Rethinking First Year English as First Year Writing Across the Curriculum

Nancy Benson, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Steven J. Corbett, George Mason University
Anicca Cox, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Will Higgins, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Robin Kish, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Michelle LaFrance, George Mason University
Katy Whittingham, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

Introduction
Michelle LaFrance

David Russell famously used the metaphor of ball handling in sports activities to demonstrate how composition courses oversimplify ideals of writing. "To try to teach students to improve their writing by taking a GWSI [General Writing Skills Instruction] course," Russell wrote, "is something like trying to teach people to improve their ping-pong, jacks, volleyball, basketball, field hockey, and so on by attending a course in general ball using" (58). As Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle have also argued, thinking about writing as a general or basic skill often results in forms of writing-instruction that reifies features of writing, such as syntax, mechanics, and process. Downs and Wardle argue, "It is often assumed that 'skills' or moves such as taking a position, building arguments, developing paragraphs, and writing clear and forceful sentences are 'general writing skills' that transfer across all situations" (579). The reality, according to Downs and Wardle, is that even if some elements of writing are shared across disciplines, these elements "vary radically across disciplines, and therefore can only meaningfully be taught within a discipline" (579).

These concerns—particularly as they are related to issues of student learning transfer and the needs of student writers who will step into multiple, flexible, and adaptive writing situations across the curriculum—have guided curricular revisions in the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMD) First Year English program (FYE), particularly the realignment of English 101 and English 102. This essay will discuss how recent research in the field of composition studies has informed curricular revisions within the First Year English program at UMD. At UMD, the focus of the First Year English program has turned away from generalized notions of writing as grammar, structure, or argument and toward more situated and rhetorical notions of writing as a flexible and highly contextual product of social interaction (Gee, "Introduction," *Literacy*), community-based expertise (Swales), and specific forms of problem solving (Berkenkotter; Johns). To support instructors in this move, the program has adapted the *Writing about Writing* (*WAW*) approach advocated by Downs and Wardle as a means to retool the second semester of First-Year English into a First-Year WAC approach.

After a brief discussion of the framework for curricular revisions, including the shared assignment for ENL 102, a "Guide to Writing in the Majors," five instructors in the First Year English program present sample writing assignments that take up some of the ideals of the WAW/WAC-based first-year writing classroom. In these assignments, instructors have asked

students to explore how writing (and language use) is flexibly shaped to reflect the values of the communities they belong to and to consider their own strengths and weaknesses as readers, writers, researchers, and members of communities of practice. While all of the authors of this collaborative piece would very much like to make claims about the effectiveness of this approach for student learning, our primary goal in this essay is to demonstrate how we have negotiated the pedagogical tensions of teaching in an English-based, first-year writing classroom even as our institutional mission charges us to prepare students to write across the curriculum.

First Year English at UMD

The UMD First Year English program seats just over 1,500 students annually, offering a two-course sequence: English 101: Critical Reading and Writing I, and English 102: Critical Reading and Writing II. As is the case in many small branch campuses in state university systems, the needs of the writers in ENL 101 and 102 are quite diverse. First-year students often arrive underprepared for college-level course work, have a wide range of abilities as readers and writers, and will continue on as students, encountering different types of writing tasks in majors across the curriculum.

The first charge for this curriculum is to introduce students to the challenges of reading and writing on the college level and to increase their awareness of the multiple audiences who will read their work in college courses across disciplines and majors. As is typical of most students entering their first year of college, UMD first-year students primarily associate "writing" with high school English courses and are often most familiar with reading and responding to classic literary texts or to shorter nonfiction readings for standardized state tests. Few have cursory familiarity with the sorts of reading and writing tasks upper-level students in their majors are typically asked to complete and even fewer have any knowledge of the actualities of writing in most professions. As such, the curriculum for these courses must be accessible for those students who might struggle with intensive college-level reading and writing tasks, but it must also "raise the bar" for these students, introducing them to the task-related nature of writing for college courses and within professional fields.

In an initial move to recognize the situated nature of writing, ENL 102 was revised in 2007 from a literature-based writing course to a course that focused student writers more explicitly on writing in the "disciplines" (the social sciences, sciences, and humanities, in turns). Unfortunately, these broad disciplinary affiliations were still too open to offer instructors and/or students deeper understandings of the relationships between the features of writing and disciplinary or professional expertise. In 2012, as part of the program's ongoing conversation about its curriculum and student needs, several instructors piloted the WAW approach, with an eye toward preparing students for the multiple writing contexts entailed in the undergraduate education. A final "shared" assignment was proposed, which would ask students to explore and analyze the writing in their majors and to present what they had learned in a "guide" for first-year students like themselves.

