prompt

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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.

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Cartographic Composition Across the Curriculum

Promoting Cartographic Literacy Using Maps as Multimodal Texts

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Abstract

This article introduces a flexible and adaptable Map Composition assignment to promote cartographic literacy. With applications to composition and writing across the curriculum, this assignment promotes students' awareness of the rhetorical nature of maps, which is important as maps inform and influence public discourse on wide-ranging issues. Student work shows how composing a map can lead them toward improved rhetorical awareness, cartographic literacy, and engagement with place-based civic issues. The article acknowledges limitations of teaching maps in writing classes and concludes with discussion of how this assignment can be adapted to a range of courses to promote cartographic literacy in support of broader literacies and civic engagement.

Introduction

Maps are ubiquitous, and even though they include alphabetic elements and are generally accompanied by explanatory text, they are not commonly seen as a potential writing assignment. However, assigning the composition of a map in writing or writing across the curriculum (WAC) courses can teach students valuable rhetorical strategies for composing, with applications to students' literacy development and engagement with civic and social issues. I offer this assignment as a way to explore possibilities of map composition within writing classes and an invitation to consider adaptations of this assignment across the curriculum.

In this assignment, I ask students to compose a map that works toward solving a problem. In its most basic iteration, the assignment functions to improve students' cartographic literacy, allowing them to develop and demonstrate practices related to more thoughtful, critical reading of maps. However, the assignment can facilitate more critical engagement too, particularly in advanced courses where cultural, social, political contexts of maps can be more deeply interrogated.

Cartographic Literacy and Writing Instruction

While considerations of space and place figure prominently in writing studies scholarship and pedagogy (Chao, 2020; Keller & Weisser, 2007; Mauk, 2003; Weisser & Dobrin, 2001), most references to mapping focus on maps used metaphorically to visualize a writing or thinking process (e.g., Brooke & McIntosh, 2007) or as expressive documents that show the influence of place on writers' practices (e.g., Reynolds, 2007). While map-related assignments appear in technical writing pedagogy in service to community-based technical writing projects (Butts & Jones, 2021; Moore, 2018), little has been written about how maps themselves can be used as writing assignments. However, because maps, like alphabetic writing, are rhetorical and use symbol systems, a Map Composition assignment can be productive in developing students' rhetorical competencies and literacies.

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When we teach writing, we teach forms of meaning-making, and composing a map prompts engagement with meaning-making in ways that move students toward critical literacies. The New London Group (2000) asserts that students “gain substantively in metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems” when they learn to critically engage with a range of texts (p. 15). Maps themselves might be seen as “complex systems” since they are complex documents with features such as underlying mathematical structures and visual mapping conventions that allow them to too-often be seen as neutral or scientific while they, in fact, usually uphold dominant cultural values (Harley, 1997/2001).

Unfortunately, coupling map complexity with modern reliance on turn-by-turn navigation means many students lack basic, or functional, cartographic literacy, including recognition of geographic features and an ability to read, use, and interpret maps (Ishikawa et al., 2008; McCullough & Collins, 2019). While cartographers have not settled on a single definition of cartographic literacy, cartographic literacy includes the ability to read, understand, use, and create maps. Much like functional alphabetic literacy includes an ability to read and write in ways that allow individuals to participate in society, functional cartographic literacy is an “ability to understand and use maps in daily life, for work and in the community,” which may include recognition of spatial patterns, understanding of map conventions, and decoding of content (Clarke, 2003, p. 717). As with alphabetic literacy, then, cartographic literacy encompasses a range of cognitive skills that contribute to an individual’s ability to read, use, and create maps. When students learn to create maps, they will have a better understanding of the decisions behind the maps they read and use.

