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IATE is a professional organization for teachers of English/language arts. IATE publishes the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the *IATE Newsletter* and hosts an annual fall conference. IATE is organized by districts throughout the state, each district having a district leader and providing local activities to members throughout the year.

IATE also maintains standing committees that address a number of professional interests and works with other professional organizations to further the interests of teachers. Composed of nearly 1,500 teachers throughout the state, IATE provides a working network for the exchange of teaching tips, current research, and professional development as well as enduring friendships.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE *ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN* 95.2 (SPRING 2008)

RON FORTUNE AND JANICE NEULEIB

These essays represent a selection of essays derived from the presentations given at the one-hundredth annual IATE conference, held at the Père Marquette hotel in Peoria, October 2007. Upon invitation, the presenters agreed to write about the talks and activities that they provided for conference attendees. These essays, therefore, show teachers providing a glimpse into their own best practices. The theme for the conference was "The Company We Keep: Celebrating 100 Years." These essays represent that theme in a variety of ways.

The first essay addresses the conference theme both by investigating the uses of technology in the classroom, but also by showing how both teachers and students work together to produce knowledge. In a larger sense, this discussion

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addresses the complications, opportunities, and challenges that technologies, in this case wikis, introduce into our English classrooms. The authors' conclusion—that the issue is not wikis *per se* but the use of wikis to promote engaged learning—should be extended to the range of technologies available to English teachers. Claire Coleman Lamonica's dissertation was on group interactions, and she currently is the assistant director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. Her coauthors, Amy Magnafichi-Lucas and Peter Petterini, participated in her Saturday workshop class on the Teaching of Rhetoric; they created their demonstrations in that workshop.

Byung-In Seo introduces English teachers to the use of symbols and signs in writing as a way for these teachers to learn to help colleagues in other disciplines employ more writing in their classrooms. Specifically, the essay effectively illustrates the value of helping our colleagues across a range of subject areas to recognize that we are all involved in teaching about language and its uses and that, once we recognize this, we can create opportunities for us to work collaboratively to connect students' language learning across content areas and to see the fundamental importance of language and literacy in all of their learning.

Larry R. Johannessen offers a variety of theories and methods for teaching narrative writing successfully. He demonstrates the value of a *structured process approach* to developing students' abilities to write narratives. To the extent that students are expected to write narratives in local and state writing assessments and on other occasions, the approach described here will prepare them in a way that will enable them to draw intuitively on what they have learned as they compose their narratives. Here, too, while he specifically discusses a structured process approach for developing students'

abilities to write narratives, we can readily see the advantage of extending his approach to a range of composing tasks of concern in a writing classroom.

The next two essays offer specific ways of teaching, each giving methods and materials for those specific classes. Marcea K. Seible shows how to learn to teach legal writing and how to discover effective materials for the class. The discussion is most useful in illustrating how an instructor might help students in a legal-writing course to negotiate—through research and carefully designed writing assignments—the territory between the mix of professional motives, purposes, and experiences students have when they enter a legal-writing course and the special demands of legal rhetoric and writing. Most importantly, the discussion offers a carefully conceived succession of writing assignments that collaborate to enable students to travel this territory successfully.

Doug Lillydahl and Jacquie Cullen offer hands-on, practical ways of teaching the specific skills that will scaffold toward the AP Language and Composition and the AP Language and Literature exams. They specifically examine the value of discourse analysis in reading and writing instruction, focusing on diction and syntactic analyses to help students become more successful in both areas. The work described here suggests that this approach can go a long way toward helping students deal effectively with such elusive concepts as mood and tone in their reading and writing. Along the way, the authors suggest possibilities beyond working with diction and syntax to address mood and tone, noting how visual materials, for example, might be used to help students learn to work with tone in their reading and their writing.

Finally, Donna Binns's essay closes with a suggestion about seeing the five-paragraph theme as a genre among genres and theorizes that students will be less bound to the

form if they see it as one choice among many, a choice that has many limitations and a few possible uses. By situating the five-paragraph essay within the field of genre analysis, the discussion invites us to step back from the subject and, instead of swearing by it as a key part of effective writing instruction or dismissing it as the worst kind of pedagogy, to think about the forms that writing involves more broadly. Doing so, effectively shifts the focus in the conversation from a particular form to form itself, which, in turn, allows us to recognize simultaneously that the five-paragraph essay can have a use, however limited, but that framing our understanding of form through the five-paragraph essay constrains the discussion of form to the point that it undermines the possibility of students ever developing a sense of form true to the work of writing.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS TO THE *ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN*

As the written forum in which Illinois English teachers share their ideas, the *Illinois English Bulletin* welcomes all kinds of materials related to the teaching of English.

We seek articles dealing with literature, writing, language, media, speech, drama, film, culture, technology, standards, assessment, professional development, and other aspects of our profession. Any combination of research, theory, and practice is appropriate. Some articles take a formal and conclusive approach, while others are informal and exploratory.

Book reviews, poetry, black-and-white photographs, and line drawings are also welcome.

When you are ready to share your work with your colleagues across the state, please consult the submission guidelines on page 10. We look forward to hearing from you. If you have questions or suggestions for the editors, please don't

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hesitate to get in touch (contact information on page 12).

Thank you for reading, supporting, and contributing to the *Illinois English Bulletin*.

Submission Guidelines

(See page 12 for the editors' contact information.)

- Via U.S. mail, send one clean, paper copy of the manuscript to the editors. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information to include in your cover letter.
- Attached to an e-mail message addressed to the editors, send an additional copy of the manuscript in an MS Word or PDF attachment. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information you should include in your e-mail message.
- In your cover letter (mailed with hard copy) and in your e-mail message (with electronic copy attached), include the following information: your manuscript title, name, mailing address, institutional affiliation, and phone number. Also indicate whether you are currently a member of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE). State that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Manuscript formatting guidelines: follow the current *MLA Handbook* guidelines for parenthetical in-text citations, the works cited section, and other technical elements; follow NCTE's "Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language"; place page numbers at the top right corner of every page; type and double-space throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with one-inch margins all around.

- With both your paper and electronic manuscript submissions, please also include a biographical blurb of fifty words or fewer. (Blurbs for manuscripts with multiple authors should total fifty words or fewer.) Blurbs usually mention institutional and professional affiliations as well as teaching and research interests.
- The *Bulletin* editors will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript via e-mail.

Submission Deadlines

You are welcome to submit your materials at any time to the editors of the *Illinois English Bulletin*. Traditionally, the *Bulletin*'s spring issue features shorter articles based on presentations made at the previous autumn's IATE annual conference. Summer issues may be themed or all-inclusive. The fall issue presents the "Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose." The winter issue is the program for our annual IATE fall conference.

To be considered for inclusion in the spring issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous November 1.

To be considered for inclusion in the summer issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous January 15.

To be considered for inclusion in the fall issue ("Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose"), materials must be mailed to the special editor for that issue and postmarked by the previous January 31. Please see the most recent fall issue of the *Bulletin* for special submission guidelines and contact information for fall issues. Please note that as of 2005, the poet laureate of Illinois will designate several of the poems selected for publication in the *Bulletin* as "Poems of

Exceptional Merit." These poems will be identified in a message written by the poet laureate and published in this issue of the *Bulletin*. The poets will receive a certificate from the poet laureate in the U.S. mail.

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WIKIS:
WRITING IN THE COMPANY OF OTHERS

CLAIRE COLEMAN LAMONICA, AMY MAGNAFICHI-LUCAS,
AND PETER D. PETTORINI
AND THE TEACHERS WHO ATTENDED OUR SESSION
AT THE 2007 IATE CONFERENCE IN PEORIA, ILLINOIS

Teachers like Claire—born in the middle of the last century—and even teachers like Amy and Peter—born later in that same century—know all too well that the world in which our students will live and work for the better part of their lives is not the world in which we have been living and working for the better part of ours. Sometimes, though, it takes a wake-up call before we realize just how different their world of work is going to be, or how different it already is. Here's an example, something we heard at the 2007 NCTE convention in New York City: During a speech to members of the Standing Committee on Affiliates at that convention, Kylene Beers, NCTE's president-elect, shared a story about

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a high school student's experience applying for a summer internship with *Google*. The student had to apply online, of course; she already had the skills to do that. But here's one of the items she was required to address as part of the application process: "Tell us about a school project you've completed that required you to collaborate with people in at least three different time zones." How would your students answer this question? How would ours?

If our job as teachers is to prepare our students to live and work in their world—not ours—we need to think seriously about whether or not our classes are doing that. As Beers pointed out in her speech at the affiliate breakfast, schools can no longer be content with teaching "the three Rs." Readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmatic, traditional literacy skills of the twentieth century, are still necessary, but they are no longer sufficient.

What are the literacy skills our students will need for the twenty-first century? Experts don't agree, but Beers made a suggestion during that same speech. She'd like to see us supplement the three Rs with four Cs: create, collaborate, critique, and communicate. "But wait!" you may be thinking. "It's all I can do to teach traditional literacy skills; how will I find time to teach 'the four Cs' as well?" Fortunately, these skill sets are not mutually exclusive, and as English teachers we are perfectly situated to teach at least six of the seven…often in the context of the same assignment.

Collaborative writing assignments are one example of the kind of opportunity that lives at the intersection of these two sets of literacy skills. Students who write collaboratively must not only read and write, they must also create, collaborate, critique, and communicate. And collaborative writing is nothing new in either the classroom or the workplace. As early as 1990, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede were able to

determine that 87 percent of the professionals they surveyed (including architects, engineers, scientists, and others) indicated "that they sometimes write as members of a team or a group" (60), and that was before the advent of networked computers, e-mail, and all of the other late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century innovations that not only support, but invite collaboration. Each of these innovations has the potential to encourage and support student collaborations as well as workplace ones. And, as Lunsford and Ede argued two decades ago, if students are going to be expected to write collaboratively in their work, we have an obligation reimagine our pedagogy in ways that will prepare them to do so (126).

In most cases, such a reimagination has been a long time coming, but with the advent of Web 2.0, the need to prepare students to become effective collaborators may be both greater than ever and more easily satisfied. If you're not sure what we mean by "Web 2.0," you're not alone. For several weeks, Claire was convinced that it must be some different Internet—one she couldn't find on her computer—but actually, "the phrase Web 2.0 [refers] to a…second generation of Web-based communities and…services—such as social networking sites [*Facebook* and *MySpace*, for example], wikis, and [more]—which aim to facilitate creativity, collaboration, and sharing between users" ("Web 2.0"). From a technical standpoint, there are not, in fact, two Internets. There are simply different kinds of sites. From a practical standpoint, Web 2.0 means that we no longer need to beg administrators and technical support staff for special software or expensive networks to support electronic collaborations among students. All we need to promote such collaborations is access to the Internet.

As noted above, one kind of Web-based tool designed to promote collaboration is the wiki. A wiki is simply "a Web

site that allows users to add and update content on the site.… Wikis end up being created mainly by a collaborative effort of the site visitors" ("Wiki").

