

PUPIL

**A Journal of Rhetoric &
Composition Pedagogy**

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Table of Contents

A Note from the Editor	5
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Featured Contributor

Better Living through the Undead: How the Zombie Apocalypse can get Students Thinking in New Directions Brewster Swanlund	6
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Writing at a Glance

Q & A on teaching composition and creative writing David Hernandez	20
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Perspectives

Crossing the Threshold Together: A Collaborative Conceptualization of English 100w Bob Neis	23
Somaesthetics Pedagogy: An Introduction Joel Wilson	32
Gaining Literacy McKenna Dans	45
Authority in Overdrive: A Case for Tutoring as a Reader Kimberly George	50
Who's in Charge Here? Ian Tompkins	56
The Little Mermaid Complex Samantha Johnson	62

Navigating the Middle Ground

Lindsay Kerstetter

68**Assignments****Project Meme: Rethinking Composition in the Classroom**

Christina L. Boyles

76**The Why's and How's of Academic Tone: A Lesson**

Kimberly George

81**Essay Prompt: Everything is an Argument**

Daniel Hogan

85**Essay Prompt: Personal Narrative through Memory**

Emily King

89**Creative****How to Teach Writing**

Sally Jarzab

92**About Us****95**

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Note from the Editor

In 2010, a group of English graduate students from Cal State Fullerton created *Pupil* – a teaching-centered handbook for new tutors and teachers of composition. The inaugural issue offered sample syllabi and assignments as well as teaching philosophies and perspective papers from our own burgeoning scholars of rhetoric and composition. It provided these graduate students a venue to share ideas and experiences with colleagues and prospective teachers in the department. *Pupil* also sought to introduce these scholars of rhetoric and composition to the world of publishing, as it is conceptualized and published by students.

While this current issue of *Pupil* continues the goals of the inaugural issue, we have expanded its scope by opening up its call for papers to the larger community of rhetoric, composition and pedagogy. This broadening of scope is the journal's first attempt, and while it was difficult to garner essays from other disciplines, this journal successfully published works from scholars across the nation on the topic of composition, rhetoric, and pedagogy. This journal also continues to feature the perspectives from both tutors and teachers, and for the first time, from a student. We hope that this journal will provide teachers and scholars, prospective and tenured alike, new insight into the field of rhetoric and composition.

We, as emerging scholars and teachers, have taken away an immeasurable amount of wisdom and experience during this issue's publication. We had the pleasure of working with our peers from around the world, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences. For these opportunities that we will carry with us throughout our careers, we thank the English and Comparative Literature Department of California State University, Fullerton, for their support in our endeavors. And we owe many thanks to our Teaching Writing Club advisor, Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, for her unflagging support and encouragement.

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Featured Contributor

BREWSTER SWANLUND

California State University, Fullerton

After the apocalypse, Bruce Swanlund gathered a small band of survivors to fight back against the zombie horde. For awhile they stood alone as the last bastion of humanity against an ever growing tide of the undead. Taking refuge at a nearby college, CSUF, these people found the strength and endurance to not only keep up the fight, but to help others. Soon they were attracting more and more people to their cause. The new recruits, after passing a short stint in quarantine, were paired with mentors. Eventually this process became codified and a new age of college was born. Bruce's knowledge and experience made him uniquely qualified to handle the challenges of teaching. Frequently, his background allows him to illustrate connections for students in ways that most other composition teachers cannot. Armed with unconventional methods, examples, and texts, Bruce brings a new perspective to the classroom, hoping to instill in his students the lessons that will set them apart from their peers. His goal is to equip the next generation of zombie hunters with the very tools they will need to survive the modern world.

Better Living through the Undead:

How the Zombie Apocalypse can get Students Thinking in New Directions

Few things can teach critical thinking like the zombie apocalypse... This simple idea became an integral part of my curriculum a few of years ago. While I confess that I have always liked zombie movies, going back to George A Romero's original *Night of the Living Dead*, I actually came to this decision when I was sitting at the front of the classroom as students furiously scribbled away in their bluebooks during a midterm. I took a look around the room, and, allowing my idle mind to wander, I started to contemplate how I would get out of the building if zombies suddenly swarmed the building. It wasn't a serious endeavor, as the completed essays hadn't started to stack up yet. I was just waiting for a hand to shoot up so that I could answer a question; however, I quickly let the idea carry me away. Not because I was afraid of some sort of eminent attack, but because it was fun and different – and better than watching the clock tick away seconds of my life. I started to see the tools of survival buried in the steel of the uncomfortable desk-chair combos, the life-giving bottles of water peeking out from inside of backpacks, and the few slivers of apple in my briefcase as potentially my last meal.

I began to quiz myself.

Where would I go? But then I realized that was getting ahead of myself.

How well did I actually know the evacuation routes on my floor? I at least knew where the stairs were. That's a start. This idea might help in the event of an earthquake...or fire.

Wait! Did the fire extinguisher cabinets actually have fire extinguishers inside? I could remember seeing some of the cabinets empty, but I didn't know if that was in University or McCarthy Hall.

What about fire hoses? Surely those could come in handy for a number of things,

but some fancy admins in a little number crunching meeting someplace decided to cut a few out of every floor in a sort of strange money saving tactic, and now all I remembered was that there was a deficiency.

Forget a supernatural apocalypse -- I was not sure I was ready for a terrestrial emergency! As I walked to my next class to hand out the next midterm, I tried to pay more attention. I saw the empty fire extinguishers on my floor, I saw the padlocked vending machines with fresh water inside, I took a longer glance at the evacuation plan plastered outside of each stairwell, and I thought okay, I have a few ideas. But I also saw students with their noses buried in text-messages, and I wondered if they ever took a few moments to do the same little safety evaluation when entering a new building for that one hour class that they do not really like and are just taking to get one more check mark in their GE requirements column.

So I thought it might be fun to invent an assignment that got them thinking about safety and would force them to take a second to look around. But a normal emergency was too mundane and would be difficult to apply to other emergencies, so again I came back to the Zombie Apocalypse. I talked to my friend Jason Taylor and we began drafting some ideas as how to incorporate this concept into our classes. We recognized that it is a “pop culture” emergency that students could get excited about, but since it’s impossible, it would be innocuous enough that students could have fun thinking about it. In fact, a lot of students had thought of this very scenario before, so it was not that big of a stretch.

Jason came up with the scenario, and I added some additional rules. Once the scene was set, I asked students to try to take it seriously and to come up with an escape plan that would allow *everyone* in their team to survive (no sacrificing other people). My basic instructions asked them to essentially plan how to survive the zombie apocalypse that I described to them. I mixed it up a bit and removed some supernatural elements so as not to allow them to simply plagiarize

the things they have seen in movies like *Zombieland*. Here are a few of the parameters that I consider and the rules that I outline for my students.

Instructor Notes and Suggestions:

Assignment: Create a Plan for the Zombie Apocalypse

Class Level: Beginning Writing or Critical Thinking Classes

Skills: Outlining, Planning, Teamwork, Safety Precautions, Risk Evaluation, and Re-contextualizing objects/environments.

Learning Objective: Get students thinking in new directions

Composition Objective: Develop outlining skills

Length: Varies -- One Page Minimum

Special Information: Customize the rules of the Zombie Apocalypse how you like to direct student thinking.

SAMPLE APOCALYPTIC SCENARIO:

The zombie apocalypse has begun and you are one of the few remaining uninfected. For simplicity's sake, assume you are at CSUF when the uprising begins. Explain your plan for survival. Where will you go? How will you obtain water, food, transportation, and weapons? Will you stay on the move or fortify into a protected bunker and try to hold out?

Keep the following facts in mind about this particular zombie uprising:

1. The apocalypse is driven by a poorly understood virus. The virus is highly infectious and can be contracted from any carrier. This means that the zombie's bite or scratch is infectious! If you are bitten, you will most likely become a zombie in 24-72 hours. This makes your defense extremely important.
2. You live in Southern California. When the uprising begins, you are in our class on the campus of CSUF, but you do not have to stay on the campus.
3. You have only the skills and training you currently have. I.e., don't magically turn yourself into a Special Forces operative or an expert pathologist.
4. The zombies created by the infection are extremely aggressive and constantly hungry. They are "fast" zombies, not slow, shambling zombies, and so they will sprint to attack you on sight. Though they are driven primarily to eat human flesh (which allows them to regenerate minor damage), they will subsist on other forms of food if available.
5. The zombies do not attack each other, but have the ability to distinguish between zombies and the uninfected by smell. Disguises, therefore, do not work. They do not have any special sensory abilities beyond this one.
6. There seems to be only one variety of zombie: fast, aggressive, and stupid. They cannot use advanced or specialized tools other than occasional club-like objects and cannot perform any complex motor skills (sewing, spelunking, gymnastics, tobogganing, etc).
7. Zombies have no super-powers. They are simply humans with massive amounts of adrenaline in their systems. Because of this, they run only at normal sprinting speed and have strength only slightly above human normal (due to the adrenaline in their systems). Additionally, they are virtually immune to pain, which makes them slightly more injury-tolerant than uninfected humans. However, in general, what would kill an uninfected human will kill a zombie.
8. Approximately 95% of the population has already been infected. This means that complex systems, such as power grids, the Internet, emergency services (fire, police, etc.) and most other aspects of civilization have already collapsed. You cannot count on any organization or amenity of civilized modern life.

Keep the above in mind when analyzing your approach to the problem. Be specific and be sure to give solid reasons for your actions.

Naturally, I have people who try to bend the rules or cheat the system. Some try to sacrifice me

to the zombies, to which I usually reply, “You mean to tell me that you would look another person in the eyes and then condemn them to death?”

To which they usually reply, “Yes”.

So I ask, “You think other people would tolerate having a murderer in their bunkers? A real murderer? I doubt it. You know how in every zombie movie there is the character that everyone suspects is going to be a problem, but no one does anything about until it is too late, and the guy has already screwed everyone over? Maybe we should elect to sacrifice you to the zombies before it is too late.”

After that, people usually begin to get more cooperative. Which is exactly the point! However, if students are having a hard time, it might be beneficial to ignite their cooperation with a few additional questions.

Questions such as *What kinds of skills do each of you have to offer? What do you bring to the team? What do you have in your backpacks that you can use? What kinds of cars do you each have? Whose house is closest? Who is on defense? Does anyone know Kung Fu? What do you do if someone gets infected?*

Naturally, this list of questions could go on forever, so I like to tailor it to match the group I am talking to. I just want to get them started. Once the students really get going, they have all sorts of conversations about how they are going to survive. It is actually very rewarding to see students get up from their seats and move around the room, looking at what is available to them. Some go outside the room to see what is nearby. They ask each other about their vehicles, what they have in their backpacks, and sometimes even go as far as talking to other teams to see if they cannot double their chances of survival. When they are working together with other teams and thinking beyond the simple rules provided, it is especially impressive, as they attempt to try anything that the rules do not explicitly say that they cannot – provided they will not be voted out

of the bunker.

They get so carried away that they usually forget about the actual assignment, so after twenty or so minutes, I ask them to get down their plans on paper in the form of an outline. Though often underappreciated by beginning writers, I consider outlining to be an essential step in the writing process, since it works as a scaffold upon which the essay can be built, as well as giving students a visual roadmap for their trip through writing the essay. So because of this philosophy, I get them to plan out their ideas. Sometimes if their plans are a bit deficient, I ask them some questions to help them add some details they may have missed. Below is a sample outline for a survival plan that I have cobbled together from various student outlines.

SAMPLE OUTLINE:

I. Immediate Safety

A. Which way does the door open?

1. In
 - a. Push tables in front of it
 - b. Smart Cabinet
 - c. Wedges under door
2. Out
 - a. Use cords/wires to tie the handle
 - b. Place a chair under handle
 - c. Tie the Hinges

B. Understand the Enemy

1. Learn as much as possible
 - a. Observe from window
 - Listen through door
2. List Zombie Traits

C. Communication Lines

1. Functional
 - a. Call for help
 - b. Browse News sources
2. Nonfunctional
 - a. Power off -- Save for later
 - b. Check at regular intervals

D. Organize (Assess Situation)

1. Deserters
 - a. Leave if you want
 - b. You cannot return
2. Inventory
 - a. Food
 - b. Water (72 Hours)
 - c. Weapons
3. Skills
 - a. CPR/Medical Training
 - b. Kung Fu
 - c. Carpentry
 - d. Mechanical Expertise
4. Resources in the Area
 - a. Nearby Food/Water
 - b. Ropes/Cords
5. Vehicles
 - a. Gas
 - b. Distance
 - c. Capacity

II. Bunkering/Waiting (Level 1)

A. Breach Preparation

1. Avoid Confrontation
Melee/Close Quarters

- a. Clubs
 - b. Table/ Chair legs
- B. Armor**
 - 1. Cover the unprotected
 - a. Jackets/Pants
 - b. Shoes (Running unlikely)
 - c. Backpacks
 - d. Hide or cut loose hair/straps/fabric
- C. Comfort**
 - 1. Resource Sharing
 - a. Selfishness should not be tolerated
 - 2. Latrine set up
- D. Plan for Breach/Exit**
 - 1. Barricade in front of people
 - 2. Discuss Maneuvers
 - 3. Choose Defenders
 - 4. Create Sentinels to listen/watch

III.Exit (Days Later)

- A. Vehicles**
 - 1. Transport
 - a. Gas
 - i. Siphoning
 - b. Strength/Durability
 - c. Capacity (Safely)
 - d. Defensibility
 - e. Cargo options
 - f. Off-road
- B. Routes**
 - 1. Side Streets
 - 2. Parkways
 - 3. Off-Roading
- C. Destinations**
 - 1. Defensibility
 - 2. Resources
 - 3. Comfort
 - 4. Security

IV. Costco (Nearest Location: 900 South Harbor Boulevard)

- A. Defense**
 - 1. Single Entrance
 - 2. No Windows
 - 2. Adrenalin Burns Calories
- C. Weather**

- 3. Strong Doors
- B. Sustainability**
 - 1. Supplies
 - 2. Space
- C. Attached Garage**
 - 1. Improving Cars for escape
- V. Bunkering and Waiting (Level 2)**
 - A. Emergency Procedures**
 - 1. Escape Route if necessary
 - B. Establish Routine**
 - 1. Rationing
 - a. Food
 - b. Renewable Resources
 - i. Plants
 - c. Emergency Preparation
 - d. Preservation
 - e. Refrigerators and generators
 - f. Security
 - i. Rooftops
 - ii. In-store
 - 2. Maintenance
 - 3. Sanitation
 - 4. First Aid
 - C. Other Survivors**

VI. Vehicles (Level 2)

- A. Stronger Vehicles**
 - 1. Semitrailers
 - 2. 4x4 – Off-roading options
- B. Armored windows/doors**
- C. 3-4 people per vehicle**
- D. Break Down Procedures**
 - 1. Extra Tires/Gas
 - 2. Cover system
 - 3. Extra room in other vehicles

VII. Zombies are their own worst enemy

- A. No pain sensations means more damage incurred**
 - 1. No self-preservation
 - 2. No treatment of wounds
- B. Hunting humans is very confrontational and dangerous**
 - 1. Apex Predator
 - 1. Dehydration
 - 2. Freezing

3. Sun-burn

VIII. New World Order

A. Maintain Civility

B. Go somewhere more comfortable

1. Ocean/Ship
2. Alaska/North

Once their outlines are completed, I throw them a curve ball. I have them hand their outlines over to another team for review. For the second half of the game, I ask the other teams to play the part of the zombies, or Devil's advocates, and indicate and correct any specific loopholes or broad assumptions in the other team's plans. This allows them to flesh out the outlines a bit more, as well as become critical of the process, which I find helpful for setting up students for writing Expository essays, since this type of essay requires students to think about their audience as well as the process they are explaining.

