

guage and content; discussions must tease out the implications of the rhetoric employed by the writer and of the information presented or avoided. In order for a student to establish an engagement with a particular text, whether it be poetry, fiction, or scientific writing, he or she must be able to judge its rhetorical presentation and to analyze its meaning and style in simple and direct prose. The ability to respond to and to write about a text is not innate, but it can be developed through offering classroom instruction in rhetorical modes and encouraging a student to understand the writing process. Teaching students to write will teach them to think about the content and format of all courses they take in college.

TABLE I
ANXIETY OF FRESHMAN WRITERS

During the first week of the 1986 fall semester, one hundred freshmen at Albany College of Pharmacy were asked if they liked to write:

- 39% of the students responding answered affirmatively
- 30% offered mixed responses (I do, but I don't write well.)
- 32% responded negatively (I don't because it's hard for me.)

TABLE II
EVALUATION OF WRITING CENTER
BY STUDENTS TUTORED

The following questions were asked of all students who attended tutorial sessions in the Writing Center in the 1987 fall semester:

- Has instruction received in the writing center helped you fulfill the requirements of your course?
 - 83% responded affirmatively
 - 17% responded negatively
- Do you believe that writing center instruction should be required for certain students?
 - 67% responded affirmatively
 - 33% responded negatively
- Do you anticipate visiting the writing center in the future?
 - 100% responded affirmatively

TABLE III
EVALUATION OF WRITING AND WRITING CENTER
BY ALL FRESHMEN

The following responses were provided by students who participated in the humanities preceptorial in the 1986 and 1987 fall semesters.⁷

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|
| I think we have written | (1986) | (1987) |
| Too much | 15% | 6% |
| Just enough | 80% | 83% |
| Too little | 1% | 6% |
| I used the writing center | (1986) | (1987) |
| Never | 35% | 40% |
| Once | 19% | 28% |
| 2-3 times | 21% | 13% |
| 4-5 times | 15% | 10% |
| 6 or more times | 6% | 1% |

Students were also asked to explain why they did or did not visit the writing center. Most who had not used the writing center wrote that they did not have enough time to attend tutorial sessions and write their papers.

NOTES

¹Marshall Gregory uses this phrase in "Writing, Literacy, and the Liberal Arts."

²For a critique of Secretary Bennett's assumption that literature can be encompassed by Matthew Arnold's definition of culture, see Poirier 26-28.

³For an example of the reduction of the debate to a copy of the Stanford reading list, see Christopher Hitchens's annotation of the syllabus in *Harper's* June 1988, 54-55.

⁴At Columbia and Chicago, students are able to take expository writing courses. At St. John's where there are fewer students in each class writing instruction is offered on an individual basis. Other interdisciplinary programs, like that of Boston University's School of General Studies, integrate extensive formal and informal writing assignments into individual courses.

⁵The 1987-88 Report of the Academic Affairs Committee, *American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy*.

⁶All quotations from Professor Wicke's report are taken from her letter of October 10, 1985, to Joseph M. Lapetina, dean of academic affairs at the college.

⁷Jeffrey Soleau, the liberal arts faculty member who coordinated the humanities seminars, compiled these statistics.

BRIDGING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WRITING

John Lofty
University of Colorado at Denver

Even when our students are admitted to an introductory-level course on the basis of a college writing assessment, they display a wide range of backgrounds, attitudes and abilities. In order to plan a writing course that is sensitive to such differences in preparation among our students, we need to know the diversity of their experiences with writing. Because our students often come from different schools in different states, the college instructor, unlike the high-school teacher, cannot consult directly with previous teachers to predict her students' needs. Given this diversity, we do well to consider Maxine Hairston's advice for teachers — to follow the rhetorician's practice and to analyse our student audience (1986).

I know of few approaches for getting to know my students so effective as a series of conversations conducted in the mini-conference style such as Atwell (1987) describes or in the more extended meetings that Murray (1979) and Carnicelli (1980) practice. However, I often find that several valuable weeks of our single-term course have passed before I can know individual students in this way. Many college composition teachers attempt to deal with this problem by giving a first essay on topics such as "My strengths and weaknesses as a writer," "Why I like/dislike writing" or "The best/worst thing I ever wrote."