Beyond functional cartographic literacy, the extent to which individuals can engage with maps is a measure of their critical cartographic literacy, or an ability to recognize the social influences on any given map, question the sources of mapped information, and create maps for specific audiences and purposes. Critical cartographic literacy is important for helping students move beyond simply reading and accepting mapped information and, instead, understanding and critiquing the social contexts of any given map. While we might hope for critical cartographic literacy as a result of this assignment, one challenge in moving students toward critical cartographic literacy is that they often have limited *functional* cartographic literacy (Ooms et al., 2016; Speake & Axon, 2012). So while no single assignment can move students from map illiteracy to critical cartographic literacy, the ubiquity of maps, the ease with which people uncritically accept mapped information, the presence of written descriptions accompanying maps, and the positionality of writing instructors to address various forms of literacy can make space for a Map Composition assignment in writing classes.

Because maps are ubiquitous and serve many public functions, cartographic literacy should be seen as an important component of students’ literacy development more generally. Muehlenhaus (2014) argues that the easy distribution of maps through social media requires education in cartographic literacy to limit the spread of misinformation. Addressing public perceptions of maps of the COVID-19 pandemic, Griffin (2020) argues that “being capable of critically interrogating a map to understand the extent to which its information can be trusted is more important than ever” (p. 7). Fleming and Quill (2020) echo the importance of such literacy, noting that students are rarely taught skills needed to interpret and critique maps. This Map Composition assignment is a step toward remediating that gap. Inclusion of an assignment like this in writing courses is appropriate when we teach maps that incorporate alphabetic writing in the form of written descriptions and recognize parallels between map composition and other forms of writing; however, it can also contribute to improved information, digital, visual, and civic literacies.

More specifically for writing instructors, inclusion of a Map Composition assignment can promote cartographic literacy by foregrounding the rhetorical nature of maps, or the ways that maps are enmeshed in ideology and always selective in what they include and exclude (Barton & Barton, 1993; Diehl et al., 2008; Harley, 1997/2001; Propen, 2007). Inclusion of a map assignment also enables enactment of Sánchez's (2016) call to reconceptualize writing as "consequential mark-making" as a step toward decolonizing writing instruction by "delinking it from the ideological, epistemological, and rhetorical baggage that burdens its study" (p. 88). Most maps are utterly and inextricably enmeshed in Eurocentric settler-colonialism, but before students can interrogate, resist, or counteract the ways that mapping has, for example, erased entire histories and cultural perspectives, they need to develop basic cartographic literacy. Sánchez's reconceptualization of writing removes constraints of what "counts" as writing, further making maps a viable assignment in writing courses.

Assignment Overview and Goals

In support of development of cartographic literacy, this Map Composition assignment asks students to compose a map that works toward solving a problem. This requires engagement with rhetorical considerations common to writing assignments, including audience, purpose, and context. While students have flexibility in choosing the technologies or tools to create their maps, most students use Google My Maps to create a focused collection of points on the map, with each point accompanied by descriptive text written by the students.[1]

Students do not expect to find themselves composing a map in a writing course since maps do not fit their conception of writing. However, this Map Composition assignment aligns with a primary goal of composition more generally: that of developing competence in rhetorical processes with applications beyond the composition classroom (Shipka, 2011, p. 138). Because very few students have composed a map, they do not have previous expectations, habits, or processes to draw on that are specific to map composition, so they have to attend to process in a new way. Yet, students make use of previously gained rhetorical strategies and must align their work with key composition outcomes by identifying a purpose and audience; using appropriate technologies; conducting research; making decisions about content, organization, and arrangement; and incorporating peer and instructor feedback.

Beyond supporting traditional writing process goals, the Map Composition assignment also enables support of literacy development as students must make choices about visual elements like icons and colors (visual literacy), engage with unfamiliar technology (digital literacy), manage research (information literacy), and deliberately create a problem-solving text (civic literacy). Readings and analysis of maps help students recognize how maps are not the neutral, value-free texts they seem to be but are deeply embedded in cultural and ideological structures. At minimum, the assignment leads students toward more critical consumption of maps in public discourse, but development of more nuanced critical literacies is possible depending on assignment implementation.