Simply put, that's the difference between the familiar "World Wide Web" and Web 2.0. If you have a site on the World Wide Web, visitors to your site are primarily consumers. They look for the information they need—information you've posted on your site—they use it, and they leave. In Web 2.0, visitors to a given site have the option to be not only consumers, but contributors. They can add to the store of information that's already there, enriching the content for the next user. In educational terms, the World Wide Web subscribes to the "sage on the stage" model of teaching; Web 2.0 is social constructivism in action.

Collaborative Writing Defined

Collaborative writing can be either narrowly or broadly defined. Most narrowly, one group of researchers defined collaborative writing as having three distinct features: "(1) production of a shared document, (2) substantive interaction among members, and (3) shared decision-making power over and responsibility for the document" (qtd. in Ede and Lunsford 15). Most broadly, David Farkas has defined it as "one or more persons modifying, by editing and/or reviewing the document of one or more persons" (qtd. in Miller) which would seem to include almost every document ever published—as well as a good many that remain unpublished! For the purposes of this consideration of wikis, it might be best to think of collaborative writing as any of the following, also identified by Farkas: "two or more people contributing components to a document; one or more person modifying, by editing and/or reviewing, the document of one or more persons;…[or] one person working interactively with one or

more person and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons (qtd. in Miller)." The second of these is already standard practice in the secondary English classroom. The first and third are not only possible in the classroom, but desirable.

Why Collaborate?

We've already identified two reasons that collaborative writing might be seen as a desirable classroom practice. That is, it allows students to engage in and practice a number of important twentieth- and twenty-first-century literacy skills and—for those so inclined—it is philosophically consistent with a pedagogy of constructivism. When we asked a room full of English teachers at last fall's IATE conference in Peoria what benefits they could see for creating opportunities for their students to write collaboratively, they suggested the following:

Collaborative writing assignments engage students.

According to the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), "Two out of three students are bored in class in high school at least every day; 17% of the respondents are bored in every class in high school. Only 2% of the students surveyed have never been bored in high school" (Yazzi-Mintz 5). It's easy to say, "Well, it's a tough world out there, and we all get bored sometimes," but the truth is that when they're bored, they're not learning, and at the minimum, our job as teachers is to create opportunities that *promote* (not just *allow*) student learning.

So how do we do that? According to the HSSSE, "students are most excited and engaged by teaching methods in which they learn with their peers" and "by activities in which they are active participants" (Yazzi-Mintz 7). Collaborative writing assignments fulfill both of these criteria.

Collaborative writing assignments create opportunities for the oral rehearsal of writing.

The oral rehearsal of writing is a strategy that has received renewed attention in recent years—particularly in regard to its usefulness for less experienced writers, English-language learners, and writers with learning disabilities, but—like many strategies touted for their usefulness with special populations of students—oral rehearsals can actually benefit many, if not all, writers to some degree or another.

When students have the opportunity to talk about their writing before and during the time they are engaged in the process, they are more likely to spend time planning, and time spent planning has been repeatedly shown to result in higher-quality texts (Burnett 133). When students have time to talk about their writing before and during the time they are engaged in the process, they are likely to give thoughtful consideration to a variety of rhetorical considerations such as audience and purpose (Lamonica 33–34). When students have time to talk about their writing before and during the time they are engaged in the process, they are likely to raise complex issues of ownership and authority (Simpson-Esper 97).

In short, oral rehearsals of writing externalize some of the internal conversations about writing in which experienced writers often engage, offering developing writers the opportunity to "think like" more experienced writers and resulting in more fully developed texts and more fully developed writers.

Collaborative writing assignments allow opportunities for interaction among writers at different levels of development, enhancing learning.

Lev Vygotsky's concept of "zones of proximal development" suggests that human beings grow and develop through

their interactions with others. Working with others and talking about the task at hand "enable[s] them to refine their thinking or their performance to make it more effective.… [Thus], the key to 'stretching' the learner is to know what is in that person's ZPD—what comes next, for them" (Atherton). When less experienced writers have the opportunity to write and talk about writing in the company of writers who are more experienced, both the less and the more experienced writers benefit. The former benefit from the "stretching" engendered by the experience; the latter benefit from the opportunity to orally rehearse their writing and to reflect on their own practices as they discuss them with their less experienced (or less successful) peers.

Collaborative writing assignments require the negotiation of text.

The collaborative negotiation of a text has been shown to be an effective method of supporting skill development at many levels of proficiency. It "develops thinking, planning, refining and consolidating while at the same time developing appropriate language structures and increasing vocabulary" as the collaborators work together to plan and draft a text ("Best Practices").

Collaborative writing assignments promote higher levels of thinking ("none of us is as smart as all of us").

"Synergy" is the name for the "where-did-*that*-idea-come-from?" effect often experienced by people working in groups. Cliché-bound as it might sound, many heads really are better than one, and all of us really are smarter than any of us. Research suggests that when conditions are right, students writing collaboratively can produce texts of higher quality than those the individual students might produce alone (Lamonica 207). It's important to note, however, that "conditions must be right." The results of any collaborative

effort will be affected by a number of factors, including the cohesion of the group, the group's commitment to the project, the degree to which the group is willing and able to manage ideational conflict, and more. The relationship of ideational conflict to creativity is particularly well documented. David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson note that "within any learning situation…conflicts among ideas or opinions are inevitable" (51) and conclude that "such conflicts will create conceptual conflict, feelings of uncertainty, and epistemic curiosity; increase students' accuracy of cognitive perspective-taking; promote students' transitions from one stage of cognitive and moral reasoning to another; increase the quality of students' problem-solving; and increase students' creativeness" (62).

Collaborative writing assignments allow students to tackle more complex writing tasks.

One of the most common concerns of teachers contemplating the design of collaborative writing assignments is the potential for an unfair division of labor among students. All too often, we know, a "collaborative" assignment is actually completed by a single, highly motivated, high-achieving student. The truth is, if one student *can* complete the assignment, chances are, one student *will*. For that reason, one key to designing an effective collaborative writing assignment is to make it a more complex task than any individual student could possibly complete on his or her own. The benefits of providing students with this kind of rigorous experience are myriad, especially when the collaborative nature of the assignment allows them to succeed at the demanding task.

Collaborative writing assignments increase student motivation because the students are responsible to each other.

Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing, especially when it's used to promote desirable behaviors. One key to ensuring

that the members of collaborative writing groups exert positive peer pressure on each other is to think carefully about the structure of the groups. The option of putting the highest and lowest achieving students together in a group in the hope that the high-achieving students will somehow educate or influence their lower achieving peers may not be the best one to pursue. Research suggests that students do better in groups they have helped form (Chapman et al. 566), in part because they have a greater commitment to the other members of the group. Of course, you will also want to avoid the creation of groups where low performance becomes the norm. One way to create a balance between self-selected and teacher-selected groups is to allow students to provide you with lists of the peers they'd like to work with and to use those lists to ensure that each student is in a group with at least one other student she or he has chosen and at least one other student who is likely to exert some kind of positive influence.

Why Wikis?

Of course, collaborative writing can be achieved through a variety of means—from "old-fashioned" paper and pencil approaches to electronic approaches via networked computer, e-mail, discussion boards, and more. So, why go to the trouble of integrating wikis into our teaching? The same group of teachers at the conference was also able to identify several ways that wikis might contribute to and/or facilitate classroom collaborations. These included the following:

Students can use established wikis to get background information for their writing.

Probably the most famous—or infamous—wiki on the Web is *Wikipedia*, "a free encyclopedia in many languages that anyone can edit" ("Wiki"). Of course, such access does not come without a price, and *Wikipedia* has generated its share of

controversy. Some would argue that open access is an invitation to misinformation. In reality, however, the very nature of wikis in general, and of *Wikipedia* specifically, suggests that such misinformation is quickly identified and easily corrected. (Visit *Wikipedia*'s Accuracy Dispute page at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Accuracy_dispute for information about how disputed information is handled.)

Does this make *Wikipedia* the perfect research tool? No. Of course not. *Wikipedia*, like any other general reference book, is a great place to start one's research. Students need to learn to use it in much the same way they would use any encyclopedia—as a place to gain a basic understanding of a specific topic. They can also use it to find suggestions for further reading and links to additional source materials which they can use to deepen their understanding of the topic.

Wikis offer "real" publishing opportunities by making student products available to audiences beyond the classroom.

Students in Nikki Aitkin's freshman composition courses at Illinois State University two years ago went beyond using *Wikipedia* as a resource; they used it as a publication site. One of the class assignments was to collaboratively produce an original article for *Wikipedia* (the site maintains a list of potential article topics) or to revise an existing article. Students were delighted to have the opportunity to publish their work on the Web where it would be read by "real" Internet users, but quickly learned that writing for real readers has real consequences. One group of students posted a poorly researched draft and, within minutes, received a scathing reprimand from a reader, chastising them for their inappropriate posting.

It's not necessary for students to post to *Wikipedia* to find real audiences, however. They can also post to a classroom wiki—which can be either public or private—and find

readers there—in the form of their classmates, other students in the school, parents, and so on. The size of the audience is limited only by the restrictions the teacher decides to place on the wiki.

Wikis extend the class period by being available to student writers 24/7—while their teachers are sleeping!

Anyone who has taught high school for any length of time knows that adolescents and their teachers operate under the influence of very different biorhythms. This understanding has even prompted some to suggest that secondary schools should start and end later in the day—allowing students to go to school at times when they are more mentally alert. Sadly, the trade-off might be teachers and administrators who were less alert! But imagine a world in which teaching and learning are able to operate asynchronously. Teachers provide the context for learning at the times when they are most mentally alert, and students interact with that context at whatever times they are most mentally alert. Wikis are one such context. No longer does learning happen in discrete forty- or fifty-minute periods. It happens at any hour that the students log on to the wiki and collaborate with each other.

Wikis expand the size of the "classroom," allowing students to collaborate with students in other classes, schools, states, even nations.

Remember the student who had to describe a school project involving people in three time zones? One such project might be a collaborative writing assignment completed via a wiki.

Even collaborations by students in the same time zone have their merits, however, as Amy and Peter discovered in the fall of 2007.

An Interclassroom Collaboration: Amy's and Peter's Stories

Amy and Peter first considered the possibility of developing their own interclassroom collaboration after using a wiki for a collaborative project in a graduate course Claire taught in the spring of 2007. The course, Applying Rhetoric to the Teaching of Writing, is one of six classes in the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in the Teaching of Writing program at Illinois State University. Sometime during the first class meeting, Claire introduced the idea of a collaborative teacher-scholar project: Using a wiki to jointly propose and draft a book about using rhetoric to teach writing in the middle and secondary schools. As technology junkies, Amy and Peter were enthusiastic about the project. Not only did it allow them to gain insight into the use of rhetoric in the teaching of writing but they were impressed with the ease with which they and their classmates—teachers from schools all over central Illinois—could collaborate via a wiki. This discovery prompted both Amy and Peter to find ways to utilize this technology in their own classrooms. They hoped to add a dimension to their teaching that would excite and engage their students with both literature and writing in new ways. These are their stories:

Amy's Story

Prior to the start of the fall semester, I had a wiki in place for my two college-prep sophomore English classes and my two sophomore English classes. In preparation for our collaboration with Peter's class, I made it a priority to use the wiki in several ways. For example, rather than having students journal in a notebook about literature they had read, they posted their reading responses on the wiki, which also allowed them to respond to each others' responses. Because I have two sections of each course, students were

able to interact with peers in different sections of the course, allowing them to expand the range of ideas they were being exposed to.