These topic papers begin to profile the students' current attitudes toward writing. However, such assignments seldom lead students to describe critically the curriculum in writing¹ that they have experienced or to reflect thoughtfully on what it has meant to them. To prepare students for college writing, we must involve them in answering Freedman's question: "At the secondary level, how do the students of these teachers understand the instruction they are receiving?" (1987, 35)

To learn as much as I can about my students at the beginning of term, I ask them to describe their experiences as writers in the form of a reflective essay. Their responses provide me with a writ-

ing sample, but more importantly they give me preliminary information about how my students conceptualize the task of writing, an understanding necessary for our work together.

This first essay provides students with an opportunity to review and evaluate their individual writing experience and to make explicit what they see as the main features of their instruction. Students need to reflect on this when they begin college writing for three reasons. First, many students find college writing courses different from their high school courses, but students encounter difficulties when asked to contrast the differences in terms, for example of audience, purpose and rhetorical situation. Second, to orient students to what will be new practices for some, we need to help them become consciously aware of their present writing practice. Third, I argue that students will assimilate different approaches to writing more readily when they can relate the rationales and assumptions underlying previous instruction to those introduced in a new course. As Troyka (1986, 190-91) convincingly argues in the context of how students make meaning as writers and readers, teachers must explicitly relate new knowledge to old in order to build on students' prior knowledge.

My students usually need help to recall their previous writing experiences, and I give this in the form of a questionnaire that requires multiple-choice answers, sentence and short-paragraph responses. Students are very familiar with this format, and in less than an hour they discover much information for their essays. As students share their answers in a class discussion, they prepare themselves to write about their individual backgrounds and begin to see the diversity of learning experiences in their class. The value of the questionnaire as a heuristic tool is fulfilled once students are talking with each other about their previous writing and what it has meant for them.

Writing the essay challenges students to select information from the answers and to present it coherently in a connected discussion of their high-school writing. Here is the assignment as I give it to my own students:

By completing the questionnaire, you have recalled information that describes your background as a writer. The different sections of the questionnaire also provide a provisional organization of the different aspects of your instruction in writing, such as the audiences for whom you wrote, how class time was used and how your writing was evaluated. Using this information as a starting point from which to reflect on your past experiences, write a short essay to describe and to evaluate your development as a writer and to recount what you have learned about writing. Select several major topics to help you describe yourself as a writer. The following questions suggest areas around which to focus your essay.

1. Describe the kinds of writing that you have done in school and on your own. Which kinds of writing did you especially enjoy and which kinds gave you difficulty? In a few sentences, speculate on what you see as the contribution of your past writing to your writing in college.
2. Describe the different individuals and groups of people for whom you have written in high school. What were your purposes for writing to these audiences? How might these audiences and purposes change with college writing?
3. What kind of a writing process were you taught? How useful did you find this and to what extent are you able to use it in your present writing?

4. How was your writing evaluated? Did your teacher's approach to evaluation attend to what you believed were the most valuable aspects of your work? What means of response and evaluation would be most useful to you now?

Please note carefully that the temptation in this essay is only to describe/record what you did in your previous courses. You are being asked here to reflect and to evaluate. Therefore you will need to bring out what you see as the reasons for why you learned to write in a particular way.

In addition to the topics suggested above, the questionnaire asks students to describe their responsibility to select paper topics and to control the time frames in which work is completed. Rather than present the five page questionnaire that I use with my students, I will give examples below of the kinds of questions that I ask.

Constructing a questionnaire that elicits useful information for teachers and students challenges the teacher to include within each item a series of choices that encompasses the range of possible responses that students might want to give. One limitation of discovering information through a questionnaire is that the form of multiple-choice answers interprets any given experience according to teacher-developed categories that may or may not correspond to how a student might segment a particular experience. An example of this problem occurs with the following question.

Kinds of Writing

In your English class, how much time was used for each of these different kinds of writing? Rank from 1 to 6. (1 = most, 6 = least.)

- a) Essays in which you explain a topic (a theme, set of ideas or process etc.) that the teacher had presented to you or that you had read about.
- b) Essays in which you persuade your reader of the validity of a particular position or belief by using arguments.
- c) Essays in which you review and make critical judgments about, for example, a film, a show, a book or a work of art.
- d) Creative writing: stories, poems, plays, etc.
- e) Essays in which you describe, for example, a person, place, scene, or a personal experience.
- f) Writing in which you discovered and made clear your feelings concerning an idea or situation about which you were unsure.

If there were any kinds of school writing which did not fit into the above categories, please describe them.