Assignment Implementation

Recognizing students' relative unfamiliarity with maps, I design a four-week unit in support of this assignment that first develops an awareness of maps as rhetorical texts through readings and analysis of several maps. The maps and readings I include during any given semester change to account for current events, but I usually include red states/blue states election maps of the United States to show limitations of maps that do not sufficiently account for population; maps of undersea cables to inform them about critical infrastructure; selections from the *Decolonial Atlas* (2020); animal migration maps; and a map used by President Abraham Lincoln to inform

Civil War strategy (Schulten, 2010).[2] Readings might include perspectives from cartographers and cartographic historians (e.g., Harley, 1990/2001; Schulten, 2010), sociologists (e.g., Butler, 2018; Lewis, 2008), and artists (e.g., Harmon, 2004; Harmon & Clemans, 2009). Because I teach this assignment in general education composition courses, I introduce a range of perspectives so students from a variety of disciplines can more easily connect with maps, but for instructors seeking to adapt this assignment, readings can be chosen that align with a course theme, direct attention toward particular social problems, or otherwise support the course.

After students have developed basic familiarity with maps through analysis and readings, I introduce several maps made with the Google My Maps tool. The sample maps show attributes that can be included on the maps and include examples with layers on a map of volcanic activity in Hawai'i to show geographic change over time, a map of Bigfoot sightings to show use of custom icons, and a map of LGBTQ Heritage sites to show features of social history.[3]

Students then select the problem to address in their own map. The assignment sheet provides a list of several possible options across a range of disciplines, including topics for maps that address healthcare inequities, disability access, mental health resources, and student life. Students can adapt one of these topics to their own locations or identify a topic of their choice. Once they have selected a topic, they write a proposal that identifies their audience, or the people who can use the map they create, and outlines their ideas and goals for their map so I can help them adjust their scope, avoid problematic topics that might reinscribe stereotypes or other forms of oppression, and brainstorm with those who are stuck. Next, I introduce the process of creating a map by directing them to the Google tool and providing an overview of the functions, time for exploring the tool, and links to tutorials.[4]

Because the assignment requires students to compose in a new genre, peer and instructor feedback are vital. I incorporate informal peer review early in the map composition process, and as students examine each other's maps, they find features they can incorporate in their own work. My feedback to them comes a bit later in the process, once they have a partial draft. In my feedback, I focus on rhetorical aspects of audience and purpose while pushing them toward more thoughtful engagement with the assignment by asking them to use more affordances of the mapping tool to support their development of cartographic literacy, but I also foreground development of civic literacy by helping them consider how their map could function to support action, advocacy, or social change.

Here is a sample workflow:

- **Week 1**
  - Introduction to Map Composition assignment
  - Preliminary analysis of sample maps
  - Introductory readings
- **Week 2**
  - More advanced readings and analysis
  - Topic selection and proposal
  - Introduction to mapping tools
- **Week 3**
  - Initial drafting and feedback, with peer feedback early in the week and instructor feedback at the end of the week
- **Week 4**
  - Revision and reflection