Writing about Writing

The WAW curriculum sets out to address core issues in first-year composition courses, particularly issues of content and student learning transfer. The issue of "content" in composition courses has been an ongoing concern for instructors and programs, resulting in any number of divergent approaches to student reading, writing and research-based activities. Wardle and Downs themselves note in the "Preface" for instructors of their *Writing About Writing* textbook that the "content" of composition courses has been one of their own an ongoing frustrations (v). Students must write *about something*, after all. Yet, if we accept that writing is a highly situated activity that is intricately embroiled in expertise and quite specific but divergent methods of problem solving (Smit; Beaufort), the idea that students can write *about anything* and become more effective writers bears more intensive scrutiny. When neither student nor instructor have significant knowledge about (or even access to) deeper processes of knowledge-production, research, or contributions to authentic conversations on a topic, there is a high likelihood that writing instruction will turn to the reifications and overdeterminations critiqued above. The WAW approach seeks to overcome this issue by focusing students on declarative knowledge drawn from the field of Writing Studies—readings examine what writing is, how reading and writing work and what is involved in reading and writing successfully on the college level. Readings often focus students on the sorts of meta-awareness that will assist them in thinking through different writing situations. Geared toward a professional, academic audience, the readings in the *WAW* textbook are quite dense, so also offer students the opportunity to encounter challenging and interdisciplinary examples of academic writing and to develop strategies for reading scholarly articles.

The second issue is related to student learning transfer. As the National Research Council has argued, "[t]he ultimate goal of learning is to have access to information for a wide set of purposes—that the learning will in some way transfer to other circumstances" (61). Indeed, this is the primary supposition underlying writing courses at any undergraduate level—after a semester or two of instruction, it is hoped that students will be able to apply what they have learned about writing in general to other writing tasks encountered as undergraduates and even professionals. Twentieth century research on student learning "transfer," however, has often suggested a much damper reality for learners. Most famously, Perkins and Salomon found that the "automatic" transfer of learning presumed by most curricula (such as instruction in general forms of writing) was "inordinately optimistic" (23). More recent and specifically focused studies of undergraduate writing development have found that very little of what is taught in first-year classes actually transfers when students move on to their other courses (Beaufort; Bergmann and Zapernick; Carroll; Wardle, "Understanding").

Despite the grim picture painted here, some researchers have found that a somewhat broader situational awareness can actually support the transfer of student learning from writing situation to writing situation (Downs and Wardle). The types of awareness that have been shown helpful include: general rhetorical awareness (Soliday), a more complex awareness of genre (Devitt; Reiff and Bawarshi), and a focus on writing as a means of "literacy development" (Carol) or negotiating the social (Johns). It is speculated that these knowledges support students in thinking through the ways writing changes to reflect any number of variables—author purpose, audience expectations, meeting the specifics of the task at hand, and the flexibility of particular conventions. Wardle and Downs's approach responds to these findings focusing students on "'general principles' based on their own experience and learning" (vi), such as self-reflection, "so

that they keep track of what they are thinking and learning as they do it" (vi) and mindfulness, or being "alert to their surroundings and what they are doing rather than just doing things automatically and unconsciously" (vi).

The FYE program has adapted this focus slightly, asking students to pay close attention to the ways they read and write, communicate (especially via writing) in communities of practice, use writing differently in different settings, and to think about the sorts of writing most active in the communities they will enter as they move into their majors. Reflection on learning moments (especially personal strengths and weaknesses) for students is an important part of this approach as well. The philosophy of the program highlights writing as a problem solving activity that takes on highly specialized forms within disciplinary communities. This philosophy is most clearly embodied in the "Guide to Writing in Your Major," the final assignment in the WAW pilot.