Later, while engaged in a character study, the students worked collaboratively to create wiki pages for their characters. I soon found that the students took their pieces to a higher level through the use of the wiki. They incorporated color, images, and even music into their pieces to enhance their characters. Rather than submitting a typed essay for my eyes only, the students shared their work with the entire sophomore class and commented about other students' work. Not only were they writing for a real audience, they were also practicing important reading, writing, collaborating, and critiquing skills.

They're clearly more engaged as well. When we spent a little time away from the wiki, my students asked to get back to it, which was more than I could have hoped for. They enjoyed engaging with English through this technology, and it has forced me to rethink how I approach my curriculum, which in turn has renewed my own excitement about what I teach.

Peter's Story

I initially introduced a wiki to my high school juniors as a way to integrate technology, minimize hard copies, and allow students to build on an area of their existing expertise with technology. This went quite well as they all have home computers and spend several hours each night on the computer exploring what they're interested in. What's more, some students see the wiki as a "safety net." While they might be hesitant to participate in class, they're more than willing to express themselves via the wiki.

This introduction to wikis turned out to be a good idea. It familiarized my students with the procedures for electronically

posting their work and responding to others, increasing their comfort with both the response process and the technology. In addition, participation in a conversation via the wiki prepared students for the classroom discussions that followed. Because they had had a chance to rehearse and enlarge upon their own thinking via the wiki, they were more willing and able to participate in class.

Amy and Peter's Collaborative Wiki

Although wikis have a variety of uses, as noted above, their true usefulness is in their ability to facilitate collaborative work that transcends geographic boundaries. Before the school year even began, we had decided to use a wiki to link our AP Literature and Composition classes. Since we teach at schools located two hours apart, the wiki offered a feasible way to connect both our curricula and our students. We began by creating a single wiki. There we posted the syllabus and created several pages where students could post their responses to our classroom assignments. We also added a "Coffee House" page for their enjoyment. This page functions as a place for students to leave messages and exchange e-mails, IM addresses, phone numbers, and the like. This way of using the wiki progressed quite well throughout the first quarter.

We soon hit a point, however, when we realized we weren't utilizing the wiki to its fullest potential, so we designed and assigned a collaborative writing assignment. Each student group, comprised of students from both schools, received an essay assignment to which they had to respond collaboratively. The collaboration worked as follows: One or more of the students began writing on the essay prompt and posting their work to the wiki page, then the others in the group would jump in and add text, edit, discuss, and contribute. This process continued for a few days until the group

had negotiated a rough draft. These drafts were read and responded to by the teachers, and the groups had additional time to polish their final drafts before they were due. Once final drafts were due, we collaboratively graded the essays online. Students from both classes discussed what went well and what they would do differently when collaborating online. Although their initial reaction was resistance, they soon understood what a valuable tool the wiki was and how pertinent the skill of working with others is to the "real" world.

The next collaboration involved the peer reading of an essay. Each student created his or her own wiki page for an essay concerning the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. We then assigned students to be peer readers for other students. Students from Amy's school responded to students from Peter's school, and vice versa. As each essay draft was posted to a student's page, the respondents had four days to read the essays and post comments on the page for the writer. Each writer then had the opportunity to revise the essay and post the final draft to the wiki page. The final step of the process involved posting a reflection to the page. Writers reflected on their processes, noting which of their peers' suggestions they had incorporated into the text, why they had chosen to make those changes, and how they felt about their final essay. Logistically, the wiki allows both students and instructors to trace the development of the text over time, providing a "history" to which students can refer as they reflect on their processes. Pedagogically, the process allowed our students, who have spent most of their high school English careers with the same cohort of students, to experience other writers' strengths and weaknesses.

Part of the beauty of incorporating wikis into the English classroom, or any classroom for that matter, is the ease with which students pick up on its use. Since they're often more

technologically savvy than we are, it's a snap for them to learn a new technology. Once they're familiar with the wiki, they'll be teaching you how to attach pictures and videos as well as audio clips into writing, incorporating elements of visual and oral rhetoric into more traditional texts. Their writing takes on a life of its own as they're able to express themselves in the manner in which they're the most comfortable.

Wikis can also expand the classroom from an isolated, closed-door space into a truly global environment. Isn't this what we want? Don't we want our students to be exposed to as much information, feedback, constructive criticism, and knowledge as possible? This is why wiki use is of the utmost importance. They allow students to collaborate with anyone, anywhere, and on any topic. Of course, some educators avoid collaboration because of the stir and buzz it creates in their classrooms, but all too often that means they're missing those "Ah ha!" moments when course content truly registers with the students because they have discussed it with their peers and made it their own. Wikis provide a level of collaboration previously unattainable, and it is for that reason they are pertinent to the twenty-first-century classroom. Collaboration is the future, and wikis are a vehicle that can take our students there today.

A Word About Assessment

Like any other writing assignment, a collaborative writing assignment is most successful when it is the subject of both formative and summative assessment. That is, students writing collaboratively should expect to receive feedback from both their instructors and their peers as part of the writing process and again at the conclusion of the project.

Wikis offer multiple avenues for formative assessments in the form of peer and instructor responses to the work in

progress. Respondents can, for example, read drafts of texts online and respond within the context of the draft, using many of the same tools available through most popular word processing programs. They can also, however, use the comments feature built in to the wiki; respond in separate documents, which they attach to the wiki page in question; make suggestions via a chat room built in to the wiki; or communicate via e-mail using links built in to the wiki.

In terms of summative assessment, collaborative writing assignments raise some unique questions and offer some unique opportunities. The most frequently asked question, of course, is: "Should all members of the collaborative writing group receive the same grade for a collaboratively produced text, or should each author receive a separate grade?" This question is largely a reflection of the concerns collaborative assignments raise regarding the distribution of labor among student contributors.

Small group theory suggests that it is important for all group members to receive the same grade for a collaboratively produced text. The knowledge that this is the case promotes cooperation among the members of the group, rather than pitting them against each other in a competitive relationship that is antithetical to the group process. This does not mean, however, that it's not possible to evaluate each student individually on his or her contributions to the project as long as (a) this evaluation is separate from the evaluation of the collaboratively produced text and (b) group members are not in competition with each other for individual grades; that is, it must be possible for all members of the group to receive the same "contribution"—or "group participation"—grade.

Ideally, any individual group member's contribution or participation grade should be determined largely by the other members of the group using criteria predetermined by

the group. This can be accomplished by having each group establish through a series of questions—as a team-building exercise prior to the start of the collaborative project—a set of criteria for group membership: What characteristics epitomize an outstanding group member? What characteristics might be ascribed to a satisfactory group member? What characteristics might be demonstrated by an unsatisfactory group member? Once agreed upon, these criteria should become part of the group's record. On a wiki, this can be achieved by creating a separate wiki page that contains a listing of these criteria.

At the conclusion of the project, each group member should be asked to generate peer and self-evaluations using the predetermined criteria as a reference point. For additional accountability, self-evaluations can be accompanied by "Individual Contribution Logs," records of each individual's contributions to the project. One of the advantages of a wiki, of course, is that the wiki automatically keeps a record of contributions and changes. Anyone with access to the wiki can check the history to see who contributed what, when.

How to Establish a Wiki

It's not hard to establish a wiki for use in your own classroom. There are a number of sites available, often at no cost. The site we used is *PBWiki*, which is found at http://www.pbwiki.com. The site's motto is that creating a wiki is "as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich," and it almost is. It's especially easy if you have prior experience with Web page development, but that's not a prerequisite. The directions are on the site, and all you need to do is follow them. Also available at this site are testimonials, tips, and teaching strategies from teachers who are already using wikis in their classrooms. Another popular, relatively easy-to-use site is *Wikispaces*, found at http://www.wikispaces.com. This site

also offers easy-to-follow directions as well as testimonials, tips, and teaching strategies. These are just two of the many sites available. To find more, simply use your favorite search engine to conduct a search using the term "free wikis." You'll find a long list to choose from, and you can compare them for yourself. For educational purposes, you'll probably want to choose a site with strong security measures, and we'd recommend making sure your classroom wiki is "private," so that only the users you designate can access your students' work.

In the end, of course, it's not the wiki site you choose that's important—it's the fact that you're using a wiki to promote engaged learning. Your students are already living in a Web 2.0 world. They create their own *MySpace* pages, journal extensively via blogs, look to *Wikipedia* for information, and more. In other words, you don't have to bring them into the twenty-first century; you just need to meet them there!

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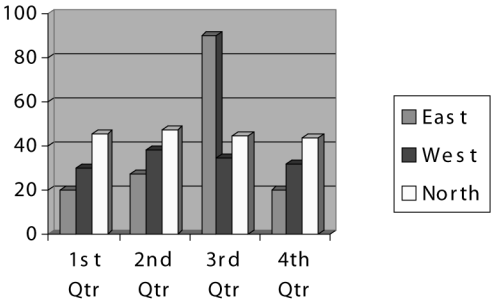
OPENING THE DIALOGUE: INVITING CONTENT-AREA TEACHERS INTO THE LITERACY DISCUSSION

BYUNG-IN SEO

What do the following have in common?

$$X + Y = 5$$

$$2H_2 + O_2 \ddagger 2H_2O$$



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In each of these instances, language is being used. Also, the two equations can be seen as sentences, and the graph can be read as a paragraph. Because we, as English teachers, do not recognize language from other content areas, we are not necessarily equipped to teach students how to become literate in other content areas. Unfortunately, in many secondary schools, the onus of improving literacy scores is placed upon us, the English department. If we expect our colleagues in the math, science, social studies, physical education, health, and vocational departments to teach literacy skills, we need to show them that they are better equipped to teach those skills than we are.

James Paul Gee wrote that all language has discourse (with a small "d") and Discourse (with a capital "D"). With a small "d," discourse is the language itself that is used between individuals. This language can be spoken or written, and often it focuses on the vocabulary and sentence structure of the speakers and audience. Discourse (with a capital "D") is the small "d" discourse combined with other factors that make meaning possible (Gee 25). For example, the classroom environment, the content area, the interaction between the students, and the teacher's interaction with the subject are other factors that need to be taken into consideration. Spoken and written language can change in meaning and interpretation, because Discourse changes from context to context. For instance, a student learns the meaning of the word "rational" in mathematics class. Here, "rational" means something to do with fractions or ratios. She may complete mathematics problems using this word, and, chances are, she'd have a quiz to check for her understanding of this word. Then, in English class, she encounters the word "rational" again. In this class, "rational" means something that is even or logical. Once again, to learn the word in this class, she may have formed a

word bank or illustrative flash cards, and, like the mathematics class, she was given a quiz to check for understanding. Only in this case, she writes "fractions" for the meaning of "rational" and she gets the question wrong. Confused, she doesn't understand her error. She learned "rational" to mean something to do with fractions, but she got the quiz question incorrect in English class. What this child didn't learn is that the meaning of a word can change as its context changes. Technically, this student didn't get the answer incorrect on the English quiz, but for the context, it was wrong.