When the back and forth between teams has ended, we discuss our plan as a class and see if we cannot come to a consensus on how to survive based on everyone's ideas, as well as extract some additional value from the assignment. At this point, I usually have a student say, "But this could never happen." Now on the surface this little scenario may seem completely illogical and far-fetched (agreed), but with just a little extra critical thinking, we can transform the discussion into how these ideas could be applied to other situations. This leads us to see the importance of the skills we just discussed. In fact, it is sad how appropriate and applicable some of the strategies they just came up with have in our recent times. Concepts like finding fresh water and food during a Katrina-level flood, getting in touch with our families if the phones do not work, or even barricading the door if there was a shooter on campus becomes instantly relevant. And all of these options depend on our communication of ideas and our willingness to work together. Our very survival and success as a species depends on this cooperation.

But people are not always as willing to cooperate – it takes coaxing...even extensive training to get people to work together. The inherent judgments and biases of human beings skew

our viewpoints and often make it difficult for us to see things from another person's point of view. The very essence of making judgments and evaluating other people's opinions is arbitrary – based on an arbitrary language.

But that is where education comes in. College is about being exposed to strange, sometimes unwanted, ideas, as well as frequently letting go of our own opinions when the data does not uphold our previous conclusions. In order to do this, we must examine these biases and the arbitrary nature of our own viewpoints. One assignment that I think helps do that is evaluating other people based on just a few criteria. The scenario once again involves the Zombie Apocalypse.

Who Should Survive?

Scenario:

It happened! The zombie apocalypse is upon us. Hordes of mindless, flesh-eating creatures are swarming the city, and there might be only a handful of humans left on the planet. These people manage to make it to a bunker; however, they all realize that if some of them wish to survive for many years, six of them will have to leave because there are not enough resources for all to survive. If they all stay, then foreseeably they will all live a maximum of one year.

In the bunker are the following people:

Instructor Notes and Suggestions:

Assignment: Evaluate who to save during the Zombie Apocalypse

Class Level: Analytical College Writing or Critical Thinking Classes

Skills: Arguments, Compromising, Teamwork, and Judgment/Biases/Criteria/Value Evaluation.

Learning Objective: Get students thinking about the nature of value

Composition Objective: Develop evaluation criteria for something like a Justifying an Evaluation essay

Length: Varies -- Half Page Minimum

Special Information: Customize the characters to reveal student biases.

Occupation	Age	Sex	Education	Attribute 1	Attribute 2
Rocket Scientist	70	Male	Two Masters	CPR	Anti-Semitic
Priest	48	Male	Seminary	History Enthusiast	Not Your Religion
Flower Child	45	Female	High School	Horticulturalist	Marijuana
Drug Dealer	18	Male	Elementary	Fit	Criminal Record
Bartender	32	Female	Junior High	Bilingual	Pregnant (counts as two)
Child	5	Female	Kindergarten	Innocent	Doesn't speak your language
Veteran	29	Male	High School	Marksman	PTSD
Retiree	65	Female	College	Chain Smoker	Nursing Skills
Biologist	38	Male	Doctorate	Pacifist	Disabled

Lawyer	30	Female	Law Degree	Resourceful	Lesbian
Welfare Recipient	22	Male	Associates	Creepy	Electrical Engineering
Doctor	55	Female	Medical Degree	Basic medical tools	Malpractice
Fire Captain	63	Male	Bachelors	Mechanic Skills	Misogynistic
Clown	25	Female	Culinary School	Artistic	Obese
Dog	6	M/F	Failed Obedience School	Cute	Ill-behaved
You	?	M/F	Some College	TBD	TBD

In this situation students are asked to look at a handful of data points and make evaluations about human life. I usually hand out just one column at a time to each group without showing the rest of the information. They then discuss whom they want to vote out of the bunker based on just a little bit of information. Once they have a set of exiles, I come by and give them another column, not showing that each column is further defining the same people. When all of the columns are distributed, I have them put them together, and see if they were consistently banishing the same people all along. If they weren't, they now have to figure out who they want to stay based on a more complete picture of the individuals, as well as explain why they made the choices they did.

It is interesting, and sometimes heartbreaking, to see how they evaluate people, but once those biases are out in the open, we can begin to examine the very arbitrary ways people look at each other. Were they making sexist, elitist, or selfish decisions? If so, where do these ideas come from? I ask if they considered that some of these people could describe their relatives or friends. With a little prodding they start to look at themselves and see if others would have judged them in very much the same way.

I am often asked whom I would banish, and I think that it is clear that the only sane answer is to keep everyone provided they do not endanger the others, as one cannot base unilateral decisions about the value of a human life off of a few data points. People are too complex for that. None of us are qualified enough to make decisions about another person's

value as a human being, but that doesn't keep us from trying to pass judgment. All we can do is try to learn to see things from other people's points of view.

In order to help to get people to see different perspectives, depending on the type of class, I might have the students break into small groups and write a short A, B, C, D conversation, assuming the personality of one of the above characters. This can be very fun, as I can give them

Instructor Notes and Suggestions:

Assignment: Conduct a conversation assuming the role as one of the listed characters

Class Level: Beginning Writing or Creative Writing Classes

Skills: Dialogue formatting, Characterization, Word Choice, and Thinking from someone else's perspective.

Learning Objective: Get students thinking about stereotypes

Composition Objective: Dialogue formatting for narratives

Length: A Page and Half Minimum

Special Information: Customize the characters to make it interesting or easier – perhaps add a pirate.

any scenario to participate in; however, it often leads to stereotyping. With a few tweaks, the characters can be made atypical, or the instructor can go a different way, and once the stereotypes are out in the open, use those to talk about our cultural conception of things like gender roles, elitism, class, etc.

Another option is to have the students keep their character's identity a secret and have the other students guess their character's specific information based off of the "speech patterns" of the dialogue. As long as the students do not just bluntly give their character's identity away, it can help the writers be more selective in their word choice, develop their style, or learn about subtle characterization. Naturally, any of the characters could be simplified for Basic Composition classes (that include narratives) or made more complex for Creative Writing classes.

I see stories and character development as a great way to explore the basics of writing, while still having fun. Narrative essays are all about the "story." While students will probably not find they need to write a narrative in the future, the act of constructing a story for an audience, practicing clear descriptions, and showing the value in the story can help students

begin to master the fundamentals of writing, while thinking about the power of word choice and brevity. The task for the student is to write an essay about an event that will engage readers and that will, at the same time, help them understand the significance or importance of the story itself. I ask students to tell their narratives dramatically and vividly. I like to see essays that have a central theme, utilize descriptive language, and follow a chronological structure (a point that sometimes needs to be reiterated a few times). Depending on the level my writers are at, sometimes straightforward prompts are best; however, I enjoy having a few creative options for those students that want a challenge, feel creative, or simply find the other prompts too boring. For them, I again turn to the zombie apocalypse.

Narrative Scenarios

Try to capture the full details of your experience. Thick, rich description and a distinguishable theme should help you compose a lively, interesting, and 'good' essay.

Non-Fiction

- **An Item** -- Find one item in your room that you feel illustrates your relationship with your family or a member in your family. Write a narrative essay that discusses the story of how you came to own this item and its significance to you with relation to your family or family member.
- **A Historic Event** -- Write a narrative essay that explains a single important event in your family's history. What made it important? Does it have any long lasting effects even until today? You may want to interview family members to gain outside perspective on this story.
- **A Feeling** -- Write an essay in which you use narration and description to recreate a time and place when you felt an intense emotion. Make sure to show the reader what you learned from this experience in your thesis statement.
- **A Lesson** -- Everyone fails, but a failure is only truly a failure when we learn nothing from the experience. Write about a time when you failed at something, but you turned your failure into a lesson -- and thus became better from the experience.
- **A Special Person** -- Without people, our lives are often meaningless. Tell me the story about an important event in a person's life, but you must show how this person is important to you. This person could be a relative, a love interest, or someone who helped change your life in a positive way -- even if he/she is your mortal enemy.
- **A Memory** -- Our memories are flawed; that is often why people take pictures and write in diaries. Think of an event that you will want to remember when you are old. Tell about what happened in a way that's so clear that if you read this story again when you are eighty, every detail will come flooding back as if it happened yesterday.

Instructor Notes and Suggestions:

Assignment: Write a narrative based on the following prompts

Class Level: Beginning Writing or Creative Writing Classes

Skills: Descriptive Language, Characterization, Imagery, Story Arcs, and Conveying significance.

Learning Objective: Learn the importance of tight, impactful stories

Composition Objective: Simple, yet creative medium for channeling student writing

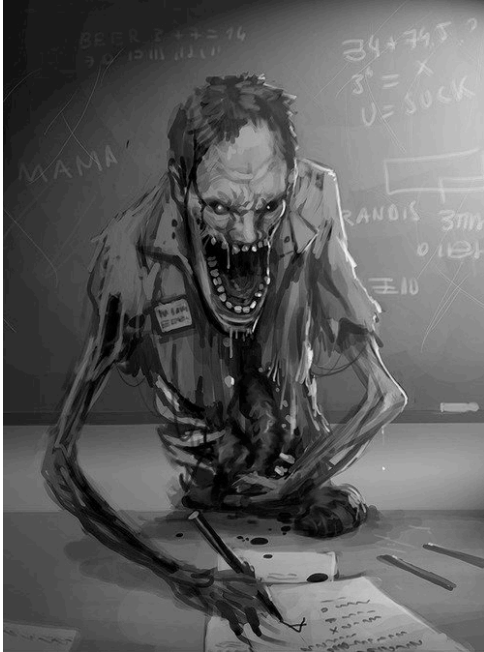
Special Information: Customize the scenarios to make it interesting or easier – perhaps add ninjas.

* **Fiction Options** (*You must clear your idea with me before you begin*)

- **A Special Item** -- Find one item in your room that will help you survive the zombie apocalypse--psychologically, emotionally, or physically. It does not need to be a weapon; however, its importance should be clear throughout the story. Write a narrative essay that demonstrates how your story hinges upon this item and the item's significance to you with relation to your overall well-being.
- **A Future Event** -- It is 20 years from now. The zombie apocalypse is happening or has already happened. Write a narrative essay that explains how this is the most single important event in your family's history, paying special attention to the characterization of your family members. What is the nature of the crisis? How do the different members of your family respond to it? What do you guys do?
- **A Bad Feeling** -- Write an essay in which you use narration and description to create suspense and mood so that your reader feels an intense emotion. Make sure to show the reader some sort of action that actually centers on conflict as well as showing some sort of significance at the heart of your story.
- **A Crisis** -- Tell me about the worst case scenario. Tell me the story of the apocalypse that you would hate to experience. It can consist of any sort of massive world changing event, but you must survive. What lessons does this scenario teach you? What do you value?
- **The Last Person** -- Tell me the story about how you and an important person in your life navigate the zombie apocalypse together. This person could be a relative, a love interest, or someone you know you could rely on, but you must show me how this person is important to you. Ask yourself, *Who's got my back?*
- **A Movie** -- Pick a movie or literary genre that you are familiar with and write a story that adheres to the traditions, motifs, and stereotypes of that genre; however, if you would like to do this option we need to discuss your ideas.

Additional Rules

1. **Be concise** --The event should take place over a short period of time (no more than one 24 hr. period)
2. **Center on conflict** (a personal transformation or external conflict)
3. **Autobiographical significance** (remembering thoughts of how you felt during the event—or would feel, reflecting on past/present perspectives, and choosing words and details that give a dominant impression.
4. **A well told story** (arouses curiosity using conflict, building to a climax, and leading to a change or discovery of some kind).
5. **Vivid description** (use specific details---how people are dressed, act, and talk). Show the reader your remembered event using vivid details.



Overall, the experience of writing should be fun, engaging, and require students to go beyond the superficial. I believe that every assignment should not only teach a composition skill or lesson, it should also imbue students with something they can use in their lives. Thinking up strange and fun ways to get students to see that connection can often help them begin to value even the most random activities in college while seeing the application to their lives, goals, and interests – which is essentially the objective of college. If

nothing else, students should learn critical thinking, which is the most important skill anyone can learn in college. Virtually, anything can do this; if the teacher gets excited about it, chances are the students will too. I choose the zombie apocalypse because I find that to be fun, and ideally, my students will too, and I think it is the best way to really get their brains working. After all, there isn't much difference between a teacher and a zombie – they both hunger for plump, juicy brains!

Writing at a Glance with David Hernandez

David Hernandez is an award-winning poet and young adult author with numerous works appearing in several publications. He currently teaches Creative Writing at California State University, Fullerton, and is the Department of English and Comparative Literature and Linguistics Writer-in-Residence.

What techniques and methods work well in your classroom as you teach students both Composition and Creative Writing?

In my creative writing classes, I occasionally quote Robert Frost's assertion that a poem has to reach three things: "the eye, the ear, and what we may call the heart or the mind." I've found that this piece of advice has proven useful to beginning writing students who tend to rely on abstractions and pushes them towards something more concrete and sonically rich. One writing exercise that steers them towards "the eye" is the childhood memory exercise. I ask my students to choose a vivid memory and write down ten specific nouns/details from that experience. I then ask them to write down ten details/nouns that they *don't* remember, but are plausible objects—so, if your childhood memory takes place in a kitchen, you might write down "a dirty spoon in the sink," although you can't say definitively that there was one. I tell my students to now write a poem about this childhood memory and include at least ten of the nouns—some from the remembered column, some from the fabricated column. I typically see the best poems from my students with this exercise and always remember to use it in my creative writing classes.

As for my composition classes, one activity that helps my students craft a well-rounded essay is by bringing copies of an essay that does just that. I'll split the classroom up into groups of six and give each group a focus and a few pertinent questions. So, for one group, I might ask them to focus solely on Paragraph Cohesion and ask them if each body paragraph focuses in the essay on one main topic, if it is clear what is the main topic for each paragraph. For another group, I'll have them look at Paragraph Transitions and ask them a different set of questions—Are the paragraphs sequenced logically? Should any of the paragraphs be moved? Is there one transition between paragraphs smoother than the others? After everyone has read the essay (with a specific focus in mind), I'll have my students get into their groups and talk about their sections for a few minutes. Then I'll go around the class, group by group, and ask them what they discussed. By breaking the essay into its components and analyzing how each one is working, they are able to look at their own essay with the same focus and see which elements could be improved.

How has your experience as creative writer influenced your practices in the Composition classroom?

When I hear grumblings in the classroom about how writing is difficult for them, that it's a lot of work writing multiple drafts for an essay, I tell them that it is *always* a lot of work, no matter what level a writer one is at. I tell them how accomplished writers have to revise as well, that my first YA novel went through roughly 5 drafts before it was sold, how I had to revise it again when my editor at HarperTeen sent me a 7-page, single-spaced letter about what wasn't working

in the book and smart suggestions for edits. As for the actual manuscript, there was not a single page that wasn't marked up with red ink. So. It's hard a lot work, yes, but it's rewarding work.

Do you believe it is beneficial for student writers to gain experience in both Composition and Creative Writing?

Yes, absolutely. Composition shows student writers how to organize one's thoughts and communicate effectively, and Creative Writing teaches them how to tap into their imaginations. If a student is able to combine both of those in their college life, and later in the workforce, then he or she will be ahead of the game.

Additionally, in what ways do you feel this strengthens or weakens the student writer?

I don't see any weaknesses other than the student writer might embellish (read: start writing fiction!) in an academic essay where one is required to stick to the facts. But, overall, I feel that creative writing can help the student write a more imaginative and persuasive essay, whereas composition can help the creative writing student with their story or poem—in terms of organization, revision, and grammar. No agent or editor will take a piece of writing seriously if it is plagued with grammatical errors!