The reader will recognize that this schema is based on both the time-honored categories of exposition, persuasion, description, and narration and the more recent modes of evaluation, expression and discovery. While Britton (1975) is right to point out that the traditional function categories are less than useful in teaching writing, most of my own students offer them when asked about the different kinds of writing taught in school. Once students have identified the kinds of writing that they have practiced and have reflected on the rhetorical purposes that they served, students are in a position to consider why teachers emphasize certain kinds of writing more than others.

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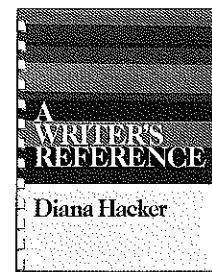
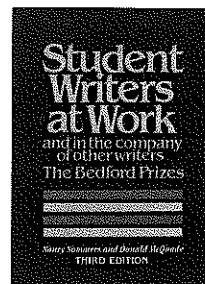
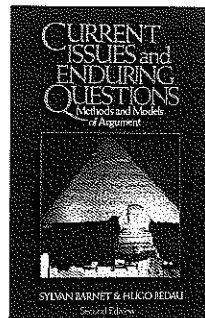
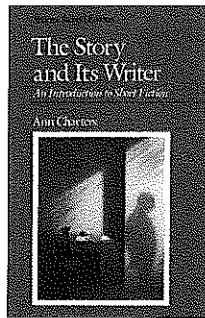
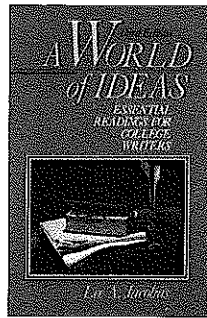
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Audience

As students reflect on the kinds of writing done and the purposes it served, they will need to consider the various audiences to whom the writing was directed. The question of audience becomes especially important in college as students prepare now to write for the multiple audiences encountered at work, for example, office memos, reports to clients, policy statements and notices to the public. Students often overlook the importance of writing in their future lives as Redish (1982, 102) observes here.

Students don't realize how much time they will spend writing on the job. They see themselves in the future as lawyers or nurses or research associates or social service workers, not as writers.

Here is the question that I ask students to encourage awareness of their experience writing for different audiences.

In many high schools, assignments are written for and read by the English teacher. However, your teacher may have asked you to write for other audiences. As a percentage, estimate how much of your time for this class was spent writing for each of the following individuals or groups of people.

- other students in the class
- for myself
- for a public audience of distant readers such as a newspaper or government representatives
- for my English teacher
- for friends and family

Writing Process

If we ask students to review their own particular approaches to writing papers, they can begin to relate their present practices of composing to the variety of processes that they will use in college writing classes. For example, if a student notices that she gives little time to prewriting, together we can consider how it could be useful in her writing. I ask students to compare their own practice of composing with the one below not to imply that this is the one right way to write a paper, but to provide students with a series of questions that will get them to assess the adequacy of how they allocate their time for writing essays.

When you wrote essays in high school, how much emphasis did you give to each of the following stages? Circle a number from 1-5 (little-much) to show how much time you gave for each stage:

- Before writing the paper, thinking what you already know and need to know about the topic.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Planning – making a topic outline, writing notes and lists of what to include

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Drafting – writing a first working/rough copy

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Revising – responses and suggestions for improvement came mainly from:
 - () fellow students and other readers
 - () my teacher.
- Writing a revised, finished copy

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Proof reading before handing in.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Students' answers to the above questions provide teachers with a preliminary framework for talking about the process of writing;

like all frames for teaching writing it needs modifying for individual groups, and teachers will need to explain that the process is recursive despite its linear representation here.

Conventions of Writing

To discover the kinds of guidance and rules that teachers have given to our students, for example, about the patterns of organization and conventions of writing, I ask students:

Were you ever told to do or not to do any particular things when you wrote? List any rules that your teachers gave you to follow.

My purpose here is to encourage students to identify the rules that they have learned so that they can better evaluate their appropriateness for the varied contexts in which they will write throughout their college careers and beyond. For example, students will need to ask whether such oft-given rules as "never use first person in a formal essay" and "always use the active voice" continue to apply in all situations.

By asking students to critique the kind of rules quoted above, we begin the term-long task of helping them to become conscious of the way in which they have been taught how to write. This enables students to apply their high-school writing experience to their writing in college and beyond because they can transfer or modify conventions as they evaluate the needs of new writing situations.