Scenarios like this one are common. Students are taught vocabulary words in different contexts, but they aren't necessarily taught *how* the meaning changes according to the context. Individual content areas are often taught in isolation, with little communication amongst the different departments. One reason for this lack of communication could be that the non-English departments don't realize that literacy skills are basically the same, and they merely need to incorporate these skills into their routine classroom instruction, without sacrificing content knowledge.

First, all teachers need to understand that all written language consists of letters, numbers, symbols, and images (Harris 25). Letters are of our alphabet, but their meanings and representations change as the context changes. For example, in mathematics, the letter "X" is often used to designate an unknown number, while in English, "X" is used as a signature of an illiterate person. As letters are combined, words are formed. Words can come in different styles. For example, in science, "$2H_2O$" means "two molecules of water." In this case, this word is comprised of letters and numbers, and it is clearly a word, which has a distinct meaning.

Symbols, which are often seen in mathematics and science classes, represent different functions (Rotman 62). ">"

means "is greater than" in mathematics, and "‡" means "results in" in chemistry class. In both examples, these symbols represent that an action took place, thus they are used as action or linking verbs in the sentence. Let's revisit the equation X + Y = 5. This equation can be read as: "An unknown value X and another different unknown value Y is equal to 5." As you can see, the left side of the equation is a compound subject, the "=" is the verb, and "5" is the direct object. In this case, the symbol "=" designated an action in the equation/sentence. The same can be said for this equation: $2H_2 + O_2 ‡ 2H_2O$. This equation/sentence is read as: "Two molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of oxygen will result in two molecules of water." Once again, the symbol "‡" designates an action in the equation/sentence.

Images, such as diagrams and graphs can have multiple meanings, but these multiple individual meanings, when combined, can give an overall significance to the image, like a paragraph (Rotman 69). A paragraph consists of individual sentences, and each sentence has its individual meaning. When these sentences are combined into a paragraph, then there is an overall significance to the paragraph.

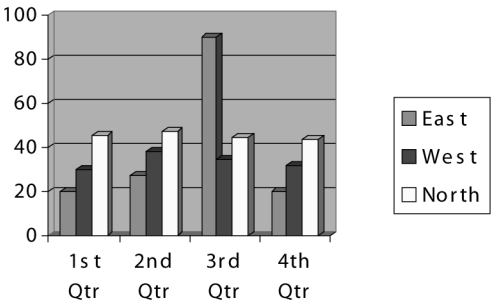

Figure 1: Example of a bar graph

Looking at figure 1, we can see that, during the first quarter, the north had the largest value. During the second quarter, there was little change in values from the first quarter. However, during the third quarter, there is a significance change in the east, and finally, the fourth quarter was similar to the first and second quarters. Clearly, each bar-graph set had its individual meanings, and, if we only looked at each bar graph set individually, we would be able to understand that individual sentence. However, with all of the bar-graph sets together, we understand the overall meaning of the graph. Similar to a paragraph, we may understand the individual sentence, but we may not always understand the big picture of the paragraph.

In each of these examples, we understand the equations and the graph because we are literate in that Discourse. We understand the meanings because we are aware of the contexts in which these meanings are derived. Adolescent students are just learning the language and the contexts of these languages. Many of them are not aware that language changes as their courses change. Words have different meanings, and the styles of sentences change. It is unreasonable for English teachers to be responsible for teaching literacy skills across all content areas because we don't know the intricacies of mathematical, chemical, or historical language. Also, we are not aware of the different contexts in which this language is used. However, since the responsibility is put upon us, I feel that it is our responsibility to open the dialogue with other content-area teachers in order to improve literacy skills across our student population.

When opening the dialogue, you need to first find a colleague who would be willing to listen to you and take what you have to say seriously. This is no easy task because everyone is busy, overworked, and stressed. However, you

may be able to find one or two colleagues in other departments who would be willing to listen to you. First, explain to them that all language consists of similar letters, numbers, symbols, and images. However, how these letters, numbers, symbols, and images are combined changes according to the content area. Find examples in your textbooks that show how similar words change meaning as the context changes.

Second, discuss the different methods that you currently use in teaching your subject areas. Often, in mathematics class, the teacher will read the section to the class, complete some example problems on the board, ask the students to complete similar problems with the teacher's help, and, finally, be given more mathematics problems as homework exercises that are similar to the ones taught in class. In social science class, I have seen students read round-robin a section of their textbook. Then, the teacher may stop periodically to ask the class questions or to answer students' questions, assigning summary questions at the end of the section for homework. In both cases, the teachers are using techniques that work for them. Also, to a certain extent, they are teaching their students how to be literate in their content areas. However, literacy skills learned in mathematics or history may not crossover to other content areas. You need to acknowledge that teaching does take place in these classes, even though you may feel that learning may not always be successful.

As you have this discussion with your colleague, ask them the following questions:

- When you teach vocabulary words, what do you have the students do?
- How do you get your students ready for the next section?
- When the students read, what do you expect them to glean from the section?

- How do students take notes in your class?
- How do you review for tests and quizzes?

All of these questions have a purpose. The first one will help you determine the kinds of vocabulary exercises that the students do during their regular classroom instruction. Next, the second question tackles the subject of pre-reading activities. Question three focuses on critical reading skills, and the fourth question asks the writing activities in class. Finally, the fifth question will help you learn about how this teacher gets his/her students to review and evaluate the material.

Third, explain how you promote pre-reading, critical reading, and writing activities in the English classroom. While, in some cases, there may be similarities in teaching methods, chances are that there will be differences between the two content areas. During your explanation, identify the similarities between the two instructional methods. At this point, you need to convince your colleagues that they are already employing literacy skills in their instruction, but they may not be aware of doing so. In many cases, content-area teachers are not cognizant that they are using different literacy skills. They just see it as teaching. By emphasizing the similarities, the content-area teacher will hopefully see that how the history teacher teaches isn't much different than the mathematics teacher. The content may change, but the literacy skills that are used are similar.

Fourth, once similarities have been identified, brainstorm additional methods that the content-area teacher may want to try. We English teachers are the keepers of literacy strategies. Many content-area teachers did not take a teaching content-area literacy class that is specific to secondary students during their educational training. As we give suggestions, we need to not only tell the benefits of the strategy but also the possible pitfalls. It would also help if you gave

the population group that works best for that strategy. For example, I often used DRTA (Directed Reading Thinking Activity) when I taught remedial algebra because it got my students to slow their thinking and focus on one section of the text at a time. With my AP English students, I would use SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review), and have them combine their best questions into a class study guide for a review of a test. Also, SQ3R worked best with my AP students because they learned how to survey text and glean the overall meaning before looking for details. This skill helped them tremendously on the reading portions of the AP literature exam.

Finally, you need to offer support throughout the school year. To some extent, you may become a minimentor to this content area teacher. Ask the history teacher how the strategies are working for him. Approach the mathematics teacher and allow her to vent her frustrations to you about the different skills. If a colleague decided that the strategies didn't work for him, find out why they were unsuccessful. The bottom line is that you need to keep a line of open communication between you and the content-area teachers. Yes, you initiated the dialogue, and you need to put in a little work to sustain it.

By opening the dialogue, content-area teachers may realize that there are names and functions for their current teaching methods. These teachers may come to a realization that they've been teaching literacy skills all along, only they didn't realize it at the time. Over time, hopefully literacy skills will gradually improve within your student population because students will begin to understand that the skills that they learned in English class will also be used in chemistry class and in health class. As students use different skills repeatedly, in different contexts, they will begin to see the relevance of literacy skills across all of the content areas.

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A STRUCTURED PROCESS APPROACH TO TEACHING NARRATIVE WRITING

LARRY R. JOHANNESSEN

How can we go about preparing our students learn the strategies and skills involved in narrative writing and, at the same time, prepare them for the tasks they will be required to perform for local and state writing assessments? George Hillocks, Jr., (*Narrative Writing* and *Testing Trap*) points out that many state writing assessments ask student to write narratives. Looking at some of the rubrics used in different state assessments reveals that while many of them place some emphasis on the formal aspects of writing (such as the number of paragraphs and organization of the piece), they also place considerable emphasis on what is often termed "stylistic considerations," such as attention grabbers at the start of the narrative and the use of specific, concrete, sensory detail, including the use of figurative language, dialogue—where and when appropriate—and creating a dominant or overall impression through the use of this detail.

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These requirements for performing well have important implication for those of us who are trying to prepare our students for these assessments. The questions I want to try to answer are: what does research show about narrative and descriptive writing, what are the implications of this research for instruction, and how might we go about translating that research into an approach that can help us prepare our students for writing assessments that ask them to write a narrative?

What Does Research Show and What Are the Implications?

One interesting study has some direct implications on what many assessments ask students to do. For more than twenty-five years, Hillocks and his associates and students at the University of Chicago conducted research on narrative and descriptive writing. In 1982, Steve Willie looked at the question of what factors had a high correlation with impressionistic holistic ratings of descriptive and narrative writing. In thinking about the question of what has the highest correlation with impressionistic holistic ratings of narrative writing, one might think that it is organization or some surface feature of writing such as sentence structure, etc. However, much to the surprise of many, Willie found that specific, concrete, sensory detail had the highest correlation with holistic ratings of narrative writing. Furthermore, he found that specific, concrete, sensory detail accounted for an astounding 60 percent of variation in the holistic scores.

The 60 percent figure is astonishing because what this clearly indicates for instruction is that instead of focusing on formal features of writing such as the five-paragraph essay or paragraphing, we should be spending much of our time teaching students to use specific, concrete, sensory detail in their writing. If we do, we should be able to have a significant

impact on the quality of student writing in terms of descriptive and narrative writing.

If our students are not using much detail in their writing, then one approach to achieving this goal is to use a series of activities that engage students in learning to use specific, concrete, sensory detail in their writing.

The Structured Process Approach to Teaching Writing:

The approach to teaching writing that I am going to discuss is described by Hillocks (*Narrative Writing*, *Observing Writing*, and *Teaching Writing*) and his students, and Applebee has termed it the "structured process approach." This approach has the following key features:

> Elaboration: Emphasize teaching students to elaborate through a reasoned response to each writing situation. This is the one component of students' writing that as Willie pointed out will likely have the biggest influence on how their writing is rated for quality.
>
> Gateway Activities: The introduction of *gateway* activities helps students to access relevant information needed for elaboration and to engage in the thinking processes that transfer to their writing. The work with problems, data sets, models, and modeling that *precedes* composing is essential in preparing learners for composing processes.
>
> Procedural Knowledge: Teach students how to organize their writing and elaborate by focusing on procedural knowledge; that is, engage students in context-specific thinking and composing processes.
>
> Interaction: To teach this procedural knowledge, rely on frequent, purposeful peer interaction. Classroom

> activities need to provide a dynamic situation so that students engage with each other in relevant processes: e.g., narrating, analyzing, explaining, arguing, and persuading.
>
> Problems: Teachers need to help students to recognize the problems that each writing occasion poses and to frame authentic problems as the purpose for the current writing.
>
> Reflection: Students need to take time for reflection or self-evaluation in order to promote the conscious awareness of the processes for composing. Without this metacognitive component in the composing process, there is little guarantee that learners can transfer strategies to new situations when the teacher is not available to structure the prewriting or to provide other support.