Perspectives

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

Crossing the Threshold Together: A Collaborative Conceptualization of English 100w	
Bob Neis	23
Somaesthetics Pedagogy: An Introduction	
Joel Wilson	32
Gaining Literacy	
McKenna Dans	45
Authority in Overdrive: A Case for Tutoring as a Reader	
Kimberly George	50
Who’s in Charge Here?	
Ian Tompkins	56
The Little Mermaid Complex	
Samantha Johnson	62
Navigating the Middle Ground	
Lindsay Kerstetter	68

Crossing the Threshold Together:

A Collaborative Conceptualization of College Composition

Every year, thousands of newly enrolled college students walk onto campus with only very basic writing experience. Regardless of major, these students will soon be writing longer and more complex papers than they have ever been assigned in high school. The only preparation and exposure these students will have at the lower division level will be their first semester course in “developmental writing;” this raises the question of how to best acquaint students with the expectations of college writing while empowering them to find a voice which will propel them throughout their academic career.

The workshop is a concept currently underutilized in English at the university level. Workshops and labs are commonplace in the sciences. Theorizing and lecturing on anatomy only go so far; students expect some hands on exploration incorporated into a course to better comprehend the content. English should be no different; the concepts it deals with are at times more abstract and less intuitive and therefore almost necessitate further exploration or exemplification in order to articulate the material to the students in a meaningful or useful way. Teachers are largely not in a position where they are able to provide time for such exploration. This is an institutional restriction; neither schools nor curricula are currently designed to accommodate a workshop. Furthermore, this notion flips the way English classes have traditionally been taught, with the instructor’s expectations at the center. As a result, students know what an essay or a thesis is in a general manner of speaking; they’ve heard the terms incessantly throughout high school and supposedly have even put them to use, but they ultimately lack detailed understanding. Rather than attempting to overload the students with hours of lecture, having the students actively learn through experimentation and interaction

might just be the most encouraging approach to take in the teaching of English; incorporating a lab component to English classes could radically alter the way departments think about an active and largely collaborative pedagogy throughout composition instruction.

Realistically, once out of high school most writers have an understanding of an essay not unlike how a motorist understands his car. He is familiar with the car (maybe he inherited it), and knows how to drive it around; he might use the car fairly often to carry out all sorts of tasks. However, when it comes down to describing the internal forces at work, the swirling around of the delicate inner workings beneath the hood, the driver is likely less confident in his range of knowledge. Students use writing every day, but lacking from the majority of their instruction is a breakdown of the subtle processes at work inside the machine. So often the essay is seen as little more than a means of transportation, a product that gets the student to point B— the grade. The essay itself remains a hazy process for many students. A writing workshop provides the space and time to explore, to see to a carburetor and understand where it fits in the car and how it contributes to the successful operation of the whole. Similarly, writers would benefit from dissecting their writing and seeing the components up close, noting a counter argument that is left unaddressed or understanding what purpose the development of a conclusion might serve. The workshop provides a space for hands-on analysis and deconstruction of model texts, but more importantly it provides a forum for examination and discussion of students' own writing as a community.

When students synthesize learning through the medium of writing, through the processes of peer evaluation and suggested revision, they feel encouraged to reflect upon how such analysis might contribute towards their own writing development. Students gain insight on their own writing when they critique the writing of others, what works and does not work, and

furthermore “the ways their writing constructs a relationship with tradition, power, and authority—with other people’s words” (Bartholomae & Elbow 503). Students are able to compare their writing with a peer’s and see how each of their voices fits into the larger cultural discussion and how they might incorporate those outside voices into their own. Conversation “prompts students to revise, to work on their writings in ways they would not if left to (not their own, but) the culture’s devices” (504); Bartholomae argues that all writers are shaped by the community in which they are brought up, resulting in a limitation of their own ability to self-critique. Dialogue with another is necessary in order to broaden perspective, to see the flaws so common in a particular social community that they become invisible. In this sense, sentence clarity is no longer an arbitrary discussion of “right and wrong,” pitting students against the teacher, but rather a matter of a peer understanding what is written.

Elbow posits that the classroom can serve as a “real world” space that explores the demands of the workplace and academia, but (under the right conditions) also as an “idealized utopian space” where “students discover that they can write words and thoughts and not worry about what good writing is or what the teacher wants” (Bartholomae & Elbow 506). The fear of judgment and the desire to craft the imagined “perfect paper” is stifling for writers. As a result writers feel stifled creatively, afraid to take risks, and worse, come across as detached from the work. When Writing Center tutees claim that they aren’t interested in their paper topic, I always ask, “Why did you pick it, then?” The response usually boils down to them thinking it is what the teacher wants (Teachers apparently love first year comp essays about the state financial crisis?). Ironically, the teacher most likely wants nothing more than for the students to write about whatever they are passionate about. Students go home with an assignment and reasonably meditate on what they think their teachers expect them to write about. At home there is no one

else to bounce the idea off of, and the teacher is not there for follow up questions. As a result, students box themselves into topics and feel as though they must trudge through a paper they do not want to write.

The intention behind a composition workshop is to have time, space, peers, and a tutor—all of which facilitate the ability to play around with topics, discuss them, alter them, destroy them, and go back to where they started without negative consequence. As a result of this freedom to exchange, this time to work out thoughts, “they discover that their heads are full of language and ideas (sometimes language and ideas they had no idea were there), and they discover they can get pleasure from writing” (B&E 506). Often the best papers—the ones that merit the most pride, the most lovingly developed, the most articulately defended—are the ones that were no work at all to compose, because they *wanted* to be written. Students will gain confidence and ultimately write better when finding agency in their writing and feeling invested in their own work; “it is empowering for students to discover that they can learn so much without instruction” (507). Elbow suggests that students finding what works on their own, seeing it for themselves, is much more powerful than an authority figure continuously correcting and modeling. He goes on to say that “what people need for acquiring language is not teaching but to be around others who speak, to be listened to, and to be spoken to” (507). For Elbow, the best method of acquiring written language is no different than acquiring spoken language. To become a better writer, one must converse with writers, write with writers, write to writers, read writers, become written by writers. Exposure, interaction, and cross pollination are mandatory for competency in communication.

Writing is traditionally thought of as a solitary act, a personal one, (thoughts of Poe, Dickinson, and Kerouac come to mind); the writer is romanticized, seen as tortured and alone,

and consequently unrelatable in the eyes of students. More recently, critics are questioning this construct. Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter argue that “the writer who writes alone....believes the social nature of language” (Fontaine & Hunter 12); they suggest that the attempt to write in solitude, in a vacuum, is really the opposite of communicating. This seems especially true in the classroom, where students’ voices are limited to the instructor, and dialogue is fairly limited. The “social nature” of communication is taken away when students feel their writing is only for the teacher. Elbow describes this as “trying to cultivate in the classroom some tufts of what grows wild outside” (Bartholomae & Elbow 507). Students master many lingual processes outside of the classroom throughout daily social interactions. Instructors should give more credence towards channeling what comes so naturally. Seated in a uniform grid, faced forward, and silently listening, students in the traditional classroom are not in an environment where dialogue can flourish.

Bridging the gap between conversation (a skill acquired early on in childhood for most students without the aid of formal instruction), and writing (a task that seems foreign, unnatural, and daunting to incoming students), is a metaphor propagated largely by Kenneth Burke:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke 110-111)

Whether student writers are conscious of it or not, their thoughts and writings are never truly solitary, volitionally birthed through the miracle of invention. Rather, their opinions and

contributions are part of a much larger and ever growing tapestry. Ignorance of this concept, a further romanticizing of the *Author* as solitary genius, will only sustain feelings of intimidation in budding writers and furthermore serve counter-intuitively against the hope of students successfully integrating their voices within the academic sphere. A lively, engaging conversation is never one with just a single person droning on and on, no matter how informed they may seem. “Good” writing, much like “good” conversation is based on interaction and communal exchange, not intimidation and force.

Restrictions placed on writing by classroom assignments (time is a significant one, expected solitary writing at home is another) largely obscure the other guests in the room for student writers; consequently writers may feel overwhelmed or wholly unprepared to discuss the content assigned because they feel alone in the task. Student writing lacking in focus, attempting to take on too wide a scope of ideas, or languishing in summarization, might very well benefit from the burden of resolution being lifted; students more readily aware that their responsibility rests solely on positing one point of view contributing to a larger overall conversation bestows confidence. Knowledge of the other voices in the conversation, and how to use them effectively as a jumping off point, gives a writer a great deal to say on any topic. How could even a graduate writer feel they have anything to contribute towards subjects as contentious as “authorship” or “creativity” without the license to lean upon seasoned scholars like Barthes or Foucault? Using secondary sources, referencing critics and authors makes writing less stressful as it reduces the bulk of invention. Research is a skill in and of itself, and most likely one honed at a later point in a student’s career, but this dialogic mentality goes back to Burke’s parlor, to engaging in a discussion, to simply talking— an activity that students are not only familiar with, but have ample access to when sitting in a classroom with roughly twenty other voices.

The workshop places the students in the parlor, a new exciting environment where “Talk is central to our collaboration in a way that it seldom has been for us as individual writers” (Ede & Lunsford 34). The idea that conversation is not just an option but central to composition is a strong statement. The utilization of talk serves as a checkpoint for a writer; the other person is objective and can help the writer to see the writing from another angle, thus avoiding blind spots, gaps in logic. The other students serve as a sounding board for the writer, so he might have a better impression of what the piece sounds like and how it is received by an audience. “We find ourselves talking through to a common thesis, talking through the links in an argument, talking through various points of significance or alternative conclusions” (34). Conversation with another person harkens back to a Platonic search for truth, one that is only attainable through a mutual understanding, a dialogue between two people. Some sort of consensus on a subject hopefully is reached through dialogue, through compromise and exchange. The argument points out what can be proven in a piece and what the audience will accept, and it subsequently shapes the trajectory of the composition. Discussion “is also central to our planning, which must be both more explicit and more detailed when we write together than either of us is accustomed to when writing alone” (34). A collaborator, even a short term one, will expect to see some kind of structure providing them with more confidence and understanding of the product. If an idea is underdeveloped or not planned well, a collaborator will point that out and hold the writer accountable. The writer is held accountable, and forced to come up with a leaner, tighter argument as a result.

Much more can happen in a workshop setting than simply writing with a tutor present and the conventional silent peer edit. Fontaine and Hunter suggest the mere act of conversing lends itself to “Listening to others and being influenced by what you heard” (Fontaine & Hunter

2). This phenomenon is common in tutorials; when the tutor simply talks about the topic with the tutee, just asking more and more questions, drawing the topic out, the tutee often has an “eureka” moment, an instance of clarity and inspiration where writer’s block melts away and the task seems more manageable. A person reciprocating words and ideas expressed by the writer helps to solidify them in the writer’s mind and organize them. Additionally, the thoughts of another fill in the blanks in understanding a writer might have about a subject. In this way, “writing, by its very nature, enacts the social construction of knowledge (Fontaine & Hunter 7). Knowledge of a subject is never innate, but rather a pooling of all a writer has encountered, touched, felt, seen or heard. A writer can utilize a partner to navigate the domain of the topic until he has steady footing.

Conversation usually forces writers to make a decision, whether finding specificity in a thesis, or taking a side in an argument. Vagueness and treading on neutral ground rarely happen in social situations because the other participants in conversation demand clarification; yet uncertainty is extremely common in student writing: “in any ways X is the stronger choice, but in many ways Y is also a strong choice.” In dialogue, rivalries occur very naturally, and speakers begin thinking in terms of defending a side through applying texts read and providing anecdotal evidence in addition to questioning the logic of the opponent—all qualities demanded of strong writing. In class, students can switch between believing and disbelieving their partners; a reader can deliberately take the writer’s side or play the devil’s advocate, thus allowing the writer to find ways to improve the argument.

If educators are to value the process of writing over the product of writing, the classroom itself must change to reflect this. A fifty minute class meeting three times a week passes by quickly, barely giving time to peer review amidst the lectures. A workshop for students to hone

their work, experiment with form and voice, and explore topics through conversation represents a shift in the composition paradigm. The focus is placed upon the writers and what issues they struggle with rather than the essays they turn at the end of the semester. A workshop is just a small step in the larger journey towards a non-directive, self-actualizing, communal pedagogy, but all journeys must start with a step, a crossing of the threshold.

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Somaesthetic Pedagogy: An Introduction

William Butler Yeats ends his famous poem, “Among School Children” on, I think, one of the most profound couplets in English verse: “O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?” In these reflective lines, Yeats presents the performer and performance as essentially one being—there is no distinguishing between what is done and by whom it is done. The dancer embodies the dance and so, the two are inseparable. In short, what is emotive about an act is not some essential quality of the act itself, but the harmonious blending of act and actor. In a similar vein, as composition instructors, we must not solely concern ourselves with composition’s dance, but instead adopt a Yeatsian perspective on writing, one where the composer and the composition are parts of an organic whole. To this end, American philosopher Richard Shusterman’s project of somaesthetics can assist composition instructors in placing a greater emphasis not just on the student text itself, but on individual students’ body-mind nexuses that underwrite the entire composition process.

Conceived in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, somaesthetics is meant to embody both theory and practice, and as Shusterman defines it, prompt the “meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning” (*Pragmatist Aesthetics* 267). For Shusterman, our bodily and mental dimensions are inseparable, and thus attention to body is as necessary as cultivation of the mind. Somatic care, he argues, “integrat[es] theory and practice,” foregrounding the concept of embodiment, quintessential to emotive writing (*Thinking Through* 3). Turning to Shusterman’s philosophy in composition pedagogy can help foster a greater appreciation for the dancer behind the dance, the individual writer whose experience with the writing process can, at times, be overshadowed by a greater concern over the writing they produce. Somaesthetic instruction will not only avoid a sort

of dualistic approach to composition pedagogy, solely instructing the mind and locating its inchoate voice, but reevaluate the role the body and bodily experience play within the writing process itself.

Well-meaning teachers have overstated the cognitive approaches to writing. Almost three hundred years ago, the French intellectual Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, articulated the paradigm underpinning the writing process ever since the Enlightenment: “To write well means to think well, feel well, and render well, all at the same time; it is to possess all at once intellect, soul, and taste.”¹ And so, many students, paralyzed by literacy myths and compositional consternation have concluded that because they do not write well, they do not think well. True, composition is ultimately a manifestation of thought, but this does not obviate the need for teachers to underscore the relationship in composition between mind and soma, a term Shusterman prefers as it does not carry the same connotations of egotism or fallibleness as *body*. Somaesthetics, then, may affect the overall quality of writing and, we may hope, help composition instructors to fulfill their ultimate goal of producing more authentic, engaged, and thoughtful writers.

Though never formally linked, principles underlying somaesthetics have always existed on the fringes of scholarly discussion surrounding composition pedagogy. In their seminal essay, “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing,” Linda Flower and John R. Hayes argue that “The act of writing involves three major elements which are reflected in the three units of the model: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing processes” (369). Regarding

¹ My translation from Buffon's August 25th, 1753 declaration in front of Académie française: “Bien écrire, c'est tout à la fois bien penser, bien sentir et bien rendre; c'est avoir en même temps de l'esprit, de l'âme et du gout” (Buffon 41).

this “task environment,” Flower and Hayes briefly summarize it as “all of those things outside the writer’s skin, starting with the rhetorical problem or assignment and eventually including the growing text itself” (369). Presenting the environment for writing as “all of those things outside the writer’s skin,” however, summarily disregards the what happens inside the writer’s skin that immeasurably affects the cognitive and process components Flower and Hayes were more concerned with in 1981. Furthermore, Flowers and Hayes’s “environment,” is only textual and thereby precludes the aesthetic environment that invariably affects the body-mind nexus of the composer. Surely, “the task environment” must incorporate more than “the immutable part of the writing process,” the “rhetorical problem” (369). In short, Flower and Hayes’s classic essay left no room for the greater, non-textual, intangible affect constitutive of the writing process. Indeed, while the rhetorical problem may be immutable, the problem of making the transition from secondary school writing to collegiate prose, all the while complicated by students’ insecurity with how to write, when to write, or where to write, is anything but, and it necessitates far more than a strict cognitive approach to composition instruction.

