media for doing conversational writing and learning, and one project we did at Clemson involved students writing poetry in disciplinary classes. We called it, what else?, “poetry across the curriculum” or PAC.

Soon after we expanded the project to include all kinds of artistic creations and called it Teaching and Learning Creatively or TLC. In 2006, Parlor Press published this book that included contributions from over a hundred Clemson students and faculty.



Landscape Architecture Design

Less is more.

This provocative architectural maxim is intriguing to design students who begin to explore its meaning, often for the first time, in their early design studio experiences.

Our Landscape Architecture undergraduates come from a world of pre-packaged vignettes, where ideas are pre-digested for them by Google[®], where reading between the lines is unnecessary. Just the facts, please . . . Give me the key words.

For many, design is about more for less—more product for less cost, more answers in less time, more academic bang for the buck. So in our introductory design studio class, where we learn to generate and evaluate ideas, we encourage students to take the time to think things through. Even when the result is a one-page drawing, we like to see a dozen background sketches and diagrams en-route.

The trick is to be selective—to work at developing the best design solution and resist accepting the first one. The language of design stresses this important distinction between basic simplification and careful reduction to essence.

Poetry employs our most familiar language to exemplify this concept. Poetry is about attentive selection—about larger ideas portrayed by a few quality words and phrases. Elegant design addresses several problems with a singular solution. This haiku-style poem, by second-year Landscape Architecture student Elisabeth Simmons, reads:

As a traveller
I walk the ant lines alone—
We think together

To better understand the nature of “landform” Elisabeth created a number of corrugated terrain compositions in a sandbox, crossing an initial grid-like format with contrasting earth-marks and parallel pathways. These were inspired by close-up studies (charcoal drawings) of her own palm, with its contoured skin-ridges and dynamic crevices.

In placing herself into this intimate topography she imagined herself responding to the “sandscapes” she had created by shrinking herself down to the scale of living inhabitant.

As such, she journeyed into and around this composition.

In presenting this mindset to us Elisabeth acknowledges the collaborative nature of sharing the design experience—of communicating basic concepts—by bringing us into her space. Through this haiku we readers can become, in effect, prospective clients.

David Chamberlain
Landscape Architecture

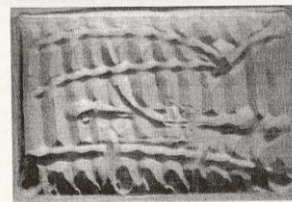
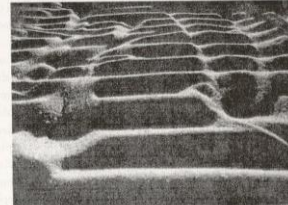
46

As a Traveller

Elisabeth Simmons



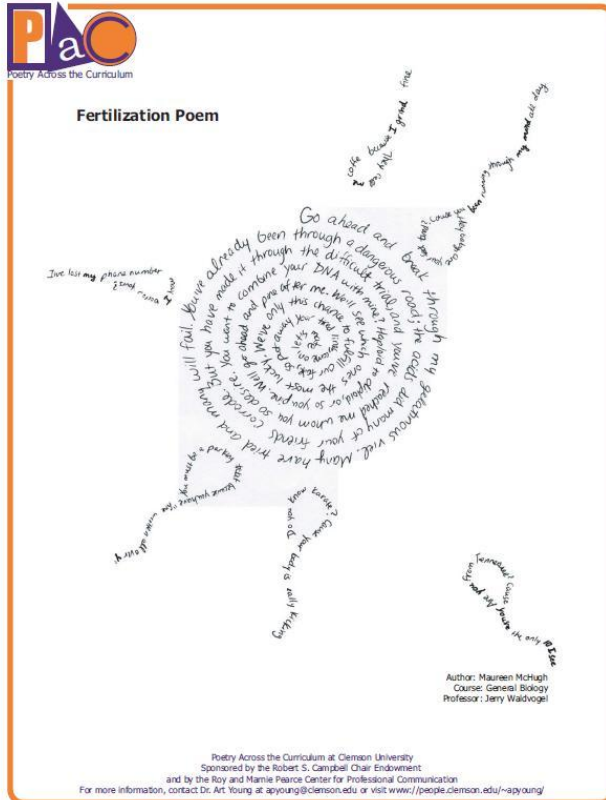
As a traveller,
I walk the ant lines alone.
We think together.