The sample activities below have been designed with these key features in mind. Typically, these activities would be a part of a larger unit of instruction that would focus on teaching students the strategies and skills involved in writing a personal experience narrative that would cover approximately eight to ten days of instruction.

Teaching Students to Observe Closely

This first activity is designed to accomplish a number of things. First, it is designed to point out to students the importance of careful observation and the need to pay attention to specific details. In addition, it is designed to interest or engage students in some of the strategies that they will be learning in this set of activities. Finally, it is designed to give them practice in selecting and using specific details to create a description of a person. In other words, this activity introduces some of the observational and thinking

strategies and rhetorical skills involved in narrative writing. It is a mystery puzzler, which one of my colleagues and I adapted from Lawrence Treat's *Clue Armchair Detective* (29, 56–57). I begin by passing out a sheet I have labeled "In the Act." The sheet contains a black-and-white drawing of four people in an antique store. There is a couple (a man and a woman) who are looking at some jewelry, a man standing to the left of the couple, and a shop worker who is showing the couple pieces of jewelry. Like many antique stores, there are objects and paintings everywhere. It is a very crowded store. I tell students that they have one minute to study the drawing. After one minute, I either collect the drawing or have students turn it over on their desks and direct them not to look at it until I tell them they can. Then, I pass out the next two sheets, "In the Act II" (Treat 56–57). These sheets contain a partial drawing of the scene depicted in "In the Act," but with the outline of the man to the left of the couple blanked out of the drawing. The directions on these sheets ask that students attempt to identify some very specific details about the man who is blanked out. I give students about five minutes to fill out the two sheets, which ask for everything from the man's age to whether or not he was "slightly" or "completely bald" to whether or not he had dirt on his shoes—if in fact he was wearing shoes and not boots.

Once students have completed their sheets, I lead a class discussion of their answers. What becomes clear as the discussion develops is that most students did not look very closely at the drawing. For example, the sheets ask students if the man was over or under six feet tall. In a typical class, students will be split on this issue with about half saying he was over six feet tall, claiming that he appeared taller than the man he was standing next to in the drawing, which suggests he was a fairly tall man. On the other hand, the other

half will say he was under six feet tall because he was shorter than the portrait that he was standing next to in the drawing, and this suggests he was short because paintings are usually hung at about eye level.

The class discussion of the drawing is interesting for other reasons as well. For example, it encourages active participation as students point to details that they remember, or think they remember, to support their responses to the questions. Inductively, the activity underscores the need to observe closely, a very important thinking skill in descriptive and narrative writing, and it underscores the need for specific descriptive details. Here is an example of an exchange that took place in one tenth grade class of "struggling" students in a large, suburban high school in the Midwest. The school was tracked with three ability levels; this class of students was labeled "below average" and contained a large number of second-language students with limited English proficiency, a number of students from minority groups, and a small number of students with learning disorders and behavior problems. This exchange began with the teacher asking for a show of hands of how many thought the man was under forty years of age, how many thought he was between forty and sixty years of age, and how many thought he was over sixty years old. The vote on the age issue indicated that the class was split about equally, so the teacher asked for someone who thought he was under forty to explain how they know that.

> Student 1: "I thought he was under forty because he had like a mustache and a beard and pretty long hair and not many old people have long hair and a mustache and beard."
>
> Student 2: "He didn't have a beard or long hair. I think maybe you are thinking of the man in painting on the

> wall. But the guy standing next to the couple was like a middle-aged man. He had this thin mustache and he had like slicked-down hair like a businessman or something. He was between forty and sixty."
>
> Student 3: "I think you both are wrong. I thought he was like an older guy. He was partially bald on top of his head and he had real thick eyebrows like some old people I have seen have."
>
> Student 4: "Yeah, and I thought he had like this age line on his face that came down from his nose and went down his cheek. This is definitely an older guy."

This exchange continued in a similar manner for a few minutes longer. This brief example illustrates how the activity engages students in practicing the skills and thinking strategies involved in descriptive writing. For example, the students have an idea about the man's age based on details that they have observed, or think they have observed, and their reasoning as to how those details support their views on the man's age. Student 2 points out that Student 1 may be confusing the man in the painting on the wall with the man standing next to the couple (which he was) and he points to details that he thinks he remembers that suggest that the man is middle-aged. Student 3 counters by pointing to details she thinks she remembers from the drawing to support her view that the man was over sixty, and Student 4 adds an additional detail to support the idea that the man is over sixty. Three of the four students point to their own observations of people in the real world to support their interpretations of the man's age. Students are actively engaged and practicing the skills involved in descriptive and narrative writing, and the students are inquiring into a complex problem. As they draw on their own experiences and observations, they are making connections to the real world.

After we have discussed all of their answers—or if they just can't wait to look back at the original drawing—we look at the original drawing of the scene again to see how well they did. A few students have usually done pretty well at observing and noting details, but most of them usually have not done very well. At this point, I refer to what they have done in the activity as being able to observe closely and pick out specific details. I connect what they have done to the real world by pointing out that what they did is exactly what police investigators must do or what citizens might be asked to do if they witness a crime.

As a follow-up writing activity to give students practice in what they have learned, I have them write a description of the man focusing on the specific details they have marked on their "In the Act II" sheets. In fact, I collect their "In the Act" drawings and ask them to write their description without the benefit of the drawing of the man. This follow-up writing gives students practice using the skills and strategies involved in descriptive and narrative writing: close observation, translating their observations in to written description, and using specific details in writing. In addition, this activity is effective because it captures students' interest and attention, and it makes them aware of the need to have specific details. Also, the "In the Act II" sheets with questions and the class discussion provide scaffolding to help students see the importance of close observation and identify key specific details, and they increase the amount of student participation in class. Finally, the activity is effective because students are orally practicing the skills they are going to use in writing and doing it in a situation in which they must contend with the demands of an audience of their peers.

In teaching students how to write narration and description, I have found that it is most effective to include an

activity such as this one as the first activity in a sequence of similar ones, so that students can practice and internalize the procedures and strategies involved in effective narrative and descriptive writing. As a result, they can then use the procedures and strategies independently when they have to create a narrative or descriptive composition on their own (Johannessen "Helping" and *Teaching Writing*, Johannessen and Kahn).

Teaching Students to Describe a Variety of Sensory and Other Details: Smells Activity

In teaching students to observe closely and include more specific details in their writing, I use a series of activities. Here is one that I use to get students to observe smell details and describe these details with more precision in their writing. I use scratch-n'-sniff sheets. If you haven't seen these wonderful little items, they come in packs of five to fifteen sheets and cost anywhere from $2.00 to $6.00. Each sheet has a set of one particular smell such as grape, motor oil, strawberry, peanut butter, pizza, mint, or old shoes. The idea is that when someone scratches the surface off of one of these circles, the odor of that smell comes through very strong. This activity requires that the teacher purchase some of these scratch-n'-sniff sheets, which are available in teacher stores and many drug stores.

I begin by putting students in small groups of three to five or sometimes in pairs. Then, I pass out the "Smells" activity sheet (see Figure 1). Once each group or pair has an activity sheet, I go around the room and give each group or pair a different smell. Then, I briefly go over the directions. Note that the first question asks them to identify the smell. Fortunately, the makers of these scratch-n'-sniff things like to be cute. Often, the little picture on the circle that is designed

to suggest what the smell is can be very misleading. This is good because it requires students to focus in on observing the smell closely.

I usually give students ten to fifteen minutes to complete the activity sheet, and then I go over their answers. I begin by asking students to read the sentence they wrote for number 5. Of course, I comment on any effective details and figurative language they have used. Once all sentences have been read, I ask for volunteers to read the comparisons they made in number 4. Once again, I reinforce effective comparisons. Finally, I discuss their answers to questions number 2 and number 3. Here students had to use synesthasia (using one sense to describe another) to describe their smells. The reason why this is in this activity is that unfortunately there are not many words in the English language for students to describe smells. Once again, I reinforce particularly effective description.

Usually, I put students back into groups or pairs (or sometimes on their own) and give them a second and different scratch-n'-sniff (and activity sheet) to work on. This step reinforces the skills students have been introduced to the first time through. As a follow-up writing activity, I would suggest having students write a description of a restaurant or the cafeteria or some other place where smell is important. In this activity, students have learned to "closely observe" smells and various ways to describe smell and even how to use figurative language to describe smells. Notice also that I had students work with other students, and, then, I led a class discussion of what they came up with. In this way, there are high levels of student interaction, and they hear how others handled their descriptions. In the class discussion, I reinforce effective sensory description and figurative language. Again, they are doing all of this in the prewriting stage of the composing process.

The Results of Instruction

Of course, the real issue is: do students learn to write better with this type of instruction? I, along with student teachers from the English education program at my university, have achieved some impressive results using this approach with middle and high school students, results that confirm previous research conducted by Hillocks (*Narrative Writing* and *Teaching Writing*) on this approach. Student writing is significantly improved. Most students write with much greater specificity than they did prior to instruction, and they are much more engaged in the classroom. In other words, they feel the success they have achieved. The following is a typical example from a seventh grade "remedial" language arts class in a middle school in the inner city of a large Midwestern city. The school, which tracked students into three ability levels, had a diverse population with a high percentage of African American students.

Students in the class were given parallel pre- and post-test writing tasks. The assignment asked students to write about a personal experience that had an impact on them, and they were given a class period to complete their narratives without help from the teacher. The following student chose to write about the same experience for her pre- and post-test. The post-test was given after several days of instruction and included activities suck as the one I discussed above. I have not corrected either composition for spelling or other errors.

Narrative Writing Assignment

Pretest

> One day my girlfriend, Swaney and me were walking on a highway, when this car came by and tried to hit us, but Swaney saw the car coming and

she screamed and pulled me out of the way. Then the car turned around and started chasing us and both of us started running and we jumped over the guide rail and rolled down the hill. We ran through a tunnel and at the other end the man was standing there waiting for us so we turned around and ran the other way. We saw a man driving a car that we knew and he took us to the police station and they we after the man and captured him. Later we found out that he was an escaped convict from a mental prison.

After that I was so scared I couldn't sleep for a few nights and I had bad nightmares. Now I'm real scared of the same spot where that happened and I'll never go back there again.

Post-test

Me and Nancy were walking down a highway one night. It was dark and dreary and the sky was filled with dark clouds floating all around the sky. When all of the sudden this car came speeding by us like a bolt of lightning and then it stopped and backed up. Right then I knew it was heading straight for us. My heart was bounding with fright, my knees shaking nervously, I felt like crying or screaming but I was frozen.

We started running, but the car was still following us. Then the car stopped and the man got out, he was a tall, skinny man with big dark sunglasses. I didn't have to turn around to see if he was still there. I could hear the heals clicking along the sidewalk and his breathing getting heavier as he got closer.

We ran faster and faster. I could feel my muscles breaking from exhaustion and the pain in my legs, like I had a thousand pins and needles in my body. Finally

> we ran up to a house and the people let us in and called the police. The police caught the guy. The guy was one dope and he was so crazy he kept saying he wanted to kill us because we deserved it.
>
> From then on, no more highways at night for me.
>
> Not only is the post-test longer than the pre-test, but comparing the content of the two papers reveals a much-improved use of specific sensory details to describe the experience. What is most impressive is the effective use of figurative language to convey meaning. In fact, some of the details and images are quite striking such as when she describes the strange man's "heals clicking along the sidewalk and his breathing getting heavier as he got closer." These sensory details vividly describe her fear and help to build suspense in the narrative.