The "Shared" Assignment: "A Guide to Writing in Your Major"

For this paper, you will:

*explore/analyze how writing is used in your major and/or discipline in the university. You'll need to write a thoughtfully researched "guide to writing in the majors" which presents and analyzes your observations **about writing in your major** to incoming freshmen interested in your major.*

*These students need to know **what sort of written work will be asked of them** in order to make a fully thought-out choice about joining the major.*

The UMD First-Year English program has used a "shared" assignment in both 101 and 102 since the fall of 2010. This assignment is intended to focus the program's assessment efforts and, along with the program outcomes, to help guide FYE instructors toward more common goals for student learning. One of four major assignments in 102, the shared assignment for the pilot version of ENL 102 was a "Guide to Writing in Your Major." In this assignment, students are asked to tie together much of what they have learned in the WAW pilot and to demonstrate their learning about writing, writers, rhetorical analysis, analysis of discourse community conventions, textual features, critical reading practice, and evaluation of sources in a guide for students new to the writing in their majors. A key feature of this assignment is the reminder for students that their own critical awareness about writing and the writing task set before them will often be central in their future success as writers. "There's no blanket set of memorizable formulas and skills that can be applied to every discipline; each major you might enter has its own set of conventions in terms of genres, research, the sort of knowledge that's valued," the example version of this assignment notes. This assignment hopes to highlight that discipline-specific conventions will often dictate the range of acceptable moves for student writers; with this understanding, students entering a major are better equipped to tackle a wide variety of writing challenges as they advance toward graduation.

Most instructors in the spring 2012 pilot positioned this assignment as the final major paper of the semester. Most instructors also asked that students produce 4 to 6 pages and to conduct both primary and secondary research on the writing in their majors. Some instructors asked students to keep a log that traced the sorts of writing they completed in other classes or asked students to

collect and analyze writing from professional organizations related to their fields. Others asked students to interview students already working in the major, professors, advisors, librarians, and other support staff on campus to find out what they could about the courses they would take and what would be entailed in writing in the major. Students were prompted with the following questions to consider as they thought about composing their guide in ways that would be helpful for a student who was just entering classes at UMD:

- What genres do most students write in the major you are entering? What are the dominant conventions of that major?
- How is writing used in different classes? What does this reflect about the discipline/ major?
- How much assistance in regard to writing can students expect from professors? What does this assistance look like from discipline to discipline?
- How does the writing of first-year students compare to that of upperclassmen? How does student writing change during time spent in college?
- How does writing in college compare to academic writing in the field?
- Why is there not one standard formula for writing at the university? If there's not one standard, how can students figure out how to write appropriately?

Anecdotal discussion of the guides produced by students in this pilot WAW effort was quite favorable. While many instructors felt that the initial assignment guidelines were far too ambitious (most agreed that the different working parts of the assignment took an enormous amount of setup and coaching for students to pull off, well before students even began to integrate those pieces), they also expressed that the guide encouraged students to think differently about writing, to think of themselves more actively as writers who could purposefully negotiate different writing situations, and to be more aware of the different sorts of writing tasks they would face as they continued on as students. A few instructors even noted anecdotally that they heard students reflect on writing in ways quite different than in previous semesters—*students seemed to be more aware of the pervasiveness of writing across the curriculum, the flexible nature of writing tasks, and the ways they would continue on as writers in their professional fields.* More advanced students also noted that the stakes for their writing would increase as they moved toward graduation and into their professional fields.

As the discussions of writing assignments below will show, instructors in the FYE have approached the opportunities presented by the WAW curriculum very differently. (Readers will want to note that the assignments discussed below were assigned to students *before* the shared assignment discussed above.) These assignments demonstrate a few of the many ways instructors in the program have made initial attempts to align their approaches to writing instruction with the program's philosophy and the WAW approach. As the curriculum matures and we begin to collect data and examples of student responses, we may seek to make stronger claims about the effectiveness of this approach for student writers. At this time, the following discussions simply serve as examples of how quite different instructors have taken up the call to teach toward WAC-based ideals using the WAW framework, a means of putting into action our concerns about general writing instruction and student learning transfer.

Exploring Your Reading Process: The Protocol Project

Nancy Benson

The WAW curriculum provided an opportunity to work with students, not just on their writing, but also on their reading. The *WAW* textbook, with its inclusion of the Flower and Hayes, "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and Construction of Meaning," a think-aloud protocol study on students' rhetorical reading practices, suggested that a WAW curriculum could also be a *writing about reading* curriculum. In this study, Flower and Hayes ask student readers at different levels to engage a text; at key points in the reading process, the researchers stop the reader and have them answer the question, "How do you interpret the text now?" Based on their findings, Flower and Hayes argue that strong *rhetorical* readers were most successful at reading overall, as they made frequent connections between the text, their other reading experiences, and their prior knowledge. I saw an opportunity for my own students in this process. In my experience, because my students are largely unfamiliar with academic texts, a familiarity necessary for their success in other academic contexts, they are often sidetracked by a number of different distractions and issues with their reading strategies. I began to think about the ways that students could identify their own issues as readers who must be prepared to recognize when they could more effectively strategize as readers to take on unfamiliar reading situations.