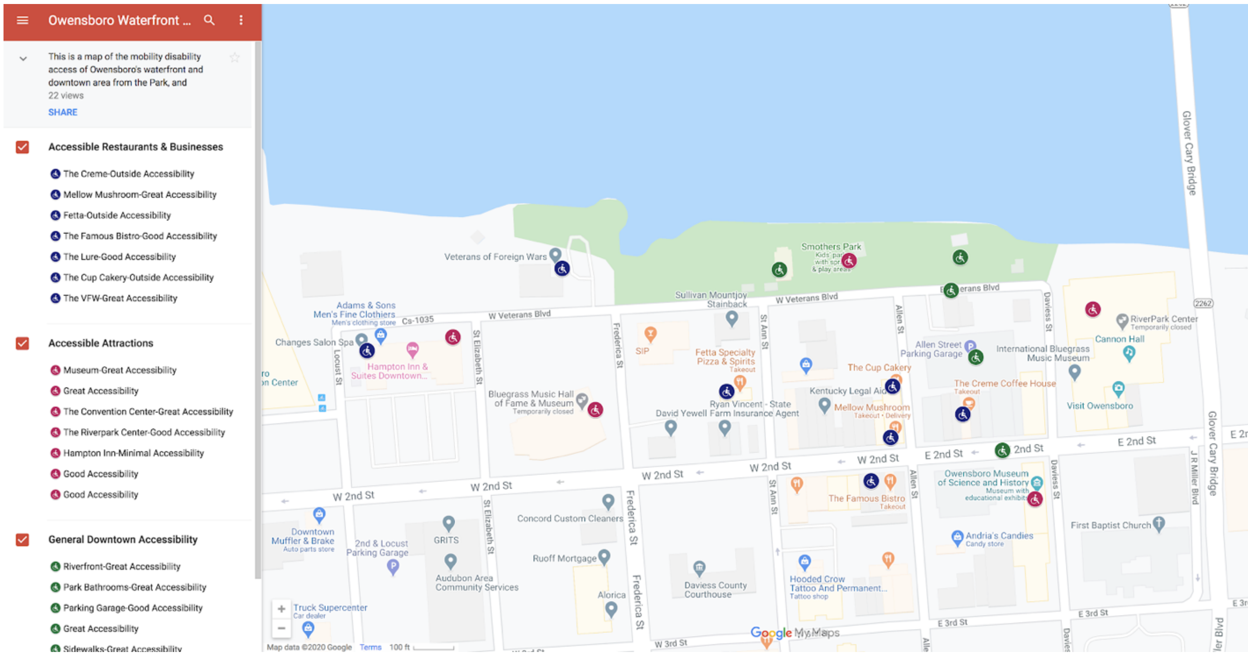

Figure 1. Emmett's map of accessible restaurants, attractions, and spaces in downtown Owensboro, Kentucky.

Student Map Compositions

While the version of the assignment described here is used in composition courses, I encourage students to undertake projects that align with their academic majors, so the student examples here reflect the disciplinary interests of the authors, pointing toward applications of this assignment in discipline-specific courses. First is the map from Emmett,[5] a psychology major who works as a caretaker for a disabled client who uses a wheelchair. The client is a longtime disability rights activist, and Emmett wanted to use this assignment to inform those with mobility disabilities about accessibility in a downtown area. Emmett created three layers in the map, which can be hidden or made visible depending on what the audience wants to focus on: Accessible Restaurants and Businesses, Accessible Attractions, and General Downtown Accessibility, which includes features like parking and sidewalks (Figure 1). Each layer is color coded, enabling readability even when all layers are visible.

Clicking an icon on the map or a title given by the map author in the left column takes readers to a more detailed description of that site's accessibility. In this example (Figure 2), Emmett describes limitations of accessibility inside a bakery while noting accessibility of tables outside and at a nearby park. Other icons lead to descriptions about sites' restroom access, parking, proximity to additional accessible services, and sidewalk widths in popular areas.

This map allowed Emmett to demonstrate understanding of the rhetorical possibilities of solving problems using maps. Each decision about content, the number of sites to include, and other visual and textual features shows development of cartographic literacy. Additionally, Emmett used this map in a later course assignment to advocate for more financial investment in the town's historical buildings to improve accessibility. Emmett worked on that document with their client, demonstrating the value of maps as a genre to help students become more civically engaged.

As another example, Micah, a science major, decided to make a map of birding locations within driving distance of campus to address the problem of a lack of local environmental knowledge and to promote environmental education (Figure 3).