Teaching for Independence

I have only been able to describe two activities out of the approximate ten activities I use with students. I have activities that focus on getting students to use many specific details, activities for each of the five senses, some that combine the senses, one for figurative language, one for writing dialogue, some for how to describe bodily sensations, one for brainstorming ideas for writing a personal-experience narrative, one or two for selecting and organizing details for effect or impact, and or two for drafting or how to improve on drafts of a personal experience essay. One important point, if we really want students to master the skills and strategies involved in producing any kind of writing, we need to spend time on it. Just doing one or two activities is probably not going to be enough for most students. The idea is to give

students opportunities to learn and practice skills and strategies that are important to the type of writing we want them to learn in a classroom environment that encourages student interaction and active learning and follows the principles of a structured process approach to teaching writing that I have outlined here.

Ultimately, the goal of these kinds of activities is for students to be able to use thinking strategies on their own when they do not have a teacher around to assist them such as when they are asked to write a narrative for an assessment task. As the sample pre- and post-test narratives illustrate, instruction that uses this approach encourages students to move toward independence from the teacher, materials, and instruction. In other words, the purpose of having students engage in activities like these when they write is that they internalize the kinds of questions that good writers ask when they write. Problem-based activities like these teach students how to tackle complex writing tasks on their own. In a very real sense, students are learning skills and strategies they need to become successful writers.

What Is That Smell I Feel?

Name(s) _____, _____, _____

1. Identify the substance that you smell:_____
_____

2. How does the smell feel? Is it smooth, abrasive, rough? Give at least three words.

_____
_____
_____

3. How does the smell move? Does it creep, surround, push, etc.?

_____

_____

4. Compare the smell to something else that will help describe it.

The smell is like _____

_____

5. Combine the best details you have written into a sentence that *identifies* the substance and *describes* its smell. Imagine that you have just entered a place and noticed this smell.

Example: As I opened the door, the rasping stink of the ammonia kicked me in the face.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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FROM ARISTOTLE TO *JUDGE JUDY*: SHAPING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF RHETORIC IN A LEGAL-WRITING COURSE

MARCEA K. SEIBLE

> *Whereas, party of the first part, hereinafter "Mary," heretofore had an allegedly little party of the second part, accordingly "lamb," its fleece thereunto appertaining as white as snow; wherein, pursuant to everywhere thereof that said party of the first part would endeavor to exit, the aforementioned lamb,* ***arguendo****, was virtually sure forthwith to, at this point in time, go.*
>
> —Mother Goose, J.D.

On the first day of teaching my legal-writing course, I open with this quote as cited at the beginning of Lynn Ludlow's article "Legalese." I believe it nicely introduces and encapsulates for students what we are about to study in the class. No, the class is not just about understanding legal

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jargon (better known as "legalese"); it is about understanding why writing such as this exists, who is it meant for, and what purpose it serves in the legal profession. In short, it is a course about understanding the rhetoric of legal writing. In this article, I narrate my own experiences as a first-time teacher of legal writing in order to share how English teachers, who may also have little preparation in legal studies, can successfully teach a beginning course in legal writing.

Course Preparation

I was first asked to teach a course in legal writing while teaching as a PhD student in the English department at Illinois State University. Until that moment, I had taught writing at the college level for several years, including developmental writing, composition, business writing, and technical writing. Legal writing, however, had not been on my teaching radar, and I was not entirely sure how I was going to teach it. The university course description provided little guidance: "A course in advanced writing for prelaw students" (*Illinois State University* 179). Given my lack of experience writing for or studying about the legal profession, I knew I needed some guidance if I was going to successfully teach this course.

Because the catalog description "warned" me that prelaw students were going to arrive in my class, I feared that my lack of legal knowledge would be exposed. Nightmares of prelaw students questioning me on case law and legal terminology filled my days and nights before the start of the semester. Frantically, I researched all I could about teaching legal writing. My efforts seemed futile, however, as I soon discovered that not much has been published recently on teaching a legal-writing course, at least not from the perspective of an English teacher. Courses in legal writing are prevalent in law programs across the country, and, as a result, several

legal scholars have written about ways to teach the course to enhance the writing skills of legal professionals. In these articles, the authors regularly expound on the ineptness of today's legal writing and the need for today's lawyers and law students to produce better-written prose. Numerous authors have written about the need for clear and effective writing, and in their articles, they share lists of tips about how to improve writing. Unfortunately for me, as a result of scanning through such articles, I came up with few resources that would help me structure a semester-long course in legal writing as offered through a university English department.

My research led me to one article by Russell Rutter, titled "Resources for Teaching Legal Writing," and three articles in *College Composition and Communication*, which offered pedagogical advice for an English teacher faced with the new and daunting task of teaching a beginning course in legal writing. While these articles brought me closer to my goal of finding pedagogical resources, I found them fairly inadequate for my situation given that the articles from *College Composition and Communication* were dated 1976, 1978, and 1980, and Rutter's article describing resources for teachers came from a book published in 1985.

Each article brought me some hope, however, in that each provided reassurance that an English teacher could indeed teach a course in legal writing; as John O. White and Norman Brand wrote in "Composition for the Pre-Professional: Focus on Legal Writing": "Actually, however, with a little help, a very useful legal-writing course can be prepared and taught by any instructor who understands and can teach the elements of general persuasive prose; if anyone can teach composition, he or she can also teach writing for a pre-professional" (41). White and Brand's philosophy, that anyone who can teach composition can teach legal writing, was based on

their belief that "success in law school depends very much on a student's language and writing abilities" (41). While I agreed with White and Brand's comments about the importance of persuasive prose and legal writing, I found their beliefs expressed in the article lacking in terms of understanding the complexities associated with teaching students about legal writing and the profession as a whole.

The other two articles I found in *College Composition and Communication*, though just as lacking in their helpfulness for designing a modern legal-writing course, did move away from White and Brand's emphasis on composition-style writing assignments and focused more on what it means to teach a course in legal writing. In "Rhetoric and Law: Designing a Program in Communication for Law Students," Dwight W. Stevenson shared a perspective more in-line with my own, in particular, the need to ask the important question: "'What are the real-life communication needs of law students?'" (30). Stevenson also shared what he believed are the "six of the most fundamental communication skills anyone in law must have" and then proceeded to offer classroom exercises designed to teach these (30). Stevenson's emphasis on rhetoric, persuasion, and teaching students how to adapt their writing to nonlawyers provided an interesting perspective on what to teach and why, but again, what was missing was information needed to make legal writing relevant to today's students.

In Terence Collins's article, I finally found an inspirational seed for designing my own course in legal writing. In response to the articles by White, Brand, and Stevenson, Collins shared his own perspective on teaching legal writing, claiming that the previous articles were only "partially helpful" (58). Though, like the others, in his article Collins shared assignments he designed for his legal writing course. Collins qualified his ideas by writing:

> I want to emphasize that I don't offer the sample assignments themselves as the solution to the problem of organizing a credible professional writing course for paralegal students. Rather, it is the method that I proffer as the model: honest consultation with students in and graduates of the program to discover what it is that students will need to know as writers that the teacher with no specific legal training can help them learn in a limited amount of time. (61)

It was here in Collins's statement that I found an idea for my own course, and I began envisioning how I could design a course that would meet the needs of today's students. Because the students in my class would be upper-level undergraduates, I knew they would have some experience with writing and understanding rhetoric. Thus I would not need to design a course in rhetoric, as White and Brand advocated, nor would I need a course grounded simply in practical writing exercises as advocated by legal scholars. Instead, I would need a course that focused on the rhetoric of legal writing and understanding the legal profession, including what it meant to write and act as a member of that profession. Taking Collins's statement to heart, I decided to be honest with my students by admitting my limitations with legal writing and frame the course as one of discovery, one where they could explore what it was that they needed to know about legal writing and the profession as a whole.

My Basic Course Philosophy: Make It Meaningful to Students

My basic philosophy for this course was to make legal writing meaningful to students. I believed that several students would enter the course with an interest in legal

writing and, perhaps, the legal profession, but I also knew that students would come from different departments and majors across the university, each with their own unique interests and career goals. As a result, I began with five basic objectives for the course that were meant to speak to a variety of needs and interests. As stated in my syllabus, students would:

> Understand stereotypes/personal perceptions of the legal profession and how these affect written and spoken communication.
>
> Analyze what it means to be a professional communicator by critiquing and rewriting professional and legal documents.
>
> Create professional documents that demonstrated their ethos as communicators and members of a profession.
>
> Question the importance of legalese and how it affects clarity in writing.
>
> Learn from practicing and non-practicing lawyers the importance of written communication in their jobs.

I tried to keep the course focused on writing, yet keep the topics broad enough to allow students to make connections between the course content and their professional goals. I tried to do this by interchanging the words "legal writing" and "professional writing" throughout the semester.

Once class began, my beliefs about students' interest in legal writing and the profession were confirmed. I learned that not all students who took my course in legal writing were planning to go to law school, though several expressed an interest in doing so. There were several students taking the course as an elective in their major, many of whom were English majors with an emphasis in writing. Thus I learned

that for the course to be meaningful to all students, I needed to leave room for them to make professional connections.

This proved to be an essential element of the course, allowing students to make their own connections between the course material and their personal and professional goals. To do this, I began with a narrative assignment in which I asked students to explore their own perceptions of legal writing and the legal profession. Our conversations about stereotypes and perceptions began on the first day of class when I shared the Ludlow quote, and we discussed the complexity of the language and the simplicity of the ideas contained within. I also brought in short clips from popular movies, such as *Legally Blonde*, as well as clips from television court drama shows like *Law & Order*. Beginning with what students knew and recognized about the legal profession provided a space for us to begin a conversation about our perceptions of legal writing and the legal profession. Eventually, conversations extended beyond images depicted in the media and into students' personal experiences with law enforcement officers, parking tickets, attorneys they knew, and so forth.

When I read students' first narrative papers, I was surprised to learn that they were just as intimidated by the course title and description as I had been when preparing to teach it. Their comments inspired me further to emphasize the inquiry-based nature of the class and that one of our goals was to make the class meaningful to each individual student. I explained to them that, while I had a general framework for the course and had certain things I wanted them to take away from it, they were also free to explore areas of interest to them.

Additional writing assignments asked students to focus on becoming effective professional communicators and focus on understanding the rhetoric of legal writing. The second major assignment asked them to engage with the

complexity of rhetorical situations. In particular, students selected a famous moment of persuasion from history (for example, President Reagan's speech following the 1986 Challenger explosion or Nancy Pelosi's acceptance speech when named as the Speaker of the House in 2007) and described the circumstances surrounding the writer's appeal. This assignment not only called upon students' knowledge of rhetorical conventions, but asked them to place them within a context, showing how writers understand the "whole picture" when communicating with an audience, something they, too, would need to understand when writing or engaging with others as professionals.