I present here the reading self-study for students that I developed early in the spring semester of 2012, after my English 102 students completed the first paper of the semester, a literacy narrative. The goal here was to continue and deepen discussions about how students read and write as part of the larger objective of understanding how they will be called upon to read and write across the curriculum. I wanted to get students to become aware of their reading behaviors, attitudes, strategies, and how they do or do not connect to a text. As part of my course objectives, I try to assist students in understanding that they will be called upon to read a wide variety of different texts across the curriculum during college, hoping they will learn that an awareness of *how they read different texts* can assist them both in managing their reading and understanding their own unique reading processes as they mature within a specific field.

Rather than using a more traditional think-aloud approach, we decided to read two different texts and log our reactions to the texts. I asked students to make notes as they read about what was occurring to them during their reading processes—were they reading fluidly? Was something disrupting their reading process? What was this distraction? Each student would then prepare a log of the disruptions that s/he had encountered during the reading process. I suggested that students not screen out any potential entry in the log; in other words, getting up to get a drink was fair game for the log, as was responding to a text message, or quitting reading entirely. The students should log what they actually experienced as they read; therefore, there could be no wrong or right log entries. Students would not be graded on how they read, but rather on reporting, analyzing and reflecting on their reading experiences. The goal here was to try to get students to be more conscious of how effective their reading practices were and how those practices could change given variations in texts, situations, and conditions. Ideally, I hoped students would become more aware of how their reading efficacy might change depending upon the text they were reading, their purposes as readers, environmental conditions, their attitude towards the text, etc.

Students read two different texts: one academic piece from our *WAW* textbook (: Greene, Klein, or Porter), and one work of short fiction (London, Hemingway, Chopin, or Welty), and logged their responses to the texts. After they finished their logs, they brought them into class and coded the log entries to see if they fell into one of the following categories: attitude, behavior, strategies and skills, connect to text, environment. In other words, a student who logged that "the text was boring" might code this log entry as (A) for attitude. A student who logged that "they stopped to look up a word" might code this (S) for strategies and skills. A student who took a break to respond to a text message or play a video game might code this (B) for behavior. A student who wrote, "I am uncomfortable, and the room is too hot," might code this (E) for environment. After the students coded all of their log entries, they were asked to analyze the findings and then reflect on what they could learn from their analysis. Next they wrote up a 2-3 page report with the following three sections: Introduction, Analysis of Findings, and Reflection.

Excerpts from students' analyses and reflections reveal that students were able to analyze and reflect upon their own reading processes, in very self-aware and revealing ways. (The students quoted here have each signed IRB-approved consent forms, allowing me to include their responses and reactions here.)

Student A
Title: "What I Thought I Did and What I Really Do"
> *"I picked this article because it was so short. I am not a strong reader so I figured picking something that I could read multiple times would make it easier for me. . . . probably it would have taken me twenty minutes to read the piece, but instead it took me two hours. I went to get water, watch TV, and was just very distracted. I think it was very interesting to look at the data and realize what I did during the course of the short piece. If I didn't write all that stuff down I would not have realized I did all of that stuff, instead of reading. I also found that when I really sat down and focused on the reading it was still confusing because it was something I was not familiar with."*

Reflection: *"I think this project was very helpful for me. I say that because I have never really seen what my steps were in reading. I am not a big reader and seeing the problems I have is kind of astonishing. It is also very important that I kept reading through it even though I didn't really like it."*

Student B
Title: "Reading Protocol: Hemingway Delivers"
> *"Most of my data shows that I choose poor environments to read in and have developed some unhealthy habits for reading. I'm constantly listening to music, which distracts me, I'm distracted when others move, and I procrastinate too much."*

In his reflection, this student says, *"I have a lot of learning and improving to do over the next few years. Part of me looks forward to bettering myself as a reader, and the other part will dread reading every page."*

Student C
Title: "Attitude Is Everything"

> *"Every comment I made had something to do with how I felt about what was written. It was all attitude. I was not exhibiting any behaviors that kept me from reading. I was simply reading. I blocked out everything and I read."*

In his reflection, this student wrote, *"What was most interesting was that all of my comments were about attitude; how I felt about what I was reading. I'm constantly having strong opinions about writing strategies and content. I believe that this aspect of my reading will make me a better writer; I know what writing strategies evoke certain emotions and feelings."*