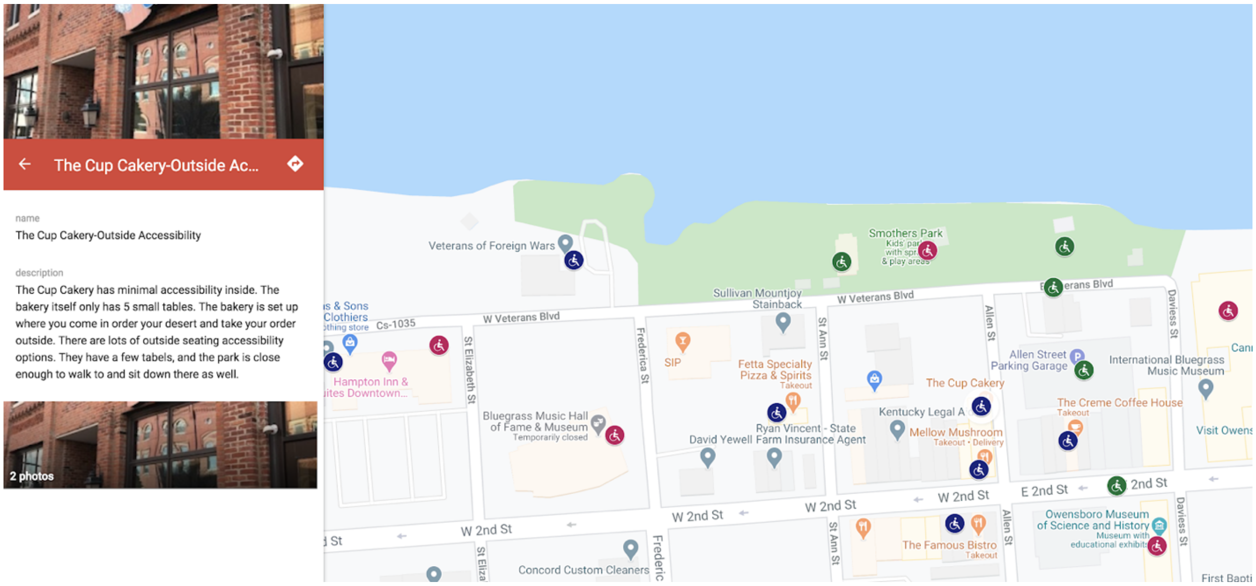

Figure 2. Emmett's description of accessibility features and limitations of one site on the map.

For each site, Micah wrote a description of the types of birds one might see, highlighted birding events or special features of each site, and provided a link underneath the descriptive paragraph for the audience to follow for more information about the site. Micah's reflection noted how much research went into these descriptions, from finding and verifying information to determining which birds were likely to be found in each habitat. Much of that research became invisible with the decision to include just one link, but it was a strategic decision to guide audience access to information.

Assessment and Student Reflections

While I regularly have students reflect on their work, reflection is especially important for this assignment since students are learning new concepts, practices, and genre conventions as they develop their cartographic literacy. My assessment of this assignment prioritizes evidence that students thoughtfully participated in rhetorical processes of composition as demonstrated through their reflections about their audience, purpose and key decisions made during drafting and revision.[6] The reflection portion of the assignment also asks students to briefly answer several questions to explain the decisions they have made during the map composition process, articulate how they see maps differently as a result of creating a map and identify other problems that maps could address to help them see applications of cartographic literacy to issues beyond our class.

For Emmett, the map they created was in response to an official visitor map that gave no indication of wheelchair accessibility, even though the downtown area incorporated many accessible features, including a playground specifically designed for wheelchair accessibility. Emmett concluded that accessibility "is missing from most maps and should be something that is normal to include." In thinking about the social function of maps and their lack of inclusion of disability, Emmett's reflection shows development of cartographic literacy beyond just what is shown on a map: "We are often taught to think about the author's bias when reading a historical text. We try to keep in mind whose side they were on, where the individual was from, what was going on in the world, and so on, but with a map it does not occur to us because most people do not view a map as a text. [...] Basically, how does the cartographer's bias affect the map?"