The remaining assignments brought students into close contact with rhetorical situations they may encounter as professionals. Assignment three asked students to assume the ethos of a legal professional and draft multiple documents in which they communicated with their clients and colleagues about a particular legal matter. For this, students could choose their specialization, their client, and their legal issue. I also asked them to create professional letterhead that represented their firm. The objectives for this assignment were numerous: students were learning how to analyze a professional rhetorical situation, learning to communicate effectively with two distinct audiences, learning when and when not to use legal jargon, and they were learning how to create ethos as professionals in the legal field. Unlike the assignments described by authors in *College Composition and Communication*, this assignment was less prescribed and more inclusive, calling upon students to make the assignment both interesting and meaningful to them. When I received students' documents, I was amazed at how they were able to blend creativity with professionalism and create some outstanding professional documents.

The fourth writing assignment asked students to focus on the problems associated with legal writing today. It had two parts; the first asked them to find and analyze the rhetorical situation of a legal document they believed could be improved, and the second part asked them to revise the legal document to improve it based on their analyses of the document's rhetorical situation and what they believed made it ineffective. For this assignment, students typically brought in documents such as their apartment leases or lengthy policies and permission disclaimers from the Internet. While the directions for the assignment sounded pretty straightforward, this proved to be very challenging for students. It required them to utilize their knowledge of audience, purpose, and format, items we had been discussing during their previous assignments, and focus on how they could improve a legal document that was, in their opinion, not adequate for the audience in some way. More importantly, this assignment raised interesting questions about the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of legal writing today and whether or not such writing really can be changed. Students left the assignment questioning whether the revisions they proposed were actually feasible.

The fifth writing assignment asked students to assume the identity of a law student and tackle a project that would be important to their future roles as law students should they decide to pursue that career. In short, students would practice briefing a law case and provide a written summary of that case. Their goal was to brief the case in such a way that, were they to be questioned on it in a hypothetical law school class, they would be able to prove knowledge of the facts and be able to analyze the results of the court's decision. For students considering entering law school, this was an ideal assignment; for students who had no desire to enter law school, it provided insight into another form of legal writing.

This assignment, too, proved challenging for the students as it required them to familiarize themselves with legal cases, which are often difficult to read and understand if one has little background in legal language. In order to acknowledge their lack of knowledge and to work with the students on this assignment, I asked them to brief one of the cases provided in our class textbook, *Clear and Effective Legal Writing* by Veda R. Charrow, Myra K. Erhardt, and Robert P. Charrow. This book not only provided a detailed explanation of what makes up a case brief, it also helped walk students through how to read a case and understand its components. Even with that information, the task of briefing a case was difficult, but, at the completion of the assignment, it was one that students liked because of its practicality and for the way it challenged them to work with text and language.

In addition to written assignments, I integrated group presentations and guest-speaker days into the curriculum. While conducting my own research to prepare for teaching the course, I discovered articles on several topics related to the legal profession in general. Using these, I decided to integrate group projects into the class, whereby students would select a special topic based on articles and present that topic to the class. This, I believed, would expand our knowledge of the profession beyond writing and introduce students to other aspects of the profession as well.

Guest speakers, however, proved to be one of the most interesting and valuable parts of the class, and something I, as a teacher, learned a great deal from. At the beginning of the semester, I had freely admitted to the students that I was not a scholar of legal studies. I also shared with them that I would bring in experts from the field who would be able to speak on certain topics related to writing and the profession. I managed to locate six professionals with law degrees to join

our class. I did my best to find lawyers who represented the diversity of the field, including those focusing on insurance, real estate, litigation, and school administration. I was even fortunate enough to have the university's community rights and responsibilities attorney join the class as well as a former lawyer who had left the field to return to college as a graduate student in English.

Bringing in guest speakers proved to be one of the most rewarding experiences for the class as a whole. Students were free to ask questions about issues pertaining to legal writing and communication, but they were also free to ask questions about the stereotypes associated with the profession, receiving answers to some of the questions they posed in their narrative essays. Students learned how different attorneys responded to similar questions in different ways, showing the range of perceptions among practicing professionals. More importantly, students were able to ask the guest speakers questions that were meaningful to them and receive answers that may or may not have impacted their future plans or decisions.

One of the most popular questions students asked the guest speakers was about the realities of law school. Questions ranged from "What is the work/reading load like?" to "How difficult is the bar exam?" One of the most popular topics was about teaching and learning in law school and how it differed from their undergraduate courses. During one of the student group presentations, the class read an article that covered the Socratic method of teaching in law school. I even brought in a clip from the movie *The Paper Chase* that discussed this as a method of teaching and illustrated how it may occur in a law school class. Having never heard of or seen this type of teaching before, students were overwhelmed by the notion that a teacher could just call on a student and drill them with questions about readings. Asking the guest

speakers if this was a reality in law school became a popular question and topic of conversation throughout the semester. Though exploring topics such as these may have seemed like they were pulling the class away from the topic of legal writing at hand, I believe they were an invaluable part of the students' education in the course and their ability to personalize the instruction.

At the end of the semester, I asked students to compile their five written assignments into a portfolio of their work for the course. Their goal was to revise any or all of the assignments to demonstrate how their learning progressed throughout the semester. I also asked them to write a reflective introduction to the portfolio in which they described their experiences in the course, noting in particular how it shaped their perceptions as writers and as professionals in their fields. This allowed students a chance to reflect on what they learned about legal and professional writing during the semester that would be useful to them. It also allowed me a chance to see how the course did or did not work for them, giving me greater insight into how I could revise it for future semesters.

Conclusion

As a teacher new to the pedagogy of legal writing, I learned that there are two things essential to teaching the course when one is unfamiliar with it: honesty and flexibility. From the beginning of the semester, I chose to be honest with my students and acknowledge my limitations in terms of legal writing and scholarship. By doing this, I was able to even out the knowledge base in the classroom; from that point on, I was not the source of knowledge, but instead a knowledge consultant, working with students to help them make legal and professional writing meaningful to them. Working

together, the students and I learned about the rhetoric of legal writing, we asked questions about the use of legalese, and we experimented with writing to new audiences in different forms. We learned to ask questions of professionals and to compare the answers we received with our own experiences and perceptions. As a teacher, I learned to be flexible and to welcome new topics and ideas into the class. By asking students to bring in their experiences and to share their goals for the future, I was able to help tailor the class to each student and help him or her make the course meaningful to his or her professional goals.

Scholars of teaching and learning agree that student learning occurs best when students are engaged in tasks that are meaningful to them. A course in legal writing may or may not speak to students' professional goals, and even if a career in the legal profession is not in students' immediate plans, such a course can still offer them a chance to see how writing is important to their professional lives. My advice to writing teachers who find themselves teaching a legal-writing course for the first time is simple: trust in yourself and your abilities as a writer and as a teacher of writing. Yes, you can teach this class even if you do not have a law degree or experience working as a legal writer. You can introduce topics and writing tasks that engage students in professional writing and that ask them to question what it means to do the work of "legal writing." Most of all, you can let the needs and interests of the students direct the course; chances are that you will learn just as much as they will and have just as rewarding a time.

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DICTION AND SYNTAX FOR THE MASSES: INTRODUCING LANGUAGE-ANALYSIS SKILLS TO ALL ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

DOUG LILLYDAHL AND JACQUIE CULLEN

The Value of Language Analysis

Mark Twain once said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." Our goal is to introduce students to skills that allow them to understand and appreciate what Twain is declaring in this quote. All students can benefit from developing close reading skills such as diction and syntax analysis. Although these skills are often addressed in AP courses, students of all levels can develop and utilize some level of these skills that will enhance their reading and writing abilities.

Teachers may be hesitant to implement these skills in their classes for a number of reasons: they fear that students won't get it or won't need it, and teachers may not feel like

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they have time for it or know how to teach it. But, by shifting small amounts of focus and time, all students can benefit from acquiring these skills. For example, developing these skills will heighten the students' level of reading ability, raise their awareness of how communicators manipulate them, create an understanding of the author's purpose, lead students to more sophisticated consideration of audience and purpose in their own writing, allow for a variety in classroom instruction, and encourage higher level thinking and analytical skills (which keep the door open to their possible, eventual enrollment in AP and other college level courses).

Four key terms for teachers to be familiar with before starting this approach to teaching include:

- Diction: Word choice
- Syntax: Sentence structure
- Tone: Speaker's attitude toward the subject
- Mood: Emotional atmosphere

Beginning with Diction Awareness

The easiest and best place to start is with a well-chosen paragraph from literature that is part of the course being taught. For example, read an opening paragraph, climactic paragraph, or particularly descriptive passage in class literature and have the students circle or list words that create or influence the "feeling of the passage." One appropriate passage we use comes from the opening paragraph of "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst:

> It was in the clove of seasons, summer was dead but autumn had not yet been born, that the ibis lit in the bleeding tree. The flower garden was stained with rotting brown magnolia petals and the ironweeds grew rank amid the purple phlox. The five o'clocks by the

> chimney still marked time, but the oriole nest in the elm was untenanted and rocked back and forth like an empty cradle. The last graveyard flowers were blooming, and their smell drifted across the cotton field and through every room of our house, speaking softly the names of our dead. (315)

After reading the paragraph, ask students how the author makes the passage "feel." Students may offer words such as "gloomy" or "dark." It may be necessary to redirect students who offer imprecise or cliché words such as "dead" or "sad" as their answers. Then ask students to explain their mood word by using the influential words listed from or circled in the passage. This discussion will often lead to a discussion of author intent and foreshadowing: two concepts that are often teaching targets but glossed over too quickly. One way to assist students in developing precise, thoughtful discussion is to follow up with a vocabulary list of common mood or tone words. Such a list may be divided into scaffolding categories like negative (critical, melancholy, condescending), neutral (ambivalent, indifferent, urgent), and positive (whimsical, inspirational, reverent) tone words. A list such as this can be revisited throughout the course and therefore become a uniquely meaningful vocabulary tool. Finally, as students begin to look at diction, guided practice will push them to develop an awareness of how connotation determines the author's final word choice.

Syntax as a Second Step

After students have developed confidence working with diction, mood, and tone, they are ready to move onto syntax. In order to do this, it may help them to have a working knowledge of different types of sentence structures; however, the starting point can simply be looking at sentence length and

identifying short sentences and long sentences. Again, it is appropriate to select a passage from the literature that is already part of the course. For example, the following passage appears in chapter 10 of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

> In a fog, Jem and I watched our father take the gun and walk out into the middle of the street. He walked quickly, but I thought he moved like an underwater swimmer; time had slowed to a nauseating crawl....
>
> Atticus pushed his glasses to his forehead; they slipped down and he dropped them in the street. In the silence, I heard them crack. Atticus rubbed his eyes and chin; we saw him blink hard.…
>
> With movements so swift they seemed simultaneous, Atticus's hand yanked a ball-tipped lever as he brought the gun to his shoulder.
>
> The rifle cracked. Tim Johnson leaped, flopped over, and crumpled on the sidewalk in a brown-and-white heap. He didn't know what hit him. (315)

Following a similar approach to working with diction, use an overhead copy of the passage to have students underline the sentences that create "intensity" in the scene. Students may point out that action comes fast in longer sentences; single sentence paragraphs make the ideas stand out; or, short sentences, especially following long ones, hold great impact. For further practice in early stages of diction and syntax analysis, children's literature fits the bill. *The Little Engine That Could* offers numerous manipulations of syntax to create easy-to-recognize moods for practice.