Although most instructors stress the importance of reading to students, and reading is required in almost every college-level course, rarely do college-level instructors assist students in thinking about how they behave or think of themselves as readers. My hope with this writing about reading assignment is that raising awareness of the roles that environment, behavior, and attitude play in a first-year students' reading processes can help them to become more reflective of their reading practices in other courses. This assignment was very helpful for me as an instructor in terms of understanding how various students felt about the reading process and about themselves as readers. This study created a framework for ongoing discussions in this pilot class about college-level reading while raising students' meta-cognitive awareness of their reading practices, an awareness I hope they will transfer to other classes and situations where they are called to read.

Thinking about Research Models Across Communities
Anicca Cox

The *WAW* textbook includes a variety of readings that define, analyze, and discuss the relationship between texts and discourse communities; Wardle and Downs have included these texts to help students understand the complex, but also highly specific and contextually rich, nature of language and textual creation within communities of practice. Wardle and Downs pose that student writers are better able to navigate unfamiliar writing situations when they are more aware of the types of attributes texts may take on in relation to the communities that produce and circulate those texts. As such, for this assignment, I developed a two-part prompt for my students. The first part was, "A Discourse Community Ethnography" (DCE), adapted directly from *WAW* (574). The second was a research supplement designed to assist my students in thinking about their information-gathering practices. Taking the view that academic research is highly recursive and situated, involving creativity and a sense of the audience or community being addressed, I asked students to approach research in a flexible and exploratory manner.

After reading and analyzing a series of articles in small groups, students chose a "Discourse Community" (DC) for their research and began to "explore how this group uses language (especially written texts) in ways that other groups may not" (Wardle and Downs 574). Some of the communities students chose to analyze included: sports fans, sororities, professional groups, campus organizations, music fans/clubs, reddit sites for particular interest groups, facebook groups, cosplay communities, workplace staff, and gaming communities.

The readings we discussed specifically addressed the features of discourse communities—from intertextuality, purpose, conflicts/tensions within communities, and the literacy required of

discourse community members, to an examination of individual identity within these communities (Porter; Swales; Gee, *Literacy*; Johns; Wardle "Continuing"; Branick; Mirabelli). The texts students read were meant to prepare them to analyze a discourse community of their choosing. The research (both participatory observation and library-based) was meant to prepare students to transfer their awareness of DC community features, so that they would be more aware of how the norms of community practice changed as they entered the new discourse community of in their majors. The research they performed and the group work we did in class were all constructed to help them see their engagement in their majors as sites of identity formation, places where they must engage as researcher-learners in order to be successful.

The research supplement asked students to look into the studies (or the existing research "conversation") about systems of knowledge-making inside of a community and to use this information to complement their analysis of a conversation being had by participants in a particular group. The first step for students was to gain a general sense of the group they were investigating. They were asked to begin with Wikipedia, Google, any social media sites relevant to their topic, and the blogosphere to get a sense of the character, identity and function of their chosen community. Second, students were to use the library to consider more formal or "scholarly" research avenues and to discover any previous ethnographic studies of their community or communities like it. Finally, students were also asked to observe the language-based interactions of group members and to interview a member or members of the group they were researching.

The DCE was a way to engage students in self-directed research and to scaffold their skills for the final common/shared assignment. My goal was to make research for the course a process that was meaningful, useful and reflective for students not only as writers in an FYE course, but also as researchers and participants in other disciplinary communities. In turn, this assignment provided a bridge from early semester self-reflective writing to a broader understanding of how language and texts shape communities of practice. Using a mix of primary, popular and scholarly research, students were exposed to the multiple, situated, practices of information gathering. As a teacher, I found it important to model research practices in this assignment—there are a lot of ways to do research and a lot of reasons to do it. But most importantly, a researcher in *any* context must be flexible and understand the ways that the communities they communicate to and within expect them to adhere to norms of practice. This assignment posed research as a form of audience-awareness, leading students to pay attention to the values and sensibilities of a particular community.

My goal here was to offer a low stakes assignment to allow students to engage as both researchers *and participants* in their communities of choice, as they began to form their own assertions about what was critical in the study of a group of their choosing. The DCE positioned students to be self-directed and to use a variety of popular and library-based resources to analyze their own experiences. Through analyzing a community of practice, I asked them to develop skills useful across the curriculum, particularly inquiry-guided, situated.