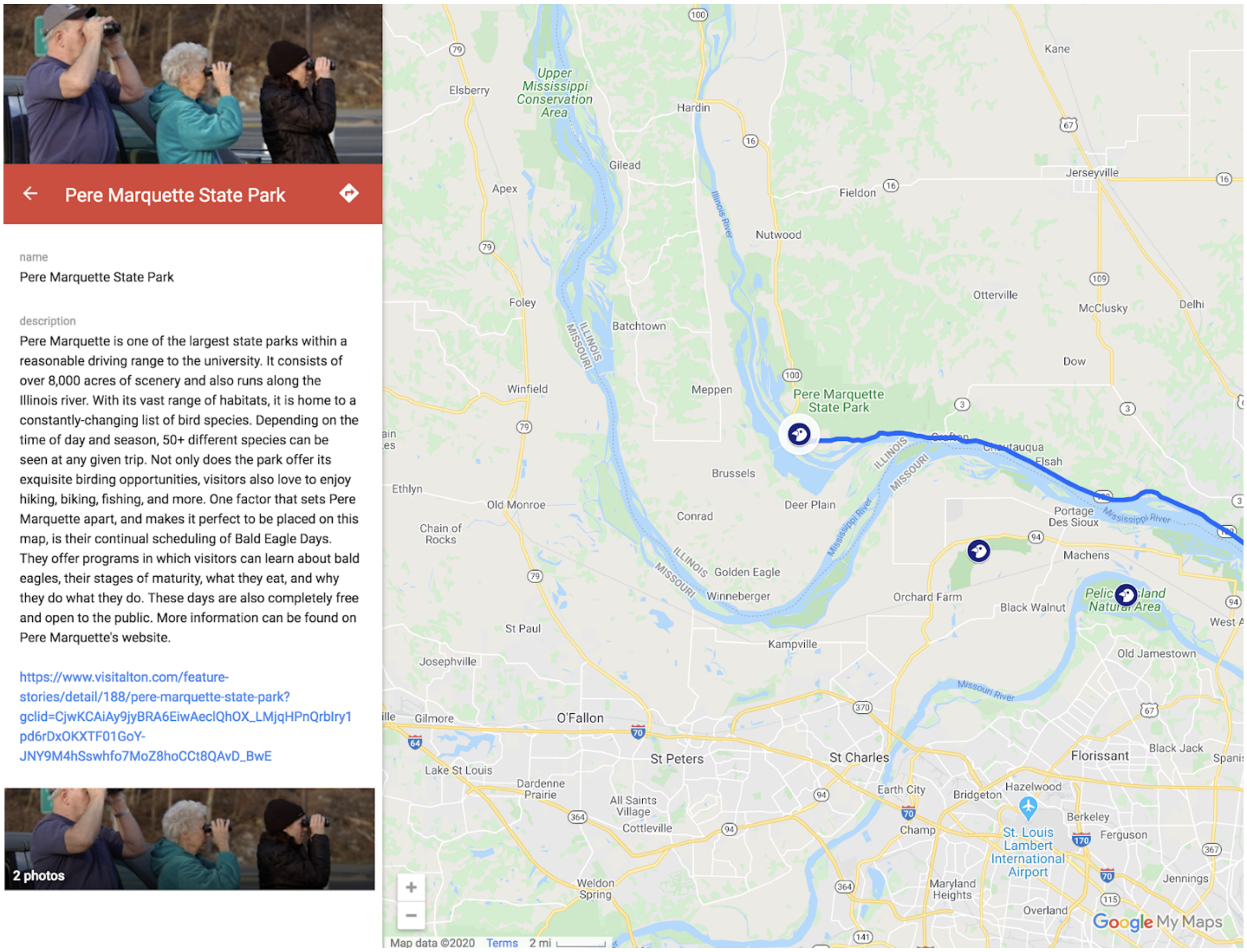

Figure 3. Partial view of Micah's birding sites, including description written by Micah, a link to one of her research sources, and an image of the site pulled from Google.