Practice and Further Implementation

Society is becoming more visual, and students live a multimedia world. Visual literacy then helps students learn

to determine tone when they "read" the context clues of pictures. The goal is for them to transfer this skill to analyzing tone in literature. One activity idea is to present students with pictures via the overhead and have them identify aspects of the picture that convey the tone. For further awareness, individuals can be assigned tone words and have to find a picture that conveys the tone or develop a collage of pictures related to the same tone word. Some teachers may also want to focus one week on a particular tone word and have a tone wall of pictures so that students can visualize what the connotation of the tone word is.

Three final suggestions for the tone-aware classroom focus further on using preexisting classroom literature: When examining a key passage, students can filter out key words and phrases and use them to create a "poem on the page." Before they put together their poem, the students should set a mood target to guide their word selection, for example, angry. Then as they reconstitute the poem, their knowledge of syntax should guide their word choice. Teachers can weave a requirement for finding an emotional passage into regular annotation or reading log assignments. Finally, as syntax and diction become a more familiar part of the classroom, a few quiz and test questions about language analysis are a natural outgrowth.

These activities and teaching ideas are mere starting points to developing language analysis with students. Without undue prep time, we feel all classrooms can use appropriate literature that is part of the existing curriculum to modify instruction so that students walk out armed with new ways to appreciate and partake in the writer's craft.

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BEYOND THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY: TEACHING GENRE AWARENESS

DONNA BINNS

Due to its many limitations, the five-paragraph essay does not serve students well in most college writing situations. Nevertheless, students usually learn how to write a five-paragraph essay in middle or high school. In my writing courses at Eastern Illinois University, I encounter some students who have difficulty moving beyond the constraints of the five-paragraph essay as they make the transition from high school to college. Consequently, they struggle to compose papers that reflect complex idea development and substantial use of supporting evidence or analysis. These students try to fit the five-paragraph structure onto any assigned genre regardless of the audience, length, or assignment guidelines. As they make the transition to college and, later, to workplace writing, an understanding of varying generic expectations would help them prepare for the variety of writing situations they will

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face. However, teachers cannot anticipate every genre that their students will write in the future. Teaching them genre awareness will better enable our students to adapt to various writing demands in various contexts. In doing so, high school teachers can draw upon familiar genres, especially the five-paragraph essay. Therefore, students' experiences with the genre of the five-paragraph essay can serve as a stepping stone to increased genre awareness. In addition, they will gain a better understanding of the limitations of the five-paragraph essay that will encourage them to make better rhetorical decisions in future writing situations.

The Five-Paragraph Essay

In *Writing Analytically*, a textbook used at Eastern Illinois University and designed for first-year college writing courses, David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen explain the limitations of the five-paragraph essay: "Five-paragraph form is a procrustean form that most students learn in high school. Although it has the advantage of providing a mechanical format that will give virtually any subject the appearance of order, it usually lops off a writer's ideas before they have a chance to form or stretches a single idea to the breaking point" (145). As they examine reasons for this lack of idea development in five-paragraph essays, they list aspects such as vague thesis statements that the writer fails to evolve throughout the paper, conclusions that merely repeat introductions, and uses of evidence that support the main idea without evolving or testing it (145–47). Although their critique points out several aspects of the five-paragraph essay that stifle idea development for their college writers, their view of the five-paragraph essay as a form rather than a genre with its own audience, purposes, and situations leads them to dismiss the five-paragraph essay with little consideration for why the genre exists.

Another college-level writing textbook, *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* by Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi, examines the five-paragraph essay more as a genre, rather than a form that students learn prior to college. As a result, they explain why students learn to write five-paragraph essays, but they still contend that this genre does not suit most college writing assignments. The genre approach thus specifies the audience for five-paragraph themes (teachers) and speculates about their reasons for assigning five-paragraph essays (the need to teach writing balanced by the time constraints of high school teaching situations). Their brief examination of the genre also suggests why the five-paragraph essay, despite its limitations, seems to be associated with some writing assessments, given that it allows both quick composing in timed writing situations and quick reading by evaluators facing large numbers of essays to rate.

Still, expediency is not necessarily the only reason why some teachers defend their choice to teach the five-paragraph essay. In "Speaking My Mind: Defending the Five-Paragraph Essay," Byung-In Seo acknowledges the five-paragraph essay's deficiencies, but she also states, "However, with remedial students who have learning disabilities or attention deficit issues, using a formula is vital. It gives students an organizational tool that can be applied to reading and writing most expository texts" (16). For some students, the five-paragraph essay provides a comfortable means of dealing with the demands of writing assessments, particularly if their time is limited. Kerri Smith also advocates teaching the five-paragraph essay with "Speaking My Mind: In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay." She suggests, "teaching it as a building block to other, more sophisticated forms" though she also recognizes potential drawbacks if teachers do not take her approach: "Some students are taught that the five-

paragraph essay is an inviolable form, an unstormable castle that, as first-year college students, they feel they must die defending" (17). As Smith suggests, perhaps the danger lies in teaching the five-paragraph essay as a rigid cure-all for any writing situation rather than as an educational genre that teachers use to present some of the basics of writing essays in middle and high school. Therefore, it is important not only that teachers understand that the five-paragraph essay works best as part of a scaffolding approach to teaching writing, but also that they convey that purpose to their students. In doing so, teachers can help students avoid using the five-paragraph essay in situations that do not call for it.

Lesley Roessing describes her transition from five-paragraph essay guru to full-fledged teacher of writing in her *English Journal* article "Toppling the Idol." She observes, "Whereas I once thought the omnipotent deity 5¶ Essay ruled the world of exposition, I now trust students to inform and persuade in their own ways, in their own voices" (46). Roessing's approach now involves introducing students to writing a variety of genres through modeling and using commercials to teach the importance of purpose and audience (42–44). An approach that provides students with the opportunity to write different genres for a variety of audiences and purposes better prepares them to adapt to various writing demands. Of course, NCTE and Illinois State Standards both encourage such variety, and, in my experience, Illinois teachers seek to provide such variety for their students.

Does that mean abandoning the five-paragraph essay completely though? The role of the five-paragraph essay in instruction may depend largely upon the teachers' goals, their students' needs, and their concerns about the limitations of the five-paragraph genre. Regardless of the emphasis or lack of emphasis on the five-paragraph essay in a given English

classroom, high school students do need to learn that very few situations in college or workplace writing suit this educational genre.

Genre Awareness

In order to help students make better decisions as writers, teachers should emphasize learning genre awareness as well as learning to write a variety of genres. In *Writing Genres*, Amy Devitt distinguishes genre awareness from mere "genre acquisition": "The goals of teaching genre awareness are for students to understand the intricate connections between contexts and forms, to perceive potential ideological effects of genres, and to discern both constraints and choices that genres make possible. Such genre awareness might also be applied to reading as well as writing" (198). Teaching genre awareness involves more than simply having students read and write different genres. It involves getting students to think about the genres they read and write. Why do we need this genre? What distinguishes it from other genres? What purposes does it serve and in what context? Who reads it? Who writes it? These are just a few questions that students should learn to consider as they encounter different genres in their educational careers.

Teachers cannot anticipate every genre that students will write in their lives beyond the English classroom, but teachers can introduce students to strategies for analyzing generic expectations and adapting their writing to unfamiliar genres. Devitt explains, "When people write, they draw on genres they know, their own context of genres, to help construct their rhetorical action. If they encounter a situation new to them, it is the genres they have acquired in the past that they can use to shape their new action" (203). Students who have predominately learned and practiced the five-paragraph essay

lack the variety of genres they need to call upon as they face different writing situations. When they enter college writing classes, they try to force the familiar five-paragraph essay onto any essay that they write, regardless of whether or not that genre is a good choice for the context. Fortunately, most students have other genres to call upon from past writing experiences. They need to know how to use those experiences effectively, though.

The five-paragraph essay can serve a role in teaching genre awareness because students need to make informed choices as they build upon those past genres. Because the five-paragraph essay is such a familiar genre for students, it provides an opportunity for teachers to introduce students to genre considerations. One way to start would be a series of questions such as the following:

1. What characteristics do five-paragraph essays share?
2. Who reads five-paragraph essays? Why?
3. Who writes five-paragraph essays? Why?
4. Under what circumstances do people usually write five-paragraph essays?
5. List a few writing-related circumstances when a five-paragraph essay might *not* work well.
6. What do you like about five-paragraph essays?
7. What do you dislike about five-paragraph essays?

Such questions ask students to consider the reasons why people read and write this genre, the circumstances under which it works well or does not work well, and the strengths and weaknesses of the genre. These questions could also be modified to examinations of other familiar genres, including genres found in popular culture.

Teachers can have students write informal reflections about experiences with writing the five-paragraph essay. Then, the students can compare it to other genres they have written. Again, such activities could work for other genres as well, including informal, writing-to-learn genres such as freewrites, semantic maps, and journal entries. Furthermore, teachers can ask students to create a list of genres that they have learned to read and write. Students can select their favorites and explore why they feel that they have worked well for them and in what circumstances they used them. Then, students can compare that genre to a few of the others they listed, and they can analyze why their favorite genre might not work as well in some other circumstances that better suited other genres. They could also analyze how they have drawn upon familiar genres when faced with unfamiliar writing situations. Such reflections may take the form of informal journal entries or a more formal genre analysis paper. The key concept here is getting students to think about the genres that they have encountered; the features that distinguish them from other genres; the circumstances under which the genres are created and read; and the reasons why people create and read them. Teachers may also have students read what other people have written about the genre. In the case of the five-paragraph essay, examples from a few of the texts and articles mentioned here could be useful in examining the strengths and weaknesses of this genre.

When introducing students to new genres, teachers may need to provide more explicit instruction regarding characteristics of that genre because it is unfamiliar to students. Nevertheless, teachers can still provide models of the new genre for students to examine in groups or individually. Students can compare the samples and list characteristics that the examples share. Teachers may supplement student

lists as needed, of course, but providing students with the opportunity to search for characteristics teaches them how to determine such traits in the future. After students practice writing the genre, teachers can assign informal reflections that ask students to discuss how they used (and/or chose not to use) their past experiences with writing to address the purpose and audience of the new genre. Such activities help students learn genre awareness and move beyond the five-paragraph essay.

As a commonly used educational genre, the five-paragraph essay may serve not only as a means of teaching the basics of writing essays, but also as a means of introducing students to genre awareness. As students consider their experiences with the genre, they learn to analyze generic characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. They also explore the importance of generic expectations when writing for various audiences. As a result, they can also recognize that no genre, including the five-paragraph essay, best addresses every writing situation. They begin to examine how to make good decisions when drawing upon their past writing experiences as they encounter new ones. In doing so, they learn to make informed rhetorical choices as they write and avoid the pitfalls of forcing a limited genre such as the five-paragraph essay onto every writing situation. Instead, they can transfer what they have learned from past writing experiences as they learn to write new genres successfully.

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