Engaging Reluctant Readers and Writers
Will Higgins

Making content relevant and engaging for our students, while at the same time improving transfer and getting students to deal with issues of genre, do not have to be mutually exclusive interests. As instructors, we are always searching for methods to improve student engagement and discussion, especially regarding difficult content. Many of the readings in our WAW ENL 102 curriculum can be especially challenging for reluctant readers; many of the articles in our *WAW* textbook are written specifically for an audience of writing instructors. Both comprehension and student engagement can be a challenge. I have frequently turned to video and audio supplements as a method of helping students to reify important concepts in the WAW curriculum. It is difficult for students to move toward the final shared assignment without a strong foundation in these WAW elements.

My goal with this particular lesson was to expand my students' comprehension of John Swales's influential article, "The Concept of Discourse Community," in which Swales lays out the six defining characteristics of discourse communities. To further this understanding, I discovered a 2011 TED.com video of YouTube's Kevin Alloca titled, "Why videos go viral" at www.ted.com/talks/kevin_allocca_why_videos_go_viral.html. Alloca is YouTube's Trends Manager and in his compelling lecture he discusses some reasons why videos "go viral"; it just so happens that some of Alloca's explanations dovetail neatly into how we define discourse community. It begs the question of whether the audiences of some viral videos constitute a discourse community as defined by Swales. Questions like this are easier for students to work through, considering their familiarity with YouTube and pop culture. This particular video has resulted in excellent debates about Swales and discourse communities. It also addresses other issues of transfer; namely, can students take the textbook concept of discourse community and transfer it to a more concrete and localized discussion. This exercise in itself could lead to great class discussion about the meaning and purpose of the WAW idea and its attendant issues.

Initially, students would read the text of Swales's article for homework; we would then view the Alloca lecture in class together as part of our discussion. I found that I was doing much of the heavy intellectual lifting of connecting Alloca with Swales. I wanted my students to have more time to sift through these ideas and take more ownership of the class discussion. Thus, I decided to flip the Alloca video/Swales article. Flipping is viral in and of itself, loosely describing a pedagogical movement that seeks to transfer knowledge at home via video or podcast and reinforce the knowledge at a higher level through classroom discussion. Theoretically, this allows students to work through some of the intellectual hurdles on their own.

TED.com has a new website, ed.ted.com, dedicated to allowing instructors to flip any video using a template that allows you to introduce the video and arrange a series of questions that will be recorded in your instructor's TED account. These questions can be objective-style multiple choice or open-ended as a short answer or short essay. Students are generally asked to Watch, Think, and Dig Deeper in this template, allowing for experimentation from the instructor and the student.

As the instructor, I now get a chance to sift through the emerging ideas of my students online before we meet in class; as a result, I can attempt to further mold our class discussion. Students get the chance to enhance their understanding of a difficult topic. More students are willing to

engage in class discussion as a result of this. The flipped assignment can be viewed at http://ed.ted.com/on/EYRBizfd.

As we move forward in addressing some of the thornier issues in *WAW*, it will be a challenge for all of us to make the subject concrete and relevant for the general writing skills student. My hope is that methods using platforms such as Ted.ed and others will allow us to advance the WAW philosophy, eliminate the one size fits all approach to writing, and increase student transfer.

Thinking as a Writer
Robin Kish

If good writing involves making choices—a process many students don't necessarily understand when reading or composing, as they see only the final, static text—I wanted my students to participate more actively in reflecting upon their own writing processes, giving them the chance to develop self-critical awareness of the different rhetorical situations they may encounter and how these affect the choices a writer makes.

To provide pedagogical framework for this concept, I have students read four essays from *WAW* which deal with issues of literacy and literacy agents (different types of "literacy;" who has access to what kinds of literacy; how one's literacy can be affected positively or negatively by agents of literacy): Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy," Danielle DeVoss's "The Future of Literacy," Malcolm X's "Learning to Read," and Sherman Alexie's "The Joy of Reading: Superman and Me." I designed small, "low-stakes" writing assignments for students to complete as they read so that they could engage with ideas from the texts and apply these to their own literacy history. These low-stakes assignments then evolved into the first major writing assignment, a literacy narrative.