47

The book is arranged so that as you open a page on the right side is student creative work and on the left side is a reflection written by the teacher about assigning creative projects. This slide is Elisabeth Simmons’ haiku along with three sand sculptures she created and photographed. On the left, Landscape Architecture Professor David Chamberlain reflects on Elisabeth’s multi-modal project.

I’d like to read one of the poems in this collection titled “Fertilization,” written by Maureen McHugh in Professor Jerry Waldvogel’s general biology course.



I hope you appreciate the visualization of Maureen’s poem. It is on stationery from our PAC project and many students’ projects were turned into posters and hung around campus. I know you can’t read these words, so let me help you. The poem begins with the image on the far left and then flows up to the right around the circle.

These are the voices of the sperm.

*I’ve lost my phone number may I borrow yours?
 They call me coffee because I grind fine.
 Hey baby, are your feet tired? Cause you
 been running through my mind all day.
 Are you from Tennessee? Cause you’re the
 only 10 I see
 Do you know karate? Cause your body is
 really kicking
 You must be a parking ticket because you
 have “fine” written all over you.*

This is the voice of the Egg:

*Go ahead and break through my gelatinous
 veil.
 Many have tried and many will fail.
 You’ve already been through a dangerous
 road;
 the acids did many of your friends corrode.
 But you have made it through the difficult
 trial,
 and you’ve reached me whom you so desire.
 You want to combine your DNA with mine?
 Haploid to diploid, or so you pine.
 Well go ahead and pine after me.
 We’ll see which one’s the most lucky.
 We’ve only this chance to fulfill our fate,
 so put away your tired lines, come on, let’s
 mate.*

Jerry Waldvogel wanted students to be creative but he also wanted the biology to be accurate, and he describes his teaching goals in the reflection he wrote about Maureen's poem.

Maureen takes this evolutionary battle of the sexes and translates it into a witty repartee between the stereotyped pickup lines of men and the more discerning response of a woman. **She humorously but accurately depicts** competitive sperm swimming about the egg, comparing these with the lengthy and thoughtful response of the woman shown in the coiled text of her egg.

The visual layout is accurate in its anatomical depiction. I find Maureen's design absorbing and important to the learning being demonstrated about the process of fertilization.

(Professor Jerry Waldvogel, Biological Sciences)

I mentioned previously that many student creative projects were displayed as posters on campus. This photo depicts Clemson student Samantha looking at one such poster in a glass case in one of our hallways.



Here is another student poem and teacher reflection, more serious than “Fertilization.” This poem by Laurie Gambrell is titled ”The Mental Health Professional” and is from Professor Patricia Connor-Greene’s abnormal psychology class.

The Mental Health Professional by Laurie Gambrell

have you ever made cornbread
watched the golden batter hit the hot skillet and ooze
bubbling and slow to fill the pan

have you ever been frustrated
felt it slide over your hot skin and ooze
bubbling and slow to fill the core of you

i feel the oozing (is that even a real word?)
it doesn't matter if it is or isn't or wasn't or couldn't be
because all i feel is the ooze
the utter ooziness of the ooze is oozing

because i know that it doesn't matter if it is tricyclic antidepressants
or lithium or benzodiazepines or chickennoodlesoup

because i know that
it doesn't matter if it is four days or two weeks or thirteen years

because i know that She will be back in my office oozing her life

into my pan of golden cornbread

Professor Patti Connor-Greene uses creative writing to provide students opportunities to make personal and emotional connections to mental illness and to therapy. She describes her appreciation of Laurie's poem in her reflection.