To redress this concern over the task environment, somaesthetics can contribute to our pedagogy through the explicit teaching of writing rituals. Writing requires an organic interactivity, where body, mind, thought, hand, writing environment, and written word coexist and cooperate. Students must be encouraged to develop their own composition rituals, by which I mean personalized writing habits that conform to individual psychosomatic needs, where both the students’ bodies and minds are primed, conjointly, with the skills necessary prior to commencing this redoubtable task of channeling one’s thoughts from mind to hand to paper.

Such individual, somaesthetic rituals, coupled with a “strenuous mood,”² may assist students to better convey what they have to say. In this way, we give attention to both the students’ soma as well as “mood’s crucial role in providing unity to thought and experience” (Shusterman, “Thought” 441). These rituals will help writers find an ideal condition and location in which to write, thereby overcoming the formidable composition process through body consciousness and mood awareness.

In suggesting an invigoration of the writing curriculum with somatic awareness an emphasis on writing rituals, I do not blaze some untrodden trail. As recently as 2011, Christy Martinez et al. identify “the physiological reaction from the stress of writing” as a major element in “reduc[ing] students’ confidence in their ability to write” (352-353). This same study suggests reducing students’ anxiety will automatically lead to higher self-efficacy, manifested in controlled and more evaluative writing. Undoubtedly, anxiety takes a toll on student writing and

² The term “strenuous mood,” used by William James to signify the mental disposition necessary to overcome challenges to living a melioristic and experiential life and moreover, that “the greater ideal be attained,” is the subject of Shusterman’s “Thought in the Strenuous Mood: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Feeling” (James, *Essential Writings* 306). In this article, Shusterman argues that mood, centrally linked to feeling, thought and thus existential meaning, is “an essential element of human happiness: not only through felt pleasures of love and beauty but also ... enjoyments of health and cognition” (Shusterman, “Thought” 452). Such beneficial cognition, I argue, is best served by developing rituals meant to assuage the emotion of the writer and sponsor a positive and strenuous mood towards the act of writing. See also William James. “The Absolute and the Strenuous Life.” *William James, Writings, 1902-1910*. Ed. Bruce Kuklick. New York: Vintage, 1987).

Martinez et al. recommend some practices to reduce this undue stress: “Breathing exercises, meditation, and guided imagery have been proven to help alleviate anxiety” (358). Somatic rituals may include less high-brow practices as well. Some students may need to sit and eat a whole stuffed-crust pizza or down a pot of java in order to stop staring blankly at the computer screen and instead, trigger their own physiological responses (not to mention the lucidity) necessary to produce a piece of academic prose. Other students may need to refrain from coffee, tea, or perhaps their favorite college-budget brew. One student may need to engage in physical activity before sitting down to compose an essay; another student may need to conserve that very same expended energy. Such somatic “coping strategies,” or rituals, may begin to assist students in fashioning new means of approaching the writing process. In other words, while students may not be writing for leisure, attention to the body and such physiological activities may facilitate a more leisured writing. Students, with their learned animosity towards composition, must be taught that comfortable, leisurely writing begins with a writing ritual that incorporates body and mood awareness, and attunement to this may produce results with which students can be proud.

I am not here suggesting that we instruct our students in yoga before argumentation. I, too, am not suggesting we jettison all cognitive pedagogy; indeed, we must move students’ minds if we are ever to produce thoughtful writers. Students must be taught to think critically and reach to the recesses of their mind for logical reasoning, metaphors, and illustrative examples. However, I am saying that our students must first learn, to use a colloquialism, how to “get in the zone” necessary to produce a piece of academic prose. As composition instructors, we want to move away from the strict “academic body,” as Shusterman notes, “whose commitment to the *logos* of discourse typically treats the body in mere textual terms” (“Somaesthetics and Education” 54). The student soma is not merely the receptacle of Plato’s *Timaeus*, a piece of

“space,” to use one translation, which assists in the transfer of the formless to the formed. To paraphrase Shusterman’s words, actual bodily performance is crucial to the idea that somaesthetic writing is practiced as well as theorized. The body is the site of experience and all activity. Being cognizant of this will lead somatic-minded composition instructors to a newfound appreciation and commitment to students’ writing bodies. Without a doubt, the composition classroom is in dire need of what Kristie S. Fleckenstein calls the “somatic mind: a permeable materiality in which mind and body resolve into a *single entity* which is (re)formed by the constantly shifting boundaries of discursive *and* corporeal intertextualities” (first emphasis added, 286). Navigating these “shifting boundaries” is no easy task, not even for the most seasoned writers; to be sure, it will take most of our students their entire college career to learn to do so at all. But all is not lost for composition teachers—we may give them a head start through somatic instruction.

Task environments and writing rituals involving anything from stuffed-crust pizzas to Eastern breathing exercises are not the only area where somaesthetics may find application in composition pedagogy. The balance of this essay will briefly introduce three additional areas where somaesthetics may play a role in composition pedagogy.

The Body of the Text

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates writes that “Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work” (Plato 264c). In constituting good composition as a somatic and organic whole, Socrates intrinsically connects the body to writing, a traditional *topos* in rhetoric but long lost in composition pedagogy. Of course, we give tacit recognition to this principle by continuing to call the essential

part of the essay the *body*, but we do not call the introduction the *head*; neither do we call the conclusion the *foot*. But to see writing in this way, or possibly reversed with the conclusion being the head and the introduction the feet, as I prefer, may hold great pedagogical value for our students. After all, what is one of the greatest issues within student and particularly freshman writing? Often our students' essays cannot stand on their own two feet. Students' emotionally driven arguments lack credible academic value, as they often do not engage with authoritative texts or present quantified research, necessary elements for any argument, spoken or written, to proverbially stand adroit.

I am not suggesting we create a worksheet and have students scribble in their proposed legs, body, and head of their argument—but helping students to see what their text *should* metaphorically do is powerful. And what of the text's arms? Good writing seldom answers more questions than it raises. These branches to other subjects—research questions, perhaps even a guiding research project for an advanced class or second year freshman writing course—may be subsumed by the idea of the text's arms. Somaesthetics is not meant as a purely intellectual exercise in corporeal-based philosophy nor is it simply practical in terms of somatic cultivation, as discussed early in the context of writing rituals. Pragmatic somaesthetics “has a distinctly normative, often prescriptive, character because it involves proposing specific methods of somatic improvement or engaging in their comparison, explanation, and critique” (“Designing”). As pragmatic somaesthetics proposes “methods to improve certain facts by remaking the body and the environing social habits and frameworks that shape it,” so a pragmatic teaching of the text as a body in of itself—inclusive of its pillars of support, its core vision and governing tenets, and its branches to greater questions and lines of research—may be of great value to locating a deft model for our students' writing.

Somaesthetic Essays and Emotive Writing

“A civilization based on information requires legions of people who can present that information efficiently, with a minimum display of self,” Scott Russell Sanders writes, “But even if the self is not on display, an actual flesh-and-blood human being still composes the sentences, and writers well-trained in the first-person singular are likelier to feel a responsibility for the accuracy and impact of their words” (117). Sanders’ argument forms the crux of the next two areas in which somaesthetics may play a role in composition: the form and content of our students’ essays.

During my first semester of teaching freshman composition, in fact during the orientation session with other instructors and teaching assistants, I was told all that matters is a student’s argument. Regardless of what students are responding to in our class, the point of their essay was to become competent in argumentation. Hence, every essay, no matter the prompt, content, or text prompting it, was in the form of an argumentative essay. No doubt, learning to argue logically, cite sources, appeal to experts and scholars, and navigate one’s self through major social issues through the written word are important skills our students must apprehend before they move on to advanced classes in their respective disciplines. But since Aristotle’s time, rhetoric has included appeals to pathos, moving the audience through the writer’s experience, diction, and shared human feelings. Only during the past few centuries, and moreover since the Age of Reason, did thinkers like John Locke try to strip emotion from argument altogether.

I think back to the first essay I taught during my first class of my first semester as a teaching assistant. We read Kenji Yoshino’s preface to *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* as well as its final chapter, and though Yoshino explicitly states in his preface, “I have written this book in a more intimate voice, blending memoir with argument” in order to

“make the stakes of assimilation vivid,” students were directed not to invoke their personal experiences and write anything that resembled a personal essay. Instead, they were to divorce themselves from the text and argue how Yoshino’s concept of a new civil rights could be applied to an area of society that he did not discuss in his text. During the weeks I was teaching this essay, I would ask my fellow teaching assistants and the professors directing the writing program why we would solely teach argumentation when dividing argument from personal narrative in Yoshino’s essay was in itself a redoubtable, if not impossible task. The answer was simple, at least according to my fellow composition teachers: our students can’t write. This answer was an oversimplification—our students do write. In fact, in the generation of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and other online social tools that only encourage conceited and egoistic writing (in 140 characters or less), the one thing we can be certain of is that our students do know how to write, *at least* about themselves.

The point is this, and I borrow from Keith Kroll’s “On Paying Attention”:

Personal essays allow students greater fluency in their writing and help them become comfortable with language, discover their voice, learn to enjoy writing, and see it as an art form rather than simply a set of skills. Most important of all, writing and reading personal essays encourages them to be present and to pay attention to their own lives. (Kroll)

Being aware of how experiences shape our identities is not an academic weakness; experience, which only occurs through medium of the body, adds depth to student writing and encourages our students to be more contemplative learners and writers. Somaesthetics encourages a life full of mindfulness, attunement to our bodies, and bodily experiences. Somaesthetic writing—personal essays and emotive writing—conveys more than just cold, vapid facts and helps our students connect their body and mind to the human experience they share with their readers.

Pedagogies of Mindfulness

Beyond just using the personal essay, setting the stage for body consciousness and mindful writing requires, from the onset of the semester, a certain commitment to direct instruction of somaesthetics. With our classes at large, we may deploy activities that help locate the body and call forth awareness during the composition process. Shusterman proposes just such an activity: a “body scan” that “involves systematically scanning or surveying one’s own body, not by regarding or touching it from the outside but instead by introspectively, proprioceptively feeling ourselves as we rest motionless” (*Thinking Through* 115). Shusterman’s body scan is a “practical lesson of experiential somaesthetics aimed at heightening somatic awareness” and helps contribute to our students’ “self-knowledge” (*Thinking Through* 113). Such a taught moment of introspection may do wonders for our students, assisting them to critically assess their own bodily experiences in order to identify what makes them comfortable. A body scan, as noted by pragmatist philosopher and psychologist William James, may help “a few parts” of the body to be “strongly emphasized to consciousness,” thereby aiding our students not to view their body, the locale of their composition, or even the composition process itself as concrete, inflexible components but as a “division into parts” of the composition process (James, *Principles* 788; Shusterman, *Thinking Through* 118). Introducing Shusterman’s body scan within the first week of class would demonstrate not only the proprioception that awareness of the body may cultivate, but also set the stage for a more comfortable approach to the class and to the writing process in general.³

While Shusterman proposes the body scan for philosophy classrooms, its import into every classroom may bear fine fruit, and particularly so in composition classes where we aspire

³ Shusterman’s body scan can be found in Chapter 5 of his *Thinking Through the Body*.

to affect students' writing for the rest of their lives, regardless of our own ideological inclinations. Building on Shusterman's body scan, a follow-up activity, a "classroom scan," if I may, can further support students in the formation of new rituals attuned to the physicality of writing. Asking students to close their eyes and fix their attention to some element of the classroom—the lights perhaps, or even more specifically, the humming of the ubiquitous fluorescents—may heighten students' awareness of the significance location has on one's body. Do the lights or the hum thereof create a sense of tension? Conversely, might they cause a sense of relaxation? Additionally, each student's proximity to the next student may be considered. Does Student A feel relaxed sitting next to Student B? The class instructor may choose to play some music—at varying levels and of assorted genres—in order to prompt the students' consideration of the somaesthetic dimensions of music, meditation, and proprioception.

In this essay, I have promised no silver bullet, no catholicon for perfecting student writing. As there is no "one size fits all" in teaching, there is no single piece of somaesthetics that will profoundly affect all of our present and future composition classes. Some principles may even be at odds with one another. One student may function well supine across their sofa with a notebook computer lying on their lap; another student may need a brightly lit room and a hard chair. Teaching students to organize their writing as a human body with legs of research substantiating their argument is not easily reconcilable with invoking experience and the personal essay in writing assignments. Nevertheless, Andrea Lunsford aptly points out that writing is both "an activity ... [and] an act always involving the body and performance" (228). As athletes preparing for a big game warm up their bodies through various drills, so too our students must be taught ways to prepare for and perform the academic art of composition. Being contemplative instructors who expect our students to learn this art, we too must seek new

teaching methodologies, including those somaesthetics encourages, so as to effectively teach our incipient writers how to write.

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Gaining Literacy

At least I knew it was coming. The beginning of senior year may have been marked by the excitement and new found “power” that only a senior has, but I felt different. Instead of skating by with late arrival and early dismissal, I had a full and demanding schedule. My advanced placement literature class was no exception, and it became very clear that it would be the major cause of my stress. However, it wasn’t my 6’4” beefy literature teacher who scared me, nor the fact that there was a fake severed arm in his classroom, nor the fact that he overturned a desk – startling the whole class – to make a point. What scared me was the fact that he expected us to write a 30 page paper for our senior project. Though I knew it was coming, I couldn’t be less prepared for the arrival.

The year started off like all the others: sweltering hot August morning, the stench of new whiteboard markers, and me, scrambling to memorize my new schedule. Over the summer before senior year I received my AP test score for my English composition class. A small black ‘2’ stared back at me. I had failed. My dream to be an English major in college cracked at that moment and I became disenchanted with the subject. However distressed I was, my guidance counselor cheerfully encouraged me to continue on to AP literature. I sullenly agreed. The AP literature class I was reluctantly assigned to was a ragtag team of misfits. Though we immediately separated into cliques, they melted away once we realized that the popular kids felt apprehension, the nerds were no better off, and the choir girls broke out in nervous harmonizing even before class started. Our whimsical yet no-nonsense teacher, Mr. Brasington, immediately instilled fear into the class; he was the type of teacher that had the magical ability to silence a class without saying anything and he made every assignment feel so important that surely you would fail if you missed one. We, as a class, would converge together before Brasington (the

Mr. to his name was dropped within the first lesson) came to class and we'd demand to see each other's papers; he was notoriously vague when doling out assignments, and interpretation thrived in the class. More than once I found myself making the wrong interpretation, resulting in a major blow to my grade and ego. Brasington's grade scale didn't exist in tens or twenties; it was in the thousands.

Around the third day of school, Brasington remarked, ever so casually, that last year's senior class had written 20 pages for their senior project, but this year was different. "I thought it would be more fun to write 30 pages this year," he said shrugging his shoulders as if it were a drop in the bucket. "Fun?" I blurted out, questioning his sanity. "Fun for you!" I felt as though our disbelief at his nonchalance was palpable. A quick and odd silence fell; a smart aleck comment hadn't been experienced yet. Instead of the backlash I expected, Brasington simply giggled, a high and squeaky one, which I found both alarming and comforting. I anticipated his laugh to be more of a threatening guffaw. Nevertheless, in that small exchange, the tension of having a 30-page paper fell, the class laughed, and the year began.

As time progressed, my grade experienced a rollercoaster of highs and lows; the essays continually knocked my grade down. The majority of my in-class essays received dismal and sad grades that I would neglect to show my mother. There was something I wasn't grasping. Even my take-home essays would read like wilted flowers. I knew the material and I understood it but I lacked the ability to put it all into coherent words. My fellow classmates progressively got better but I couldn't nail down any consistency in my writing. I could come up with maybe a single good line in an entire essay. My writing could be compared to a look around Brasington's classroom: books of all subjects were stacked haphazardly in corners of the room, and papers

were scattered around like confetti. Yet even his room had some form of fluidity; my writing was simply all over the place.