While completing the steps in the literacy narrative, I asked students to keep a writer's log of their progress through the assignment. As an introduction to this writer's log, I had students read Carol Berkenkotter's "Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer" and Donald Murray's response, "Response of a Laboratory Rat – or, Being Protocoled." While the students were not required to go to the lengths Berkenkotter had Murray go through (transcribing his work, creating a code for certain tasks), I did require that students monitor various parts of their writing stages: how much time they spent prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing; difficulties they encountered when writing, and how they "solved" or resolved these; and how they thought about their audience as they wrote (in this case, students in a first-year writing class much like their own). I then asked the students to transform this writing log into their second major writing project, a self-portrait of the student(s) as writer(s). For this project, I asked students to reflect on how they approached the writing situation, focusing on the problems they encountered as writers, and how they addressed these to meet the requirements of the rhetorical situation. For a more general picture, I also suggested that students could think about their usual "habits of mind" when approaching different types of writing assignments, and how their approach to this specific situation may—or may not have—differed.

Since teaching the pilot course, my design of these assignments has changed slightly. This past spring, I began the semester by asking the students to write a rhetorical analysis of two Malcolm

X pieces, "From the Ballot to the Bullet" and "Learning to Read." In assigning these readings, and an analysis of the strategies the author used in each, I had hoped to give students a stronger understanding of how a writer's use of rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) can change depending on his/her rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, etc). I offered this assignment as a replacement to the literacy narrative because I thought it would allow students a closer look at how a publishing writer approaches different rhetorical situations, so that they had a model against which to compare their own processes.

Writer's Baggage
Katy Whittingham

In the introductory unit of my WAW course, the students complete a personal narrative about a time when they struggled as writers. Their intended audience is college writing instructors interested in learning more about student-writers and the struggles these writers face and overcome. Their purpose is broken into three parts: Discuss in detail a time when they struggled with a writing task, reflect on how their process is or is not similar to the processes of other writers published in the *WAW* textbook, and pose a set of strategies for teachers who teach students like themselves.

The assignment gives the writer a chance to share a personal, often painful, writing experience, and to reflect on what the experience has taught them and what might be useful for others. Through examining one particular writing event and the students' emotional associations, the assignment is designed to encourage a better understanding of how past experiences may have led to their current perceptions of writing. As they suggest strategies to teachers of writing, they are also thinking through the ways that they can be more proactive and self-directed learners. The intention is to ask students to sift through their own writer's baggage, providing them the opportunity to recognize and let go of what might be holding them back as writers, so they can face new writing situations as equipped problem solvers.

In preparation for the assignment, students complete several pre-writing and reading exercises beginning with a close reading of the poem "Pass/Fail" by Linda Pastan to help inspire their own narratives. About academic anxiety, and full of sensory images such as "blue books" and "dull pencils," the poem provides a model to support students in conjuring up, writing about, and sharing some of their own memories and associations with writing for school purposes—particularly standardized tests—since this is a very common, frequently negative, experience. In a follow-up class discussion, we break down definitions of writing and misconceptions about what writing for school has to be or has to look like based on their reflections and foresight.

A second pre-writing exercise for this assignment is a writing metaphor free-write. We first read the extended metaphor, "The Writer" by Richard Wilbur, a poem in which the speaker compares his daughter's writing experience with a trapped, and eventually freed, starling. After reading the poem, I ask students to come up with their own metaphors for writing, and we write them on the board. If they are particularly happy with what they come up with, I encourage them to incorporate their metaphor into their essay's introduction. Some of the examples students have come up with in the past are: *Writing is a newborn kitten, Writing is a foggy mirror, Writing is a clown with smeared makeup, Writing is a patch of black ice, Writing is an elderly driver, Writing*

is falling off a stage, Writing is getting dressed in the dark, and Writing is trying to find the silverware in a stranger's kitchen.

Another part of this assignment is a comparison between the writer's personal experiences and other famous writers' experiences detailed in the *WAW* textbook*,* which includes insightful narratives and advice from writing veterans like Stephen King, Allegra Goodman, Kent Haruf, and Susan Sontag. In particular, "Shitty First Drafts" by Anne Lamott, originally from her quintessential writing book *Bird by Bird*, tends to be a reading students identify with. Her self-deprecating and honest examples of times when she struggled give the students a license of sorts. It's OK to have trouble. It's OK to have a "shitty draft" if a writer, a REAL writer, admits that she writes them all the time. Writer's block can be a very isolating experience, and my hope is that young writers, especially those still new to university, will feel a lot of weight lifted when they learn other students and even professional writers have faced some of the same difficulties.