In just 21 lines, Laurie Gambrell captured some of the most complicated and difficult obstacles therapists face: the struggle to maintain healthy personal boundaries while caring for an emotionally needy client, the threat of professional burnout, and the challenge of feeling (and instilling) a sense of hope despite setbacks.

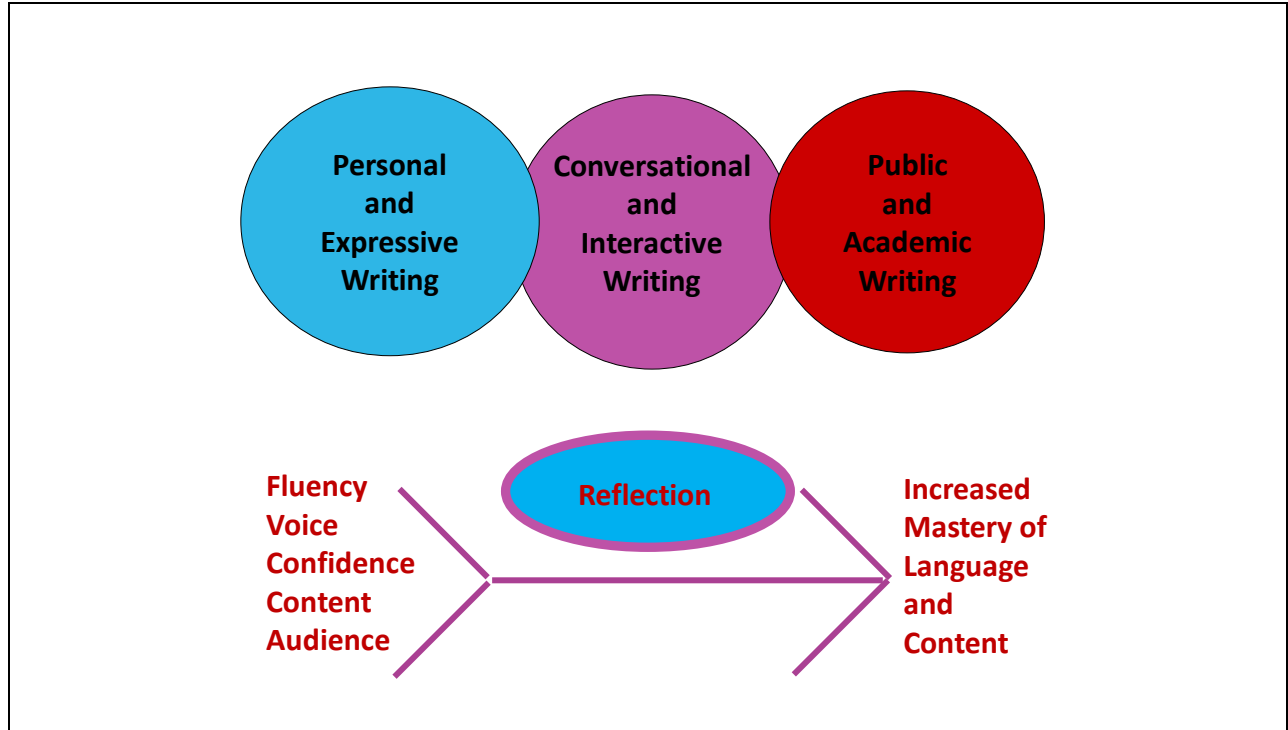
Laurie not only demonstrates an extraordinary grasp of this therapist's ambivalence and fatigue; she invites the reader to empathize as well. By beginning with "have you ever made cornbread," she connects us to a familiar experience that engages our senses far beyond an intellectual discussion of therapy.

(Professor Patricia Connor-Greene, Psychology)

To write reflections can be as important for teachers as for students, and such reflections shared among teachers enable faculty in a WAC program to reach out to colleagues beyond the boundaries of their classrooms and disciplines. Innovation and renewal in a WAC program begin with individual teachers in an engaged community creating a culture of writing and learning on their campus.