Once the year had dwindled to second semester, we were assigned to pick topics for our senior project. We were to document a genre of our choice. I struggled with my topic choice; if I couldn't write on the topics I was provided in class, then there was no way I'd be able to pick a decent one myself. With my heart thumping full of insecurity, I chose comedic literature. Sure, I liked reading and enjoyed a good laugh, so I thought that perhaps I had finally found my literature calling. For the last few months of high school, the senior project was constantly in my mind and on small scraps of paper. My writing process turned me into the human form of sweaty palms; I poured over comedic books, skated on the different types of humor, and developed a taste for literature that I had never had before. I checked out dozens of books at the library, staggered under the weight of them (both in terms of mass and literary merit), and began to write. For the first time, I actually read books, developed opinions, and formulated thoughts about them. I wrote everywhere and on everything at a feverish pace. I drafted pages and brainstormed, for once. I used quotations that were supported by evidence, and I analyzed everything: how the title contributed to the theme, why the characters behaved as they did, and why the time period was relevant to the humor. I would write gobs of pages one day and then delete them the next because I found them unsatisfactory. My constant mantra was this: would the author I'm writing about be impressed by what I'm saying? If the answer was no, then it was heavily edited or deleted but mostly sighed at in irritation. If the answer was yes, I would try and apply it to my other writings and maintain the confidence I would gain from it. I was determined to deliver a decent final essay when the whole year I had struggled to maintain a 'C' average in my writing. It was both a horrible and awesome obsession. My mom became alarmed when she

left early one morning for work on Saturday, and when she came home she saw me typing at the computer, surrounded by books, and still in my pajamas. I don't think she knew how to feel, proud of me for being dedicated or concerned because I was being too dedicated.

As the senior festivities continued on I was voted class clown by my grade and upon hearing this piece of news Brasington smiled and remarked, "No one is better qualified." Instead of being happy about his compliment, I pondered my paper and whether or not I should add more humor and personality to my tone or keep it informative and impartial. Inwardly, I decided on more humor and personality - this meant more editing. Once I had decided to write in my own voice I learned that I was making writing more difficult for myself the whole time. I started to edit my paper so that it sounded less like a somber book report written by a lawyer and more like it was written by a scholar with a sense of humor. In many ways I found the editing more difficult than the actual writing. Coming up with the raw ideas wasn't a hassle but gluing them all together into my precious mosaic of literature was. The night before my project was due my printer crashed, exploded, and died a horrible death during the printing of my paper. I was absolutely devastated. All those times I had scoffed at others for having printer issues came back to me in full karma with a vengeance. I internally cried and resolved to print it at school early in the morning for ten cents a page. I arrived at school an hour and a half early (for safety) with puffy eyes and a nervous and jumpy demeanor to print my paper. It took me over three months, endless editing, and three dollars to complete my senior project, but it was finally finished.

I felt a mixture of emotions when handing in my paper that made me feel nauseous; I was excited and relieved but nervous and uneasy. We then took our AP literature exam in the same large classroom I had taken my AP English exam; I felt this boded ill. I completed my test and felt as though I had just failed. For once, I pushed my worries to the back of my mind as I

attempted to enjoy my last few days of high school before I received my grade for the paper. On the day before graduation, I walked into Brasington's class to pick up my graded paper. I approached his desk nervously with sweaty palms, sure that my heart was visible through my chest. Mutely, he handed me my paper. Scrawled in the corner was an 'A.' Next to it was 100%. Choking on the rush of emotions I felt, I looked up to see Brasington smile at me and tell me it was an awesome paper. I thought about saying something meaningful to express my gratitude for teaching me how to unlock the secret of good writing but all I could manage was, "Thank you." I waited until I left the classroom and checked to make sure I was alone before I let the hot and boiling tears of relief, happiness, and sadness envelope me.

As I sat at graduation in the hot sun, I saw Brasington's shiny bald head. Maybe it was the heat going to my head, but it suddenly dawned on me that he had been purposely grading me extremely hard to force me to do my best. Later during that summer when I received my AP literature test results, I was thrilled to see that I earned a '4' on my exam that I was sure I had failed. I had passed and solved the mystery of writing. All this time I had been writing to get only one thing: a good grade. Before my senior project I hadn't thought of writing as an emotional experience but instead as a document that would determine my grade. I had to learn how to connect to the literature in order to write about it. In addition to my newfound skills as a writer, I had also gained confidence in myself as a future English major. I had placed so much of my emphasis on grades and not what it meant to be a writer: to say something profound and significant. Writing the 30-page paper taught me that writing is not about the destination but the journey to get there.

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Authority in Overdrive: A Case for Tutoring as a Reader

When I enrolled in the advanced poetry workshop, one of the final courses I needed as a Creative Writing major, I expected a similar experience to the other workshops I had taken: the writer would listen to the class discuss his or her poem and take notes, then decide which suggestions to implement for the final portfolio submission. Professor Ward's class, however, was different. To wrap up each workshop, he gave very specific feedback on how the work should be revised. For example, at the end of my first workshop, Professor Ward told me to add a line about "clouds shaped like apples" following the description of a man wearing a bowler hat. "It'll make the Magritte allusion more clear that way," he explained.

Although I did not intend to make any Magritte reference in the poem, I was too intimidated to say anything. And ultimately I didn't think the changes were a problem; it was only for the portfolio, so I could remove the line once the class was over. However, after a few weeks, I began to dread workshops, and my enjoyment for writing was waning. When developing new poems, I found myself focusing on whether or not Ward would like them, imagining his criticism before I'd even typed out a line. Drafting became painful, and my poems (I thought) got worse. They didn't seem like mine anymore—the particular nuances of my word choice and tone were abandoned in an attempt to mimic Ward's preferred aesthetic.

Although Professor Ward's overzealous intent was to help my writing be the best it could be, by focusing so much on improving my poems, he inadvertently revised my personality right out of them. After working at writing centers for the past four years, I've realized how easy it is for tutors and professors to unintentionally cross this helping/fixing line. My first semesters working as a writing tutor, I would approach each session with a mental list of things to check-out: thesis, topic sentences, organization. I considered it my responsibility as a tutor to guide

students to understanding and, eventually, success. And I was excited to help. I tried Socratic techniques. I used real-life models. I worked really hard to get students to realize the potential *I* saw in their drafts. But more than once I found myself in the last five minutes of a session with a confused looking student whose essay I'd covered with arrows and diagrams. It was stressful. I always worried I wouldn't get to everything and always ran out of time. My eagerness to help students was motivated by good intentions, but it led to sessions revolving around *my* ideas.

CSUF's writing center "promote[s] a nurturing environment" (Department of English) in order to support tutees as both writers and students. However, to maintain this environment, it is necessary for tutors to be [conscientious](#) that our authority as experienced writers and representatives of the university does not accidentally translate to "cultural imperialism, good intentions notwithstanding" (Freiré 84). Since "[o]ur world is becoming increasingly more diverse, multilingual, and multicultural... [with] increasing numbers of minorities and nontraditional students ...entering the mainstream in today's classrooms" (Lovejoy 94), it is increasingly important for tutors to develop approaches that encourage students to feel confident articulating their ideas rather than causing students to doubt their own writing instincts and choices. However, recreating this dynamic from session to session is a challenge. Each tutorial, tutors must renegotiate authority to suit that particular session. Even within a single session, as "tutorial *methods* shift from directive to nondirective ... so does the authority of the participants" (Carino 125, my emphasis). And every tutor you confer with and every article you read has different tips and techniques on how to manage it all. It can sometimes feel overwhelming.

What has helped me the most in maintaining flexibility from one session to the next has been an increased focus on a consistency in my tutorial role: regardless of who I'm tutoring or the genre of text, I maintain authority as a reader. Lad Tobin reminds us in his book *Reading*

Student Essays that “student essays are, in fact, texts”—an idea that should be self-evident (29).

But Tobin’s insight helped me realize how drastically my reading approach differed when I read student essays compared to other texts. Rather than sitting down to absorb and understand the message behind the piece of writing in front of me, as a tutor, I felt it was my job to question students’ choices, find the problems in their text and guide them to solutions. By re-envisioning my primary role in a tutorial to that of a *reader*, I’ve found it easier to balance my own authority as a (often) more experienced reader and writer, with each student’s authority as the author of their essay.

This mindset has also relieved me from the responsibility of having *all* the answers or addressing *all* the major concerns in a student’s draft. Instead, I can focus on “the disparity between what the writer wanted to communicate” and what I took from the text (Brannon 161). Rather than acting as a guide, I am able to “serve as a sounding-board enabling the writer to see confusions in the text and encouraging the writer to explore alternatives that he or she may not have considered” (Brannon 162). Although I am there to help the writer if he or she gets stuck by suggesting new techniques or additional resources, the responsibility to express and clarify meaning remains with the student.

I’ve found that moments of reader confusion can also be feigned by the tutor as a non-directive technique that feels more organic than attempting to develop effective Socratic questions on the spot. Walker Gibson has coined this “the dumb reader” strategy: “by adopting the pose of a confused, bewildered reader, a tutor can help the writer comb through a paper for trouble spots” (McAndrew & Reigstad 115). This could be as simple as telling a writer, “I’m not sure what this quote has to do with this paragraph,” rather than asking them “How does this quote support the main point in this paragraph?” The two ways of addressing a poorly integrated

quotation might seem similar, but the first one requires a student to explain for themselves the choices they made rather than just answer a question. This avoids prompting answers or suggesting solutions that turn the student's writing into something he or she did not intend it to be.

Approaching student essays as reading, rather than flawed writing, also makes tutorials much more enjoyable. By "reading drafts for potential" (Tobin 11), I've become more open to the possibility of student essays being "delightful and instructive" (Tobin 29). And merely changing my attitude about student essays has led me to the realization of how entertaining and interesting they can be. I've begun to learn as much from my students' texts as any other informational material I've read (Exemplified by a student essay I read explaining how to build a computer, through which I learned how to fix my home computer's overheating problem). And I've found students' experiences and stories to be just as touching and engaging as any published human interest piece: student narratives have caused me to choke-up, made me laugh, and provided many instances of inspiration. Just by revising the way I view my role from a tutor to a reader has enabled me to become absorbed in student essays. And I believe my enthusiastic responses to student's writing shows them what they have to say is important. Something my enthusiastic "helping" did not achieve as effectively.

Tutoring as a reader might not make instant, tangible improvements to the essay at hand. It won't help students word their allusions better or implement all the possibilities that a tutor or instructor sees in their text. However, it helps students discover strategies for achieving their own vision. And it encourages students to reflect on their choices by showing them how a real reader reacts to their writing, helping them "develop their skills as better writers and critical thinkers" (Department of English). For tutors, eager to help, it provides a method to avoid focusing too

much on making a paper (or a poem) the best it can be. Through revising our perception of our own authority, tutors can show students that their experiences, ideas and opinions are valuable—“that we take their writing seriously” (Brannon 166), and, by doing so, we can more effectively work to “empower students from all academic levels and disciplines” (Department of English).

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Who's In Charge Here?

Inside of our one-stop shop we have many items available for the student writer. Not many of them, however, are tangible. They possess no bar codes nor do they contain any packaging. Yet the savvy shopper can get a great bargain. This deal I speak of is the ability to obtain a college-level tutorial at absolutely no charge. And why not take advantage of this offer? Struggling writers can continue to alienate themselves from the learning experience by remaining mute on their growth, or they can seize the opportunity to become involved. For the latter option there is our corner of the library, both physically and metaphorically free of walls. The staff at the Writing Center knows the system all too well. We get it. We have been there, and many of us are still there. During the course of that transaction one aspect of authority begs to be questioned: who's in charge here?

Please do not walk into our Writing Center expecting the worst. The countless conferences that manifest inside all share one common recipe: two individuals arrived at an agreement and produced a delicacy. The ability to accomplish this feat is made possible by a generous act of give and take. Sometimes, however, there may be a slight skewing of the balance of power in such a Center. Researcher Peter Vandenberg's declaration that tutors may become less like our peers and more like our professors is one of the more memorable assertions from the long list of theorists we follow. He recalls that those of us who are members of the Writing Center community got there because we were deemed to possess some expertise at something. Whether or not that something is authoritative in its nature is debatable.

To address this somewhat idealistically, of course we are all experts in our field. That field is the role as student, for by mastering the *student* component of our exchange, the tutor can succinctly move between the demands of a professor and the expectations of a pupil. The Writing Center Tutor is, by this definition, not only a great leader, but an equally effective follower, ready to both take the reigns and hand them off. As Vandenberg surmises, nonetheless, we tutors and directors are in fact, “products of institutional authority” and as such should cautiously adhere to established guidelines because, “[t]he system ultimately authorizes and absorbs its own critique” (92).

I wholly agree that guidelines should be acknowledged, but the material should originate from sources such as the student, the teacher, the book, and the world they each occupy, respectively. The individuality that is gleaned from a writing assignment is a reflection of several avenues converging at one intersection. From that intersection, we may direct the writer through or allow him or her the opportunity to seek other means of travel. I understand that Vandenberg finds it difficult for us to break from authority when we, by nature, adhere to it in the first place. This is, after all, necessary to ensure a successful tutoring session, correct? I don’t suspect he wants us to throw out all grammar and English usage when it comes to constructing a paper, nor does he want us to give complete control to someone who is not particularly well-versed in our craft. He himself admits that no one has identified the possibilities of change that could occur. Here then is where one may be confused: Does authority have parameters that cannot be breached, or as Vandenberg notes, have “[student tutors] traded one conception of authority for another...” (92)?

My own theory and perhaps answer to the above question I posed is simple in declaration but more complex in practice. Let the rules of grammar stand but the manner in which we critique them remain fluid. I suspect an advanced writer or one who is of the “veteran” class may wish to have his or her work scrutinized in a different manner than, say, a newcomer to the process. The level of concerns (High versus Low) and time spent on a tutee’s assignment would be dictated by an assessment that they have undertaken on their own. For instance, I would declare myself in need of clarity, accessibility, and ease of reading. A younger, less experienced version of me at the beginning of my college career would have needed more precise help with organization, punctuation or citations, and diction.

Through this approach I am giving the power to the tutor by being a companion in the authoritative process but handing off the limited degree of my talent for overall improvement. If I was to declare that there is a Ministry of Control here on campus, unrivaled in its influence and unmatched in its ability to challenge the status quo, several authority figures would unavoidably get nervous. Subversion amongst our colleagues and peers? Is there a radical faction of some distorted view of religion or idealism poaching our young minds? Surely this place is hidden from view, obscured by the darkness it must promote. Dress the place like a tutoring spot with a cute front desk and a splattering of table and chairs, and the elements that previously alarmed now subside into harmless existence. It is the threat of losing authority that scares some in academia and we, at present, confront it each time a tutee passes the couches.

Authority: that nine-letter word that frightens the Writer Center Tutor into

submission and continuously makes us question our purpose. My degree is a product of the research I have put into reading others' use of the language to produce fiction, lyric, nonfiction, literary theory and analysis, etc. Nowhere do I recall reciting from nineteenth-century primers the rules of composition. It comes as no surprise then, that I can easily shed the authoritative badge and gun. Simply put, we are given the opportunity to recognize when to be the guide and when to follow the writer. Our college classrooms and lecture halls have long stopped being dungeons of rote learning and mindless memorization, so let us not suppress the brain in our Center either. We may share the obligation of learning as a unit.