Evaluation of Writing

Assessing how students understand the purpose and the criteria of paper evaluation is another way to discover what students believe is important for them to attend to in their writing. The question below is designed to identify what students believe their teachers value in a piece of writing in relation to what students themselves value.

Circle from 1 to 5 to show what was least important (1) to most important (5) to your success as a writer in high school.

- The style of the writing (e.g. effective diction & sentences).

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Organization & development of content.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- The interest and originality of the content and underlying ideas.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Correctness of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Strength of arguments and clarity of explanations.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Punctuation and mechanics.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
- Paragraph development & organization.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Now go back and cross through a number from 1 to 5 to show the importance of each criterion for you. Describe other criteria that you and/or your teachers thought were important.

By encouraging students to relate what they value in writing to what they perceive to be of importance to their teachers, we can lead students to reflect on how various audiences will attend to different aspects of their writing.

Our effectiveness as teachers of writing in college is strongly influenced by the attitudes toward writing that students have developed in high-school; this is especially true for those students who do not want to take one more English class. By describing their previous experience and practice of writing, students reveal their self-image and self-esteem as writers and where they most need our guidance and encouragement. Because such essential information takes time to discover, I find that my students' first reflective essay provides an initial sense of my students that I can deepen through class meetings and in conferences.

This introductory essay provides the teacher with basic knowledge for designing the course and reveals to the students the assumptions, values and attitudes that they bring to college writing. When we ask students to reflect on the high-school writing curriculum as they have experienced it, we communicate to them not only an interest in their background as writers, but also a respect for the work of their former teachers. Whether or not we choose to recognize and to value the many years of previous writing instruction that teachers have given to our students, this instruction will influence strongly how our own teaching is received and how fully it is incorporated into what these writers already know and believe about writing. Our offer of one more writing course is most successful when we relate our pedagogy to what students have been taught in grades k-12 and when we discover ways to relate new knowledge to old. Then students can regard college composition as an integral and continuous part of their education and not just the last required writing class.

NOTES

¹My thanks to Richard Larson, former editor of *College Composition and Communication*, for encouraging me to stay focused on the "curriculum in writing" that students have experienced in relation to our more public statements about the writing curriculum.

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RE-UNITING THE ARTS OF LANGUAGE: ASSIGNMENTS IN THE BASIC WRITING CLASS

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"It does seem clear that many students will fail to write as well as they can when confronted with vague and confusing topics or topics that are ill suited to their age, capacity, or background" (White 100). E. M. White's comment sounds like common sense, but authorities disagree on what makes a clear topic and how to be sure it is suitable for the students who will write it. Writing assignment research and theory offer conflicting advice and concern themselves with the written assignment rather than the preparation leading up to it. In other words, they tend to be more concerned with the written product as it relates to the teacher's or tester's requirements than with the preliminary steps students follow in producing the final product. If this sounds like the argument we thought was no longer in debate—product versus process—the researchers and theorists usually have not confronted that possibility.

In the case of Basic Writers (B.W.), confusion of product and process can be a disaster, but there is a glimmer of hope because for Basic Writers, especially, teachers can look to the whole language approach for guidance in assignment preparation. Elementary teachers are, perhaps, more familiar with the whole language approach than are those of us at the college level. Those teachers understand this teaching strategy to imply that the language arts—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are integrated in each assignment. College teachers are beginning to view this approach as using the "arts of language" (Lunsford, 1988).

Unlike our elementary school colleagues, we at the college level have often ignored the possible importance of integrating the arts of language and have instead concentrated on two central issues about appropriate writing assignments. One aspect of debate about assignments centers on whether teachers should provide students with all the variables in the writing situation, or whether they should give a minimum amount of information, allowing the students to develop their own rhetorical situations. One could make the argument that the first group of theorists is discussing writing assignments while the researchers are examining writing tests. However, White believes the same concerns are present whether the writing is a test with time restrictions or an out-of-class assignment. He concludes, "A carefully designed writing topic will help students write their best and find that writing more rewarding, whatever the nature of the assignment" (101). Neither White nor the other researchers and theorists address the critical question of preparation leading to the assignment.

And yet, what is done before the final draft of the assignment is actually written is especially crucial because during the preliminary stages teachers are helping students to build a writing schema to call on in the written product. It is this schema that will be developed by an approach utilizing all the arts of language for each assignment.

Cognitive Structures

A schema, a type of cognitive map, is a mental representation. For an essay, the schema may be as general as an introduction,