

Editor's Note

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I am very happy to share issue 6.2 of *Prompt* with our readers. We are putting the final touches on this issue as the 2021–22 academic year comes to an end. This is always an interesting time of year, when many who live and work on the academic calendar look back at the year behind us and try to make sense of it as we also look forward to the year ahead, making plans and setting new goals.

I began this year by figuring out how to slow down in class, something I had been trying to do for years. The trick, it turned out, was that an N95 mask reduced the oxygen getting into my lungs, and it became a physiological necessity to speak more slowly and take more breaks from speaking. Teaching through an N95 was far from the greatest challenge the year posed, however. My first-year students were overwhelmed by the transition to college in ways I had never seen before and which I was not always able to anticipate or respond effectively to. I watched as many students fell behind in my highly-scaffolded writing course that depends on students keeping up with the work and moving forward together, so that collaborative learning can take place across the term. Colleagues shared similar experiences. At the academic year's end, in his opinion essay "My College Students are Not Ok" in the *New York Times*, Jonathan Malesic (2022) shared experiences that reminded me of my own:

By several measures—attendance, late assignments, quality of in-class discussion—they [his students at the University of Texas, Dallas and Southern Methodist University] performed worse than any students I had encountered in two decades of teaching.... I required individual meetings to discuss their research paper drafts; only six of 14 showed up. Usually, they all do. (para. 3)

Malesic's essay offered some arguments for how we can help our students and move beyond these challenges, an understandable impulse that was quickly questioned in a response published five days later by *Inside Higher Ed* columnist John Warner (2022). In "You Can't Ignore That a Pandemic Happened," Warner indicates that he supports many of Malesic's goals and observations, but he argues that we have to understand we are still in the midst of an unprecedented emergency and that rather than opt to make pandemic accommodations permanent or eliminate them, we should examine structural challenges and continue to focus on the human component of teaching.

I think there is a third option, which is to apply a pedagogical lens to the structural problems that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and work with students to create the maximum possible human connection that is also consistent with lives that are both complicated and, in many cases, have been inextricably altered by the pandemic itself. (Warner, 2022, para. 8)

This focus on cultivating a human connection to our students, which runs through both essays in different ways, is a lesson I have taken from the last two years. At the same time, I have learned how utterly exhausting and even mystifying it can be to pursue that commitment.

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The pandemic has left and will continue to leave its marks on all of us. As editor of *Prompt*, I hope that this journal can help us in a way I never would have imagined when we founded the journal—to provide a place for pedagogical reflection, ideas, and motivation during a period of profound and ongoing uncertainty that affects both students and instructors in ways we cannot always anticipate or readily understand. It will be years before education experts can help us analyze the times we are living and working through. In the meantime, I hope that *Prompt* will be a place we can continue to share our insights and innovations about teaching as we also process and seek to survive this ongoing disaster. Editing this issue, I found renewed motivation for my own thinking about teaching while reading about the thoughtful work the authors in this issue are doing in their classrooms.

As we work to locate ourselves and chart a path forward during a time of transition, the first article in this issue invites students to compose maps. Joy Santee’s “Cartographic Composition Across the Curriculum: Promoting Cartographic Literacy using Maps as Written Texts” invites students to explore how the composition of a map in a writing course teaches not only map making but also rhetorical awareness and leads to engagement with local civic issues.

Kelly Kinney’s “Breaking into Print: The Book Review Genre in an Introductory Graduate Seminar in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies” asks students to write a book review of a recent monograph, aimed at two goals. First, the project allows graduate students in an introductory course to connect their areas of prior expertise with those explored in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies, leading to increased learning and engagement in the field’s research. Next, it aims to help young scholars write a publishable article, building early confidence and knowledge about how to get their writing out to readers.

Kelly Blewett’s “Meaningful Writing Assignments in a Graduate Certificate Program Practicum” tackles a similar pedagogical scene—a graduate certificate program in rhetoric and composition with a group of students who bring diverse types of prior knowledge of the field into the course. Blewett’s assignment guides students to compose a writing prompt as well as a reflective letter. The assignment, like Kinney’s, provides graduate students with a meaningful opportunity to explore and share relevant research from rhetoric and composition.

Dorina Tila shares an assignment from a macroeconomics course in “Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Assignment in Macroeconomics: Collect, Analyze, Interpret and Implement Policies Based on Economic Indicators.” Economics instructors who are interested in how to offer students experience with data collection, analysis, and interpretation through a writing assignment will find detailed guidance for doing so in this assignment.

In “Inquiry Journal Facilitation: A Writing Assignment for Practicing Exploratory Speech,” Jessica Rivera-Mueller describes a project for preservice teachers that combines writing and presentation to build skills of deliberative inquiry. In moving from writing an “inquiry journal” to sharing “exploratory speech” about a key idea that emerged from their clinical teaching experience, students gain practice with key intellectual moves, like framing observations and posing questions.

Felicita Arzu-Carmichael offers first-year writing students a chance to critically explore and reflect on a technology that shapes their entire college educations, the learning management system (LMS). In “Studying the Rhetoric of the LMS in the Online Composition Classroom,” Arzu-Carmichael describes a writing and digital presentation assignment that challenges students’ assumptions that such technologies are neutral and benign.

In “Mapping the Conversation: A Graphic Organizer Tool for Synthesis Assignments,” Sigrid Streit presents readers with a dynamic activity for helping college writers draw meaningful connections between multiple texts. She provides detailed explanations of both in-person and online versions of the activity, which could be utilized in a wide array of classrooms.

This journal would not exist without the expertise and volunteer labor of our dedicated production team. I want to welcome Beth Keller and Liz Hutter, our two new Associate Production Editors. They have been integral to the production of this issue and will be a key part of the work of getting *Prompt* out to our readers in the coming years. I also want to thank Joseph Glover, who has been a fantastic Associate Production Editor and whose time and energy has been deeply appreciated.

Finally, I want to thank our outgoing Associate Editor Jamie White-Farnham for her four years of work on the journal. Jamie is a uniquely generous and insightful respondent to writers' work. Her insights into the strengths and limits of submissions we receive has been integral to an editorial process that aims to support writers and help them produce their best work, and we will miss having her on the team.

Supplementary Material

For supplementary material accompanying this paper, including a PDF facsimile of the assignment description formatted as the author(s) presented it to students, please visit <https://doi.org/10.31719/pjaw.v6i2.155>.

References

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