In fact, I frequently hand off the tutee's paper onto other people not associated with the Writing Center. That is, I tell the student writer to have others read their work as well. The perception is that my English Graduate colleagues and I read through a different lens; we see the paper differently than others. Therefore, when I tell the student to let their family or friends read their final paper, I want to use my "power" to give that paper life. After the immediate disbelief that I give them the opportunity to decide who their master is wears off, they inevitably keep that trust in my sphere of influence. This courage to release the ideas to others must be accompanied by a litany of questions. Does the paper make sense to anyone else besides you (the writer), your professor, or me? I frequently demand that the writer does not let the paper become another dry, academic assignment but rather a reflection of his or her personality.

Additionally, one important component of the above scenario flowing smoothly is the collaborative discourse needed to urge the writer to let his or her paper "go". If

individuals arrive at the Writing Center with sheepish anxiety and are completely turned off by the writing process, then I can wholly expect them to never let the words they've produced leave their side until it's in their professor's hands. Exposure to criticism and the attributes of a thorough disassembly of their work is, without a doubt, beneficial.

How do we find the precise moment, that opening to "make the sale" or win their trust, if you will?

To be honest, it is all dependent upon the individual tutoring and the student being tutored. If I share with them their strengths and reveal no weaknesses, then they are happy to add more commentary to the work, taking ownership of their writing. A small window that is their comfort zone opens very briefly most sessions. If I am unable to see through that window and subsequently open it, then I have already lost the fight to find a productive end. Some stone-faced students are excellent bluffers and can hold a gaze for what seems like many millennia. A funny thing starts to happen, though. The window of opportunity begins to fog up and then it's obvious- they do have something to say. Allowing their narration to come out on paper, in voice, or through hand gestures is the cracking of the window and the creative release at the pane. Authority has emerged from behind the glass and I have seized their offer of it.

Does this make me a better salesman of their talents, or are they simply a customer whose needs and abilities are clearly pasted upon their face? I am a veteran, simply put. Therefore, my knowledge is gained through numerous campaigns, but unlike a true old dog of the battlefield who may give up after the fight, I continue to learn more with each student I encounter. As Vandenberg concludes, "[tutors] come to us

predisposed to academic discipline...”(94). The rigors of college writing are demanding and intimidating. My new tutees always arrive in the exact same manner. Some are well-equipped and others appear disorganized in their approach. Both groups, however, are at the beginning of a saga that they fully expect to watch from the sidelines. Our relaxing of the authority involved welcomes them into the fold and on the road to success. As a result, the tutee assumes control and is indeed in charge because power may now be passed between the two parties without further apprehension or anxiety.

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The Little Mermaid Complex

“But if you take my voice,” said the little mermaid, “what will I have left?”

~ Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid*

Students have been told that they must surrender their individual voice, allow their metaphorical tongues to be ripped from their mouths, in order to succeed in scholarly affairs. This is ludicrous; it is *ludicrous* to ask students to write intriguing papers and then take away their unique voices because those voices are not considered “scholarly.” Yet, it happens. Students are detoured from what they want to say and how they want to say it due to the conceptions, and arguably the confines, of “academic writing” (use of elevated language, writing strictly in third person, refraining from use of contractions, etc.). They find themselves having to conform to these concepts causing a loss in their own motivation for the production of an essay. I classify students who have experienced such a loss of voice as having a Little Mermaid Complex; they feel as if their own unique voice has been stolen from them much like the sea witch steals the little mermaid’s tongue in the Hans Christian Anderson story.

Students suffering from the Little Mermaid Complex (LMC) often have a difficult time with bringing their pen to the page or their fingers to the keyboard. They get so wound up with their ideas but become afraid of writing them down because “it won’t sound good” or “it won’t be academic” or, the one I cringed at most, “it sounds stupid.” Without a unique voice, writing “academic papers” becomes a huge burden for students, and reading such a paper becomes a chore rather than a pleasure. This is not to say that there isn’t a distinction between writing a letter to grandma and writing an essay for a class or an academic journal. Rather, this *is* to

suggest that students can learn skills that can help them retain and develop their own unique voices through a different writing medium: creative writing, specifically the narrative, fiction, script, and poetry forms. Each of these forms has the ability to provide students with skills that can be later used in academic work.

Narratives help students with LMC learn how to analyze issues they face in their own lives; the writing of such stories allows students to distance themselves from a personal experience to learn more about who they are as a person and how they are perceived by others. Writing a narrative requires students to analyze their actions: Are they proud of those actions? Ashamed? Glad? Do they feel like a fool? What happens now, after these actions have been committed? In a way, it forces a student to take a closer look at the choices they have made and decide whether or not they need to change their behavior. By analyzing his/her own personal experiences a student can learn to make choices that will benefit him/her in the long haul. But this ability to think critically isn't the only skill that can be learned when writing narratives; it also allows students to explore the English language in new and sometimes unexpected ways.

I tutored a student once who had been writing about a theatrical performance she had participated in and how this particular performance helped her grow as a person. Her descriptions were very poetic, and they involved all the senses. At one point she was informing her reader of the stench attached to the costumes she had to wear; they were never washed, and every performance only added more sweat and dust to the clothes. She wrote in such great detail that I swore I could smell the hideous sour odor radiating from the costume; it brought her experience to life for her reader. I was pleasantly surprised to see such detail in a narrative. Sometimes when writing narratives students forget that their reader wasn't present during the event they are describing and, as a result, they often forget to fully describe the scene at hand.

When this happens, practicing another form of creative writing may become beneficial to the student.

Fiction writing can help students with LMC address this lack of descriptive information in their own work. Where narratives involve description, fiction demands it. It is true that if students, regardless of whether or not they have LMC, were given the choice between writing a narrative or writing short fiction, the majority would most likely choose the narrative because every human has experience telling his/her own stories to friends, family, coworkers, etc. Short fiction on the other hand, can be intimidating because it requires the full involvement of the imagination demanding the use of descriptive terms. If the description is too vague, then the reader knows nothing of the setting, plot, or characters. This required in-depth description often encourages students to explore new ways of describing emotions and characteristics using similes and metaphors. Long blond hair turns into “a golden cascade, rippling over a lustrous neck, falling down to conceal a pointed shoulder blade protruding from beneath pale skin.” These new descriptions make the text much more interesting not only for the reader, but the writer as well. But this enjoyment and learning process doesn’t end with descriptive terms.

Short fiction tends to, more often than not, be based on a moral or lesson. If a student is asked to write a short story with a moral or lesson, then the student will be forced to participate in a reverse analysis of their own text. He/she would first, choose a moral he/she wants to convey, and then figure out how to reach the end result through the exploration of a story. As a result, writing fiction forces the student to take a look at how texts work; how they get their point across to their audience. It also requires the student to decide who he/she is writing for: Children? Adults? Elderly? Other students? The skill of identifying an audience is immensely important to all forms of writing and, once learned, it can be applied to these other forms. While

the descriptive and audience-related skills learned while writing fiction can be used later used to help strengthen a student's academic works, the acquiring of writing skills can also happen by studying another form: scriptwriting.

Scriptwriting offers students the ability to analyze dialogue. By writing dialogue, students learn not only how written language is different from spoken language but also how to “read between the lines.” This use of reading between the lines and the understanding of how written language differs from spoken language will aid students in analyzing relationships in their lives. Whether the relationships being analyzed are between close family members or complete strangers, students will gain knowledge regarding how people interact with one another. This knowledge will then allow these students to make better informed decisions, by allowing them to read other people and take these people's emotions and ideas into consideration.

Much like fiction, scriptwriting also requires students to use a moral or lesson and either find a way to introduce it within the constructs of a story or find a way to introduce it through symbols and acts (as seen in more surreal plays). This, again, allows students to explore the constructs of story building; they learn how playwrights use different conventions to reveal a moral/lesson. This type of creative writing also requires some thought regarding the use of descriptive writing, however, this use would be much less compared to the other types of creative writing, especially poetry.

Poetry. The word makes me want to find a hospitable ditch that I can gently crawl into to die in. It is, for me and many other students, one of the most difficult forms of writing to produce. That being said, it is another literary form that can help students, especially those suffering from LMC, develop skills for creative description and critical analysis. Unlike fiction, poetry is more freely constructed and it tends to be more emotionally driven. As a result, students

writing poetry would be forced to analyze their *emotions* during past experiences more so than the experiences themselves. This analysis would most likely consist of questions such as: Why did I feel that way? What does this say about me? How did others react if they were involved? Do I even care about how others reacted? The questions go on and on. Because poetry is one of the most personal forms of writing, it may come as little to no surprise that this form has the best chance of helping students develop their individual voices quickly. Once a student has experience doing an in-depth analysis of his or herself, an analysis of another person's text would no longer be intimidating. In a sense, the student will have already managed analyze the most challenging of texts: the self. Thus, analysis of any other kind will be less difficult.

Students practicing poetry writing will also find themselves using descriptive terms, not necessarily to reveal a scene or character, but rather to reveal a concept. Poetry offers the writer a chance to artistically describe difficult to understand concepts, and the ability to write in this way will definitely help the student later, when he/she attempts to explain a new concept in his/her own academic work. But while these techniques and skills can be very useful in academic writing, there is no surety that a student will be able to transfer that voice over to his/her academic work.

There is no clear cut way to ensure that the techniques students use in creative writing will transfer over into their academic work, but there are ways to attempt this jump between these two writing forms. For instance, to avoid LMC, it would be beneficial for the students to write a creative piece at the start of the semester because it would allow the students to develop the descriptive and analytical skills needed for later work. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that students will even know they learned these skills while writing creatively. To help them realize their own knowledge of such skills, I suggest having students complete a critical analysis

of either their own creative work or the creative work of a published author. In this critical analysis, it would be required that they explain the techniques that are used by the author and explain whether or not they think these techniques were used successfully or not. After performing this critical analysis, and receiving feedback from their instructor, students would be ready to attempt writing more “academic” papers. Thus, this process would allow students to slowly ease into academic writing without losing their unique voices.

By nourishing the skills students learn through creative writing, they develop a unique voice that can then be applied to academic work. Creativity is a necessity. Without an individual unique voice, a student’s work becomes dull and dry. When a student’s voice is lost due to LMC, he/she loses confidence in his/her writing, and his/her words on the page become nothing but meaningless sea foam.

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Navigating the Middle Ground

So you've arrived at your first Writing Center meeting after being hired and it's the Friday before the semester will begin. You're being told you will start giving tutorials on Monday. As in two days from now. Wait, what?! Don't you feel unprepared? Surely you don't have any authority to be giving students advice on their writing. "Don't panic," everyone reassures you, "You'll know what to do when the time comes." What is this? Some kind of new-age teaching crap? That was the first thought through my mind when I discovered I was being thrown into the world of tutoring with no prior experience. As the semester progressed, however, I quickly realized that, like writing, someone can't simply tell you "how to tutor." Sure, there are overall guidelines on how to deal with certain situations ethically and several different views on what is the "right" method of tutoring, but there are so many different ways to handle any given situation – and many of these different views will all be strongly supported and refuted by your fellow tutors and published scholars. You will start to become your own authority and exercise the tutoring methods you consider to be the best. You slowly learn that while you are still working within the guidelines of the Writing Center, you are doing so with your own style. In this way, examining your own progression as a tutor can greatly help you relate to some of the students placed in remedial writing courses.

English 99 is a course that students must take if they score below a certain level on their placement tests. Students must pass this course before moving onto English 101, which is a GE requirement for all students. Students are taking this class because they have been told they need to learn "how to write." On the first day of class, they are given a syllabus which shows due dates for draft after draft of several different papers, the first draft being due the second or third week of class! I can imagine that many students' first thought would be, "But I don't know how

to write yet – that’s why I’m here!” The teacher reassures the class that they just need a first draft – no pressure. They will know what to do when the time comes. The difference here is, instead of learning that there are many different ways to write and being reassured that they can develop their own style of writing throughout the semester, many students are told that there is only one way to write: for the teacher or for their portfolios. English 99 requires all students to submit a writing portfolio of three essays that are reviewed by a panel of assessors who are other English 99 and Composition Instructors. English 99 students submit their portfolios anonymously and the people reading and evaluating their work usually have never had the student in his or her class before. As a writing tutor, our main goal is to make each student a better writer and to find his or her own authority within his or her work. Stephen North comments on the purpose of the writing center as being to “make sure that the writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction” (North 39). Or is it? Isn’t our goal also to help these students pass their classes? Which in turn would mean reinforcing that they need to do what their teacher says is the “right way” to write? What authority do we have to tell the student to ignore a teacher’s comments in lieu of becoming a better writer? What authority do we have at all? The authority we have in the minds of English 99 students is instilled by their professors who require their students to go to the Writing Center for “help,” which gives us more authority than I think we realize. With this power to make or break students’ opinions about writing, it is crucial that we use our authority to establish a middle ground by explaining why some of these rules in writing exist and by showing them how they can operate within these rules without completely surrendering their voices.

As Sherwood points out, some students only come to the Writing Center because they “are eager to learn how to make their papers more acceptable to their professors” (132). Most of

the time the teacher's comments are helpful and are attempting to guide the student in the right direction, but there are several cases where the teacher's comments appear to be very vague, unhelpful or just downright wrong. And in these cases, when the students are clinging to teachers' every word because they determine the students' grades, it can be extremely harmful to their future writing. It also makes for an extremely difficult tutorial.

One student came in with a paper that he had revised per his teacher's comments. When I asked him if there was anything specifically he wanted to work on, he told me he just wanted to make sure he had made the necessary revisions his teacher had told him he needed to make. It was a well written paper, but his thesis didn't include his main points. I have always considered a strong thesis to be a top priority in an English 99 paper, especially one being considered for a portfolio. When I brought this issue up to the student, however, he insisted that his teacher had said it was "fine" and he didn't want to touch it. So I tried a different approach. I had the student do a reverse outline on his paper by taking the main points of his paper and writing them down in three sentences. Then I asked him to compare this list to his thesis and asked him if he thought it matched. While he agreed that it didn't match, I could tell he was hesitant to revise it. He started to revise it anyways, but I stopped him and asked if he wanted to change it. Not wanting to appropriate the student's paper, I wanted to make sure he was comfortable with this change. He responded, "I don't know, YOU'RE the tutor..." This caught me off guard, but made me realize he was putting way too much emphasis on what other "authorities" were telling him to do.

I was taken aback when he challenged my authority in his paper; he said it as if I should be telling him exactly what to do to make his paper better. It also made me second-guess myself – should I be telling him more assertively that he needs to revise his thesis? No; I decided my place here was to encourage him to think about the changes he makes to his papers. Even though

there isn't any one way to tutor, there are few universal things about tutoring that everyone must follow, and appropriating a student's text is one of the big no-no's. So I said, "I'm not trying to tell you what to write. I'm asking you if you feel that including these things in your thesis makes sense to you. If you don't agree and think that this standard thesis formula is boring or uncreative, I don't want you to change it just because you think I want you to." He looked stunned, as if no one had ever asked him what he thought about his writing. That's when I realized he probably had never been asked about his opinion on what was good or not. This reminded me again that these students think they aren't writers or think they don't know what they are doing. It's crucial to remind them that they need to think about the changes they are making and why they are necessary so that they can learn how to correct their own papers in the future. Once he realized I wasn't going to tell him what to do, I could see he was starting to think about it for himself. I wanted him to actively think about his decision and justify it to not only me or his teacher, but to himself. We looked at the rest of his paper, and he ended up saying at the end he would talk to his instructor about revising the thesis. He was still a little hesitant to break outside of what his instructor said, but he at least was willing to start thinking about his own authority in his writing.