Since audience awareness is something the students are still learning to consider as part of their growing awareness of different writing situations (particularly writing in different disciplinary communities), in this first essay, I ask them to come up with a set of teaching strategies based on their own struggles and to offer these strategies right to their intended audience, writing instructors. It is my hope that extracting particular strategies based on the readings in *WAW* and their personal reflections will promote the sorts of metacognitive awareness necessary for effective writing in other classes and in all disciplines; additionally, this exercise is intended to build students' credibility and writing authority as they write based on personal experience, but ground these experiences in their comparisons to the experiences of other, more seasoned writers. With these activities, I hope my students are more prepared as they move into the reading, research, and writing in their discipline of study.

Response: Assessing Attitudes
Steven J. Corbett

In her 2012 keynote for Quinnipiac University's Fourth Biennial International Conference on Critical Thinking and Writing, assessment guru Barbara Woolvord spoke of writing assessment in terms of goals, information, and action. She explained that good assessment involves identifying a problem, getting people's attention, and gathering resources. But before (or at least as) we assess, we must find some footing closer to the beginning of the assessment loop: how are students meeting the goals and objectives of the program? This demands that curriculum designs negotiate the tensions inherent in institutional structures. Some of these tensions are laid out cogently in the introduction, including the idea that there are generalizable writing skills applicable to most writing situations across the disciplines. In answer, the authors offer writing assignments from the UMD FYE program as an attempt to provide the sorts of flexible, community-based, and problem-posing pedagogical apprenticeships that can lead to authentic assessment wherein curricular problems are collectively identified and instructional resources shared and reflected upon. The teachers and program administrator above offer cogent snapshots of exactly what it means to gather together resources in a goal-directed and informed way in attempts to solve the problem of effective writing instruction in FYW. But something else, a theme just as powerful, and perhaps more generally transferable, runs through each contributor's piece. Kenneth Burke often drew on George Herbert Mead's concept of "attitude as incipient

action" in writing about human motivation (see for example *A Grammar of Motives* 236-47). It appears that each of the contributors above have done their part to realize that not only was a shift in curricular orientation and framework needed, but—hand in hand—both student and instructor attitudes toward writing needed accounting for.

Program leader Michelle LaFrance sets the stage outlining the pedagogical attitudes and motives in moving her program toward a more knowledge-transfer and WAC-friendly Writing about Writing (WAW) model of FYW. She goes on to describe how the WAW model can help instructors coach students (and each other) toward realization of the importance of developing flexible strategies for *mindfully* (metacognitively) learning to write for a variety of rhetorical situations—including the sorts of writing most valued by a student's particular community of practice. LaFrance outlines the nexus of these curricular reform goals toward flexible, mindful and community-based practice via the shared program assignment a "Guide to Writing in Your Major." Fellow contributors subsequently describe their efforts in scaffolding toward this assignment for their students. Nancy Benson uses reading protocols to help students metacognitively delve more deeply into their negative attitudes toward reading. For Benson, perhaps if students gain an awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as readers—including their attitudes toward reading and their own reading-to-write habits and patterns—they will experience more success reading in a variety of rhetorical situations. Anicca Cox illustrates how a teacher's curiosity, engagement, and willingness to experiment can help students investigate the concept of discourse communities. Her two-part assignment calls for students to immerse themselves in multiple forms of inquiry—from field investigation to library research—in their quests toward learning what it means to be both researchers and participants in an academic community of practice. Will Higgins offers a snapshot of how TED-talk videos can be used in interactive, creative, and engaging pedagogical ways. For Higgins, the familiar aspects of video can offer students a more identifiable form of engaging with thorny issues of negotiating in and between this or that discourse community. Echoing Benson, Robin Kish shows how she sponsors student literacy and reflection in her attempts to help students realize the power of rhetorical- and self-awareness in reading and writing. Kish utilizes the WAW approach by having students read and write about how famous authors describe their own reading and writing processes, and then comparatively monitoring, analyzing, and reporting on their own. And Katy Whittingham meets students where they are in mobilizing her attempts to help them understand their often negative attitudes toward writing and their experiences as writers. Like Benson and Kish, and in line with WAW pedagogies, Whittingham structures the assignment so students can compare their reading and writing experiences with the experiences of professional writers. She goes one step further, though, by having students also flex their skills in audience awareness and accommodation by making recommendations for instructors teaching students like themselves.

Together, these thoughtful teachers suggest that the "habits of mind" called for in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*—curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, flexibility, responsibility, and metacognition—while undergirding student incipient actions toward writing, should just as importantly be habits that inform our goals, attitudes, and actions as teachers and learners of writing.

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