As an outdoor enthusiast, Micah had more familiarity with maps than some students. Still, her reflection noted, "I personally only considered maps as a way to investigate location, topography, and things of that sort. [...] It is extremely rare that one views a map and is skeptical of its truth. As long as it is well made and backed by a reputable source, we almost always trust its information." She continued, "Whereas it is important to view maps for their factual evidence regarding location and landscape, it is also important to view them through their social construct." While it is clear that students are working with unfamiliar terminology to describe their developing cartographic literacy, the reflections also show moments that point toward critical literacies in comments about biases, social contexts, and missing information.

Limitations

Micah said one most challenging parts of the assignment was selecting an icon for each location, noting "the only bird icon I found greatly resembled a chicken."[7] The tension between surface considerations of mapping (chicken icons) and deep ideological factors affecting mapping will always be present in an assignment like this that introduces a new genre while also moving students toward critical consideration of that genre. No single assignment about maps will result in a nuanced understanding of the ways maps have been used to oppress or the possibilities for their use in resisting oppression. A single assignment can be a first step, but the extent

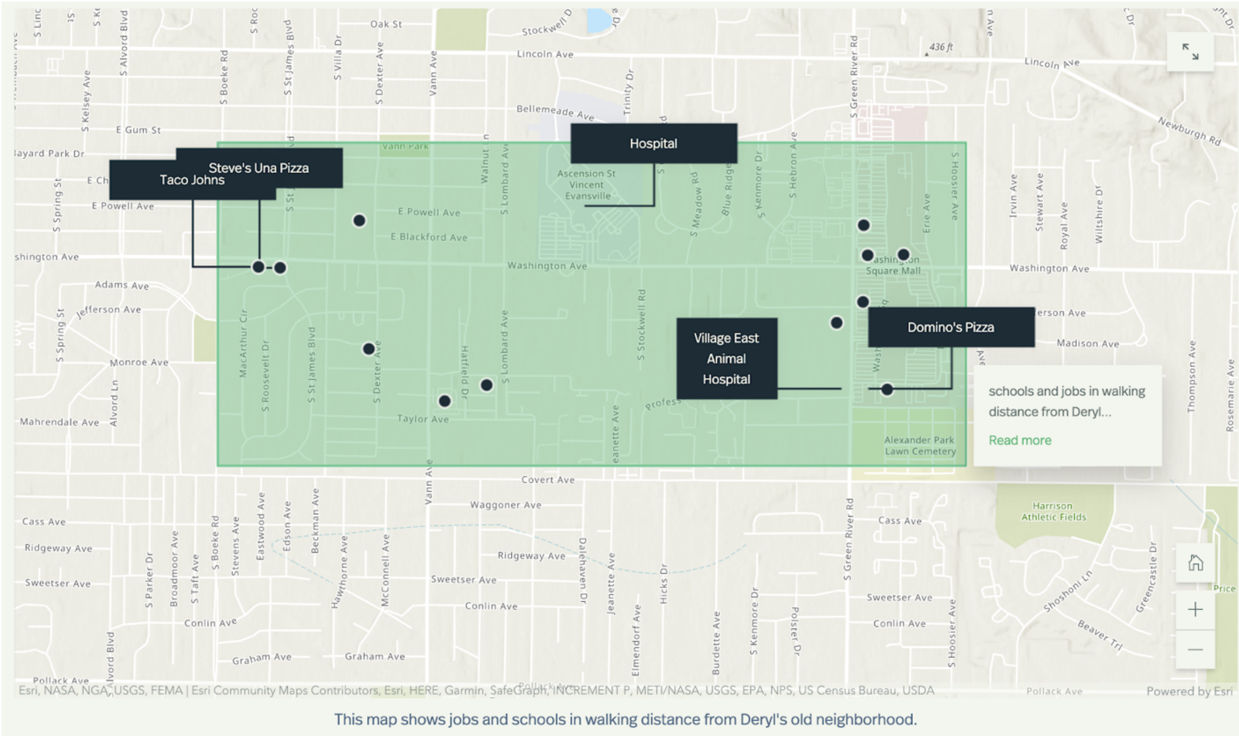

Figure 4. Map created by Caden to show jobs in a neighborhood.

to which it promotes critical literacy depends on how it is contextualized within the class. Integration with other course content and addition of scaffolded assignments leading to (or from) the creation of a map, for example, can result in greater engagement with the contexts and complexities of maps, leading to greater development of critical cartographic literacy.