One of the most frustrating scenarios is when you have a student who is already trying to navigate the middle ground between his or her own voice and the requirements of English 99. These students often recognize that they need to follow their teacher's instructions but are confused as to why the suggestions make their paper better or don't want to change or remove something because they included it on purpose. I find this frustrating because these students are actively considering changes, meaning they are thinking about their writing, yet they are being told to change it anyway. These tutorials are especially difficult because you basically have to

tell the student that in order to pass their portfolio evaluation, changes need to be made that he or she may not agree with. The portfolio is evaluated with a standard rubric that looks for a somewhat standard text, and while it's a fairly logical system, it can limit students' creativity and agency in their writing. I often find it easiest to sympathize with the student. I had a student come in with a narrative paper about a softball game that I thought was very well done. The introduction was incredible – it really hooked the audience and had me genuinely wondering what was going to happen next. She spent a couple paragraphs setting up her paper and then placed her thesis at the end of the third paragraph, which had something to do with softball teaching her dedication, passion, and hard work. Her teacher had written that she needed to move her thesis to the end of the first paragraph. Looking at how the girl's essay was formatted, I completely disagreed. After reading several narrative papers that were all the same, this was refreshing, creative, and well done. But what should I do? Her teacher and the portfolio readers are looking for that thesis at the end of the first paragraph. Do I tell her to ignore them, do what she wants, and hope the portfolio reader is like me? Or do I tell her to change it to please her teacher, totally taking away the uniqueness of her paper? In this situation, it seemed impossible to navigate a middle ground.

I ultimately left the decision up to the tutee. Even if she decided to go the route that would make the teacher happy, at least she was deciding it. I explained to her that I really liked what she had done and that I felt her thesis placement was far more effective than what the teacher wanted, but that the portfolio graders, like her teacher, would probably be looking for the thesis in the “standard” location – at the end of the first paragraph. I sympathized with her and explained how I felt it was weird that in these narrative papers the student is expected to give away the entire story in their introduction paragraph and thesis. While she decided to make the

change that would please her teachers, I was glad that I had explained to her that her stylistic choice wasn't wrong, but that the requirements for English 99 wanted something specific. I had felt she was unconfident with her writing and when I told her that I liked what she had done more than what the teacher wanted her to write, she seemed pleasantly surprised. We, as tutors, often unintentionally reinforce the idea that there is only one way to write by depending on that "standard text." As Sherwood points out, "too often, our conception of what good writing looks like rests on a fixed notion of literacy, a singular standard that discourages diversity and independent thinking" (Sherwood 133). This is the problem: we see something in the student's writing that is well done and creative, yet we only tell them they need to change it for the sake of English 99, and we often forget to tell students when they have done something well. By telling her that her creativity had been successful, she recognized that she could still be creative in the future, but that she needed to work within these specific guidelines for now.

After looking at the similarities and differences between being a writing tutor and an English 99 student, things really need to change for English 99 and other designated "remedial" composition students. I feel that it would be beneficial to students to be given more authority and options in their writing. While I do see the difference between a writing tutor who has demonstrated competency in writing and an English 99 student who has demonstrated the exact opposite, I feel there is much to be gained from treating them similarly. The only reason I flourished as a tutor was because I was given options; I was also encouraged to think for myself and to make decisions as to what methods worked best in different situations. While English 99 students will still need guidance, they need to be given multiple approaches to writing. They need to be told that there are several writing styles. The focus can still be on the standard text and mastering the basics, but English 99 students need to be aware that there are other ways to write

successfully. Teachers also need to be open-minded about students' assignments and appreciate if a student is addressing the prompt in a creative and non-standard way. These students are used to hearing negative feedback telling them they don't know what they are doing, which heavily discourages them from experimenting in their writing. By showing students that there are multiple approaches to writing and encouraging them to have fun with their writing, these students will be able to easily navigate a middle ground for all of their papers.

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Assignments

“I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.”

John Steinbeck

Project Meme: Rethinking Composition in the Classroom

Christina L. Boyles

76

The Why's and How's of Academic Tone: A Lesson

Kimberly George

81

Essay Prompt: Everything is an Argument

Daniel Hogan

85

Essay Prompt: Personal Narrative through Memory

Emily King

89

Project Meme: Rethinking Composition in the Classroom

In most composition programs, emphasis is placed on written assignments. Recently, however, a number of assignments utilizing different literacies has become available to teachers and students. One example is meme composition, a project which utilizes both visual and alphabetic literacies. Teaching memes in the classroom allows students to understand “the implications of such cultural trends as well as manag[e] their own communicative efforts in ways that are rhetorically effective, critically aware, morally responsible, and personally satisfying” (Selfe 642). In particular, students are given an opportunity to analyze the ways in which memes remix pop culture images, use “stock” phrases, and subvert audience expectations; their level of critical engagement with these genre conventions will determine the effectiveness of their own memes. Throughout the process of composition, students are encouraged to reflect upon the online environment(s) in which they participate and their interactions with popular culture. In doing so, students become more critical of their use of digital media while mastering a new mode of composition.

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Create Your Own Meme Assignment Sheet

OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the elements of the rhetorical situation
- To introduce students to multimodal composition
- To encourage students to think critically about the environment in which they live and participate
- To encourage students to think critically about how they interact with popular culture

DIRECTIONS

Compose a meme that directly addresses a community in which you participate.

In the meme, combine a pop culture image with text to make a comment about a community of which you are a member. You can use one of the following focus ideas:

- Address a cultural stereotype that you find problematic
- Comment on a cultural behavior/trend that is prevalent in your community
- Remark about a holiday/event that is significant within your community

Your meme should have the following characteristics:

- A recognizable image connected to popular culture or an iconic image of your community (at Baylor, this could be the dome of Pat Neff or a picture of RGIII)
- Text that connects to the image in a meaningful way
- Text that plays within genre conventions (It revises a phrase used in pop culture and/or subverts reader expectations).

The project should employ the affordances (capabilities) of the media you are using in effective ways. It should be characterized by careful design that helps to convey meaning. The project should be both analytical and creative.

The project should do more than depict a well-known figure or place, it should help readers *reflect and gain insight into the subject of the meme*.

For this assignment you will need to do the following tasks:

- Choose an element of your community to analyze
- Use a website like www.quickmeme.com or www.createameme.net to find a stock image and insert your own text over the image
- Reflect on the composition process by describing why you chose your particular topic, what you found problematic about it, how the image relates to your topic, and how the text conveys your message. End by reflecting on the effectiveness of your meme and how it utilizes genre conventions to convey meaning.

Want to see some sample student-made memes? Go to the Facebook group “Baylor Memes” to see how fellow students have used memes to comment on the Baylor community.

English 1302 Introduction to the Elements of Composition

Day 1

Introduction to Composition

Read: *PH*, pp. 13-24 (an overview of the rhetorical situation)

Day 2

Memes and Communities

Read: “The Growing Power of the Meme” by David Sax (on Blackboard)

Read: “The Politics of Humour in the Public Sphere: Cartoons, Power and Modernity in the First Transnational Humour Scandal” by Giseline Kuipers (on Blackboard)

In-Class: We will be looking at memes from sites like memebase.cheezburger.com and the Facebook group Baylor Memes to discuss how memes function on both a local and global level. We will spend the majority of this time analyzing genre conventions related to memes; in particular, their remixing of pop culture images, their use of “stock” phrases that are connected to the image, and their subversion of audience expectations.

Homework: Find a meme in a reputable meme archive (like memebase.cheezburger.com) or in a community-specific meme archive on Facebook (such as the group Baylor Memes). Ask them to copy/paste the image into a Word document and then, below it, have them address the following questions: Does the meme follow genre conventions, why or why not? Does the meme follow genre conventions more effectively than memes that don't? Does the meme subvert expectations? How does this contribute to its effectiveness?

Day 3

Presentation of Memes - Peer Review

In-class: Today we will be looking at the memes you have created and analyzing them as a class. Make sure to save your meme in two places (preferably one physical location and one cloud location – like a flashdrive and DropBox) to ensure that the class will be able to view the meme. In class, we will be focusing on the composition of the meme: how the image and words interact with one another, how the meme utilizes elements of pop culture, and how the meme subverts audience expectations. Consider these elements while composing your meme.

Day 4

Final Draft of Memes Due

Submission Guidelines: Submit your meme to me electronically by posting it to our class Facebook group. Also, upload your meme to another forum, like a meme archive or Baylor's Facebook group “Baylor Memes.” Use the comments from these communities to assess the effectiveness of your meme in the reflection.

Day 5

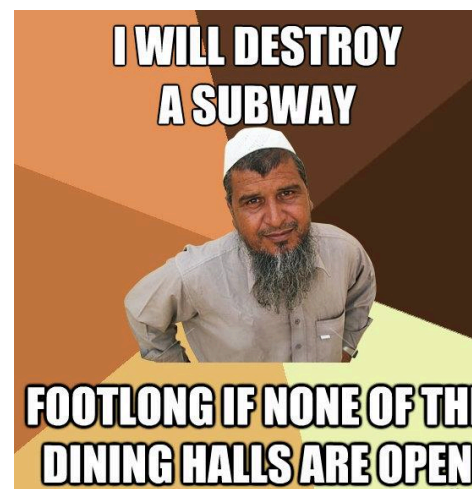
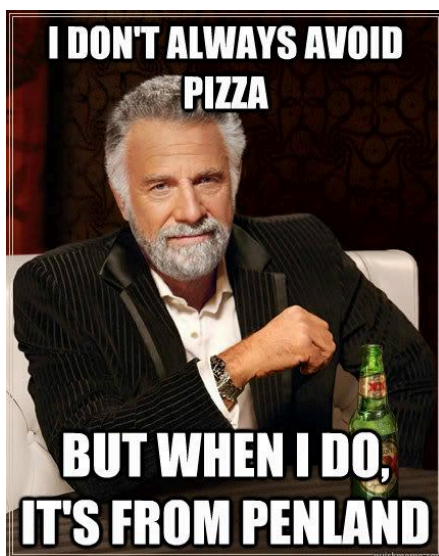
Reflection Due

Write: After submitting your meme, write a 2 page response reflection in which you clearly outline your composition process. To do so effectively, you need to answer the following questions: How did you find/choose an image for the assignment? How did you decide what text to pair with your image? Did you play into meme conventions? Did you subvert audience expectations? What message are you trying to convey? Did the class have any problems interpreting your meme during peer review? If you had to edit the image, what would you do differently?

The 4 Elements of Memes: Teaching Memes in the Classroom

Class Day 2: Spend a class period analyzing memes and their composition. Focus on the following:

1. Memes use stock images to convey a message. These images portray an element of popular culture and often include a celebrity, a consumer product, or a stereotypical image (this last category is used to comment upon issues such as race and gender expectations).
2. Memes subvert expectations by “appearing” to follow stereotypes or conventions and then not fulfilling this expectation. For example, the image to the right depicts a non-Westernized Middle-Eastern man who, when seen in popular media, is often connected with terrorism. The meme begins by suggesting that this stereotype is accurate, and then highlights how this stereotype is problematic by not fulfilling reader expectations.



3. Memes often utilize very specific narratives to communicate with viewers. For example, the image to the left depicts the spokesperson for Dos Equis Beer, whose catchphrase is “I don’t always drink beer, but when I do I drink Dos Equis.” As a result, both images use the “I don’t always _____, but when I do _____” sentence structure. This creates a direct connection between the image and the text. At the same time, these

memes also subvert expectations by changing the catchphrase so that it describes a problem/issue within a certain community.

4. Memes are often geared towards a particular audience. For example, the two memes above both come from the Facebook group “Baylor Memes.” Though the second one is limited to a Baylor audience who is familiar with Penland Hall, the first one works on both local and global levels. Locally, the meme is pointing out that Subway is the nearest restaurant to campus; thus, if the dining halls are

closed, all students would have access to Subway. Globally, the meme is commenting on stereotypes regarding terrorism, both in terms of who performs it and what is targeted. Memes that operate on both of these levels are more effective because they are especially significant for a local audience, but also have meaning for a broader audience.

The Why's and How's of Academic Tone: A Lesson

I designed this lesson for an English 99 class when I was working as an ISA for at California State University, Fullerton. After the class, I also adapted the lesson for use in workshops at a community college writing center. My goal was to help students examine their own communication styles in the real world in order to facilitate their discovery of the relationship between purpose, audience and tone. At the beginning of the lesson, I asked students to complete three brief quick-writes: one in the style of a text-message or Facebook Post to a friend, one as a note to parents, and one as a letter to an insurance company. Following the quick-write, the students were given an opportunity to compare the language and style used in these various texts. This close analysis helped students see how specific uses of language are more appropriate for some audiences than others and which styles of language to avoid when writing for college classes. This knowledge was reinforced through a sample paragraph containing many elements of an informal tone, as well as applied practice in the students' own drafts of an essay. The following pages include the lesson plan and sample paragraph I used through this class.

Kimberly George
California State University, Fullerton

The Why's and How's of Academic Tone

Quick-Write:

Imagine you were in a fender-bender on the way to school this morning on your freeway of choice. Write a brief...

Text to your friend	Note to your parents	Statement to your insurance company
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Share with partner:

Have students share with partner. Read their notes to each other and discuss the following:

- 1. Share your QWs with your partner.**
- 2. What are the differences between how you wrote each type of message?**

Regroup:

Discuss question #2: What are some differences you noticed?

Develop chart/list on board.

Text	Note	Statement
<i>-Slang</i> <i>-Short</i> <i>-Exclamation marks</i> <i>-Emoticons</i> <i>-Profanity</i> <i>-No details</i> <i>-Highly emotional</i> <i>-Incomplete sentences</i> <i>-Cliché</i>	<i>-Greeting ("Hey Mom")</i> <i>-Less angry</i> <i>-No slang</i> <i>-More details about me ("I'm ok")</i> <i>-Wrote a heart as a sign-off</i> <i>-Used "I" a lot</i>	<i>-Formal greeting and sign off</i> <i>-Very detailed</i> <i>-Complete sentences</i> <i>-Specific words and formal words</i> <i>-No emotion, just facts</i> <i>-Focused on the point</i>

Discuss:

- What differences did you find between each type of writing? (word choice, level of formality, proper grammar, amount of detail, amount of emotion)
- Why do these differences exist? What were you thinking about when you wrote each one? (Who were you writing to and what were you trying to say?)

Frame:

Everything we've talked about in class so far this semester will help you create an academic tone: having a well structured essay, being clear (thesis statement, purpose, transitions), and using specific support and analysis.

However, when completing academic writing, we also want to pay attention to things like word choice, amount of detail, and level of emotion. The audience and purpose will affect what type of tone you're going to use whenever you write (or talk) to someone.

Watch out for places where your sentences sound more like these first two categories (text, note). Usually cutting out extra wordiness or taking out clichés, second person, unneeded punctuation, rhetorical questions etc. will help you maintain an academic tone.

Watch out for: wordiness, vague word choice, clichés, 2nd person, poor transitional words,

Model:

For example: Pass out handout

Have students read through the sample essay and work with a partner to answer the following (as time allows)

- What do you think of this paragraph?
- What elements of these sentences need to be changed to make my tone more academic, and less like a text/ note?
- How should I fix them?
- Do you think if this writer made these changes this essay would be less boring? Why?

Apply:

Proofread Essay #3 and make the necessary changes to maintain an academic tone. Watch out for wordiness, word choice....

(as time allows)

Share some changes you made with your partner, get advice/ feedback as necessary. Ask questions.

Wrap-up: Questions? Review Schedule, collect QuickWrites

A Student

Fall 2012

English

To Vote or Not to Vote

Politics are a thing that I am passionate about. Clearly, voting is an awesome way for you to be staying involved in your country and community. Well, I told this to my friend last week and I couldn't believe what she said. She told me that she didn't even realize there was an election going on! Was she kidding? I couldn't believe it! I truly think that everyone should have a lot of interest in an election. Even though it oftentimes seems that voting doesn't really make a difference, you need to remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. And besides, it is only every few years that we have to deal with it. I hope my friend follows through. It may be the case that many people don't care about voting, but obviously I am an example of how untrue that can be.

Essay Prompt: Everything is an Argument

It's often hard to teach media analysis without resorting to literary analysis (which can be good or bad depending on the institution). This prompt attempts a different approach to media analysis. It focuses on argument in an attempt to stimulate critical thinking and engage students with culture.