Writing poetry and composing other creative projects may also be a way to temporarily step outside a discipline while being in the discipline, which is what's happening, I think, in Laura's "Mental Health Professional." One goal of creative projects may be to reflect on those attributes of a discipline that are not usually critically examined within classrooms—a discipline's invisible values of inclusion and exclusion, of knowledge and belief, of sanction and dissent. To write in the discipline is to follow disciplinary conventions for the communication of information and thus to focus and limit what can be written and how it can be written, as in term papers, lab reports, and patient histories. Arts and crafts exist on the margins of most disciplines and that may make them a valuable asset to WAC programs that serve undergraduate students who often feel similarly situated on the margins.

To choose non-disciplinary conventions like multi-modal electronic conversations about T. S. Eliot, Salvador Dali, and Hootie and the Blowfish with engineering students in Sweden or like the poetry in "Fertilization" and "The Mental Health Professional" is to express disciplinary knowledge and values in unexpected and sometimes surprising modes and media, and often thus to perform cultural work as well as the disciplinary work that connects conversational and creative projects to ethical judgment, informed empathy, disciplinary knowledge, and civic responsibility, as well as to self discovery and artful expression.

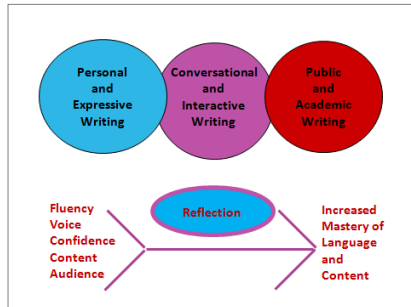


I hope WAC continues to develop multi-modally and internationally even as it builds on its history and prepares for a world saturated with mobile technology and an uncertain economic educational future. I hope, too, that WAC remains broad and not just focused narrowly on academic discourse, which too often in teaching with writing means prescriptive discourse. We need to continue to develop writing in the disciplines (WID) and writing in the major. We need to develop, likewise, writing in and for a range of communities within and beyond the academy. I suggest that we give students in all our disciplinary classes at all levels opportunities to explore the middle ground of academic discourse by writing and learning conversationally, responding academically and personally, composing critically and creatively, and communicating with multiple modes and media, while interacting with readers and writers across boundaries of place and time.

HANDOUT FROM

WAC Today and Tomorrow: Composing in Many Modes and Media

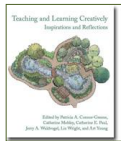
Art Young, Clemson University, apyoung@clemson.edu
<http://www.clemson.edu/~apyoung/>
10th International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference
Bloomington, Indiana, May 20-22, 2010



Goals for Conversational Writing

- Learning disciplinary content
- Creating disciplinary knowledge
- Developing critical and creative thinking
- Increasing competence with written language, rhetorical expectations, modes of expression, electronic communication

<http://www.clemson.edu/~apyoung/conversationalwriting>



Teaching and Learning Creatively: Parlor Press “poetry and images composed by students in a variety of disciplines, together with teachers’ reflections on their students’ achievements” <http://www.parlorpress.com/teaching.html>

Cross-Cultural Collaborations Among Swedish and American Students: Directions and Details <http://wordsworth2.net/projects/crossculturalcollabs/>



WAC Clearinghouse: Online Journals, Books, and Extensive Resources on Writing, Speaking, and Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum; Information on Starting and Sustaining WAC Programs; and Related Organizations <http://wac.colostate.edu/> — including the following:



Digital Books

Digital Books on Writing and Speaking Across the Curriculum: new and landmark works including *Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum* by Art Young

[writing across the curriculum](http://www.wacnetwork.org/) international WAC network

International WAC Network: “an informal community of teachers, researchers, and institutions... partnering with the WAC Clearinghouse to support individuals and programs around the world”



Across the Disciplines: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Academic Writing — “a refereed journal devoted to language, learning, and academic writing...articles relevant to writing and writing pedagogy in all their intellectual, political, social, and technological complexity”



The WAC Journal: “articles by educators about their WAC ideas and WAC experiences... a journal of practical ideas and pertinent theory”