By presupposing an argument within a text, the students are able to see how arguments exist in nearly *any* pop culture text. Believe it or not, I've read excellent papers exposing arguments in the *Twilight* franchise. The research requirement challenges students to think outside the microcosm of the movie and contextualize its message. I regularly update the selection of movies to keep them current (within two years). I do this to avoid overanalyzed movies (*Dead Poets Society*, *Schindler's List*, etc.), to keep the assignment fresh for my own taste, and to keep students focused on what is *currently* influencing their culture.

Three words of advice: 1) Sometimes the texts with clear arguments are the hardest to write about. 2) "Fun" movies like blockbusters can require lots of outside-the-box thinking when examining them for an argument. 3) Students often resort to summary, so be prepared to stress the difference between summary and analysis.

Daniel Hogan
California State University, Fullerton

Essay #3: Everything is an Argument

Context:

It's often said that popular culture both reflects and influences our opinions on the world around us. Regardless of whether we notice them, or whether their creators intend them, *every* piece of pop culture has an argument—and these arguments extend to all aspects of our lives, whether political, social, or ideological. For this essay, you will examine a piece of popular culture to identify what it is trying to convince our society to think, do, or believe about a specific subject in real life in 2013 society.

First, choose a film from the following list to write about:

21 Jump Street st. Channing Tatum and
Jonah Hill

The Avengers st. Robert Downey Jr. and
Chris Evans

Argo St. Ben Affleck and Alan Arkin

The Dark Knight Rises st. Christian Bale and
Tom

Hardy

Django Unchained St. Jamie Foxx and
Christoph

Waltz

Dr. Suess's The Lorax St. Ed Helms and
Danny

DeVito

The Hunger Games st. Jennifer Lawrence
and Josh

Hutcherson

Les Misérables St. Hugh Jackman and Anne
Hathaway

Life of Pi st. Suraj Sharma and Irfan Khan

Lincoln st. Daniel Day Lewis and Tommy
Lee Jones

Looper St. Joseph Gordon Levitt and Bruce
Willis

Magic Mike st. Channing Tatum and
Matthew

McConaughey.

The Master st. Joaquin Phoenix and Phillip
Seymore

Hoffman.

Moonrise Kingdom st. Edward Norton and
Bruce

Willis

Silver Linings Playbook st. Bradley Cooper
and

Jennifer Lawrence

Skyfall st. Daniel Craig and Judi Dench

Ted st. Mark Wahlberg and Seth Macfarlane

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2
st. Kristen

Stewart and Robert Pattinson

Wreck-It Ralph st. John C. Reilly and Sarah
Silverman.

Zero Dark Thirty st. Jessica Chastain and
Jason

Clarke

A few of these films are still in theaters. Otherwise, all of the above movies should be available on Netflix/ Redbox because they came out on DVD fairly recently. Some were extremely successful commercially, while others were mainly successful with critics. I advise you to watch whichever film you choose several times in order to get as many examples as you can.

Prompt:

Your assignment is to identify one (1) argument demonstrated by the film about an important issue in real life society in 2013 and explain *how* the film makes the argument using examples and reference to rhetorical techniques. This argument does not necessarily have to be explicit. For instance, some films, such as *Django Unchained*, demonstrating many issues about slavery, have more overt themes and arguments, than say, *The Avengers*. Also, the argument you identify need not be an argument the writers/directors intended. For example, you could argue that *Zero Dark Thirty* glorifies torture. On the flipside, you could argue that *Zero Dark Thirty* is showing the horrors and ineffectiveness of torture.

Additionally, you must ***apply this argument to real life***. For example, I'm not very concerned with an argument about how you think the time travel aspects of *Looper* work. Rather, I would want to know what the film is saying *about society* through its use of time travel. As long as you can identify an argument, support your findings with examples from the film, and apply it to real life, everything is fair game.

What if you don't like what's on the list?

If you feel strongly about a topic other than one of the films, I am open to letting you apply a similar technique from the above prompt to another piece of popular culture such as a song or songs, an episode of a television program, a book, a comic, a commercial, or simply a different film than what I have listed. My only stipulation is that ***I must approve the topic***, and it must have been released/dropped/published on or after January 1st 2012.

Rules and Regulations for Essay #3:

- No more than three (3) students will be able to write about the same movie, so be sure to choose 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices for when we choose topics (date to be announced).
- Remember, when analyzing and evaluating the argument in the film, **IT DOES NOT MATTER IF THE FILM IS GOOD OR NOT**. I have placed some more-or-less horrible films on the list because of their cultural impact rather than their cinematic quality.
- While writing the essay, assume that your audience **HAS SEEN THE FILM**. There is no need for plot summary. While you will need to provide specific details about the scenes you mention, you do not need to list major plot events or discuss characters/scenes that do not pertain directly to the film's argument.
- You **MUST INCLUDE REFERENCE TO AT LEAST TWO (2) RHETORICAL STRATEGIES (ethos, pathos, logos)** when describing how the

film makes its argument. If you'd like, bringing in appeals from any of our readings on advertisement (i.e. sexuality, keeping up with the joneses, the color red, etc.) would help satisfy this requirement as well.

- When identifying the argument within the film, you **DO NOT HAVE TO AGREE WITH THE MOVIE**. For instance, I could say that *Life of Pi* argues for the existence of God even though I might be an atheist.
- Each **final** draft should reach a minimum of six **(5) pages**.
- Each essay must make reference to at least **two (2)** outside sources. All sources must be credible, relevant, and cited correctly both in-text and in a correctly-formatted works cited page. At least **one (1)** of your sources must be about the real-life topic to which your argument relates, with no mention of the movie (or book it was based on) at all. (*I.e., if you are writing about mental illness in Silver Linings Playbook, one source must be about mental illness alone, not the movie*). You may use reviews, news articles, or statistics regarding the movie itself for your second source if you so desire (though it's not required).
- All essays must be typed, in MLA format, with a corresponding works cited page.
- The essay is not a narrative. Try to avoid first-hand examples unless they pertain directly to how you interpret the film and/or the subject about which it makes its argument. In some cases, however, personal and first-hand examples are acceptable, but they should not take the place of outside sources. Use of first person words, such as "I," "me," or "my," is acceptable, but should be used sparingly.
- **Avoid using the word "you" at all costs, unless you are addressing your reader DIRECTLY. Do not use it to describe people "in general."**

If you have any comments or questions regarding this assignment, PLEASE ASK ME! I am more than willing to help you out!

Good luck!

Personal Narrative through Memory

“Learning to write is learning to generate chaos and to emerge from it, meanings in hand”

- Ann Berthoff

We’ve all read essays that screamed “disconnection.” In fact, we’ve probably written a few of them ourselves – the ones born in front of the t.v. the night before the due date, the ones that were technically freewriting because they barely got the benefit of a spellcheck or the ones that were clear attempts to just please the teacher or make our friends laugh. Whether we’re reading or writing them, these are the essays that we try to forget. The problem with forgetting them is that we learn nothing.

The aim of this prompt is to encourage student writers to engage with their writing topic in order to gain a sense of their own writer-voice and to begin to understand that the process of writing demands personal engagement.

Some teachers object to using “personal childhood experience” as a platform for a writing assignment. To them I would say that writing is personal. It can be frustrating and tiresome. But it is these things because it demands a part of us. As Ann Berthoff tells us, writing is a chaotic process. “Meanings do not come out of the air,” she says, “we make them out of a chaos of images, half-truths, remembrances, syntactic fragments, from the mysterious and unformed.” We are driven to write because we want to make meaning. This assignment is an attempt to capitalize on that natural drive, to allow students to make meaning through the act of writing.

The prompt is intentionally open to allow for creativity and exploration, especially when it comes to specific topic choice. It asks writers to recall past experiences and to consider themselves as a crucial part of the text but it doesn’t necessarily call for a crying fest. Childhood memories range from scary and intense to hilarious and seemingly meaningless. Still, they inform the people that we become. By reflecting on how these memories influence our identities, however that might be, students can begin to adopt writer-identities that are honest and genuine.

Emily King
California State University, Fullerton

Essay Prompt:

Step One: On an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper, draw a map/floorplan of your childhood home. If, like me, you moved around a lot as a child, choose the home that you remember the most about and draw that one. Your map should be one-dimensional, like a blue print. You can include as much detail as you'd like as long as it includes the basic layout of the home.

Do not skip step one. It is an important pre-writing exercise!

Step Two: After you've completed the floorplan, mentally go through the home and place an "x" on every place that carries a memory. Any memory will do even if it seems insignificant.

Step Three: Choose **one** memory (or "x") to write about. Your best bet is to choose one that is most vivid in your mind. Don't worry about the meaning of the memory yet; just choose one that stands out to you. It can be anything from the sidewalk that you covered with chalk every summer day to the spot you buried your first pet.

This might be a good time for some free writing to recapture the details of the memory – even just a paragraph or two.

Step Four: Start writing your rough draft. Your goal is to recreate your experience of the memory for your reader and to then analyze what the memory means to you today. You can organize your essay as you wish but it needs to include these elements:

1. A retelling of the memory – be sure to include information about the place in the house that is associated with the memory (descriptive detail is important here).
2. Reflective information about why the memory is significant. How does it relate to your life today and to the person that you've become? Why do you think you remember this moment?
3. A thesis with a clear statement of the memory and its significance – this is what makes this essay a narrative and not just a story.

Things to consider:

This essay is your story. Write it in first-person (use "I").

Depending on how you decide to tell your story, this essay might require that you move back and forth between past and present tenses. If that is the case, be careful to match verb tenses appropriately.

Do not choose to write about a memory that you do not wish to share in peer discussion. With that said, I encourage you to choose a memory that is personally meaningful. This essay requires self-reflection and it will be apparent if you choose your topic haphazardly.

Step Five: Turn in your rough draft with your original map stapled to the back (make sure your "x" is clearly circled to signify the place your memory occurred).

Creative

"Every truth has four corners: as a teacher I give you one corner, and it is for you to find the other three."

Confucius

How to Teach Writing
Sally Jarzab

92

How to Teach Writing

Sit down.
 Review the research.
 Look carefully at the landmarks of this tradition.
 Begin with recent scholarship.
 Persist in reading. Invest considerable effort.
 Describe the various data sources.
 Discern the useful from the irrelevant.
 Select what is best.
 Write papers in the academic way.
 Ask major theoretical questions.
 Reach conclusions.
 Let it form a starting point.
 Think.

Ask, but is that really how it happens?
 Begin.
 One question is where to begin.
 Ask the following important question:
What does a writer acquiring mastery need to know?

Enter the controversy.
 Teach composition.
 Allocate time for planning.
 Design a curriculum.
 Discuss materials and content.
 Explain concepts or terms.
 Give students useful skills.
 Offer the linear model.
 Separate the writing process into discrete stages.
 Expect perfect paragraphs.
 Insist that they spell every word correctly.
 Know what's best.

Get students to write.
 Remedy what is wrong in their written products.
 Maintain a critical posture.
 Test students.
 Have difficulty.
 Confirm their lack of self-respect for their work and for themselves.
 Want something more.
 Argue. Struggle.
 Lose it.
 Beat your head against a brick wall.

Quit. Give up.
Run away.

Work in a garden or something like that.
Think and dream and stare out windows.

Hold on.

Persevere in the face of difficulties.
Push forward.
Start from scratch.
Ask the following important question: *What can be done?*
What is the best way to help students?
The answer, it turns out, is "It depends."

Shift the mood.
Do not rule. Show productive control.
Step-in and step-back.
Accept the full implications of teaching.
Include research and daydreaming and past experience.
See through the tangles in the process.

Articulate the grammar issue in different and more productive terms.
Redefine error.
Claim that error is an opportunity to understand.
Understand.

Get all of the issues on the table.
Understand cultural differences.
Understand that individuals within the classroom are
but one factor that influences a student's learning.
Navigate between the conditions
that contribute to students' motivation to write.
Motivate your students.

Explore how writing is produced
across a dispersed chain of events in varied settings.
Make clear the vast complexity
of literate activity in our present society.
Teach a broad articulation of reading and writing.

Reflect upon, change, and develop those ideas further.
Promote and require different types of thinking.
Make links. Discern patterns.
Set the conditions for the creation of new ideas.

Accept students. Study them.
 Understand that they have an important voice.
 See what they have to say.
 Prove that they know.
 Give their words complete attention.
 Initiate true dialogue.
 Work with language in action.
 Make language live.
 Show that the study of writing can be a window for the mind.

Create spaces.

Make present that which has been absent.
 Learn what it might feel like to be someone else.

Read and act. Play. Push and agitate.
 Be quiet, listen, respond.
 Be honest.
 Be present.
 Learn to be vulnerable.
 Be willing to take risks to be effective.

Come to understand the way writing works.
 Come to understand the way teaching works.

Tell it to others:

Plant a seed.
 Start a fire.
 Put some of the ash on your head and leave it for the night.

Sally Jarzab
University of Buffalo, State University of New York

Author's note: This poem is constructed of words and phrases taken from twenty-five different scholarly writings on writing and composition theory, including those by Arnetha Ball, James Britton, Lisa Delpit, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Donald H. Graves, John R. Hayes, Linda Flowers, Donald M. Murray, and others. The poem was written as a final response to a graduate-level class on research in writing for which these works were read.

About Us

We are graduate students studying English at California State University Fullerton and members of the Teaching Writing Club. What brought us together to create this journal is our interest in teaching, and rhetoric and composition.

Mariam A. Galarrita

Mariam's research interests include Classic and Early Modern literature, and Modern theater. These interests have culminated into a MA thesis that explores the intersection of grotesque art in both Early Modern drama and Absurd drama. She has an interest journal publishing; she served on the review board for the online journal *Diesis*, and served as the editor-in-chief for the Spring 2013 issue of *Pupil*. For her, community is vital component of academia, and thus she has held numerous officer positions in her department's student clubs, including Teaching Writing Club President, Acacia Graduate Club Secretary, and Creative Writing Club Treasurer. She has also served as an Inter Club Council representative in order to help send English majors to conferences. She is currently completing her last semester of her Masters and intends to continue her research in a PhD program.

Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."
-Benjamin Franklin

Jamie Greuel

Jamie has an incredibly wide variety of literary interests, but ever since she began working at the CSUF Writing Center she has become more and more interested in pedagogy, particularly in how group activities can help alleviate the stigma most writers attach to revision.

"Read, read, read. Read everything -- trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it's good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out of the window."
-William Faulkner

Emily King

Emily's academic interests revolve around composition and pedagogy and she is particularly interested in critical theory and transformative education. Emily is currently working on a research project involving student perceptions of power and the influences of those perceptions on classroom behavior.

"The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves."
- Paulo Freire

Katrina Schwerdt

Katrina is currently working on her Master's thesis focusing on subalternity in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Her research interests include Victorian and American literature. She has her secondary teaching credentials, attesting to her interest in teaching literature and composition at either the secondary or postsecondary level.

"Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me... Anything can happen, child. Anything can be."

- Shel Silverstein

Shannon Takeuchi-Chung

Shannon is currently working on her Master's thesis, which focuses on William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Her research interests include American literary modernism and poststructuralist theory, but her passion is found in teaching composition at the college level.

"Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."

- Roald Dahl

Ian Tompkins

Ian's interests lie in Postmodern Fiction, particularly in the work of author Thomas Pynchon. Ian currently instructs primary school child development and looks forward to teaching at the secondary and college levels in the future.

"Think before you speak. Read before you think."

- Fran Lebowitz

Charmaine Vannimwegen

Charmaine's research interests include Narrative Theory in Modern and Contemporary Literature. As a poet and scholar, Charmaine is drawn to the dynamic between creative language and academic composition.

"It ain't whatcha write, it's the way atcha write it."

- Jack Kerouac

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