Adaptations

With these limitations in mind, what follows is an exploration of possible adaptations of this assignment, including map composition as part of larger assignments and perspectives from cultural rhetorics that can be supported by this assignment.

Inclusion of a Map Composition as part of a larger assignment is particularly useful for multi-major writing across the curriculum courses where maps can be used to support a broad range of assignment types. As one example, I adapted this assignment to a technical writing course in which students write a proposal for community-focused change using ArcGIS StoryMaps, a web-based tool that allows users to create maps alongside text, images, and other forms of media. In support of a proposal to improve public transportation, one student in the class interviewed a local resident and created a map showing that jobs within easy walking distance were either low-paying fast-food jobs or jobs that required highly specialized skills (Figure 4). Caden used this map in conjunction with information about higher paying jobs in other parts of the city to argue for improved public transit. In Caden's words, "The point of the map is to show people that either public transportation needs to be improved to take people across the city for better jobs, or that the neighborhood needs to be improved so that businesses will feel safe opening up there."

While Google My Maps can facilitate assignments that focus on description of individual points on a map, ArcGIS StoryMaps could be used to develop students' mapping skills alongside other forms of composition or when description of patterns, rather than of individual points, is more appropriate to the context of the course, as is the case with Caden's example.[8]

The Map Composition assignment also has applications to collaboration and service-learning projects. Hurley (2018) notes that "cultivating a critical spatial consciousness can be potentially transformative for our students when viewed as a spatial practice that can build coalitions across disciplinary domains in order to intervene in various forms of oppression" (p. 98). I found this to be the case in another technical writing class where students combined their disciplinary expertise in psychology, health, English, and computing to create documents to facilitate better disability access on campus (Santee, 2020). In that case, students created a guide for disabled campus visitors, but I am planning a future iteration of the assignment that will result in a proposal to campus leadership that maps problematic points of access (e.g., restroom access) and argues for change. In other service-learning applications, students could participate in community asset mapping, design maps of safe routes to schools or community services, or create a map that identifies problems and proposes community improvements.

Finally, the ease with which maps can now be created from several different sources of knowledge makes them a particularly useful assignment in support of cultural rhetorics pedagogies. The emphasis on collective knowledge and coalition in cultural rhetorics makes application of this assignment well suited to community-based projects that foreground experiential and embodied forms of knowledge.[9] Walton et al. (2019) note that marginalized communities are often left out of meaning-making since "their knowledge is not valued and does not align with more privileged forms of knowledge making" (p. 93). Maps are a prime example of a genre where lived experience and storytelling, for example, are not often valued, but a Map Composition assignment creates possibilities for visualizing these forms of knowledge, whether through mapping community assets, mapping patterns or sites that reveal injustices (such as disproportionate environmental impacts on communities of color) or envisioning better futures.[10]

Certain approaches to this assignment might also address injustices of settler-colonialism through making visible both historical and modern oppressions or integrating oral histories and other Indigenous ways of knowing using map technologies that facilitate such integration. Students might expand their understanding of Indigenous mapping traditions (Lucchesi, 2018), read Eichberger's (2019) comparative analysis of maps used in the Standing Rock conflict, or examine how part of a class project on environmental justice incorporated Indigenous stories and naming conventions (Butts & Jones, 2021). They might also heed Johnson et al. (2005) in their cautions to Indigenous communities about how maps and GIS can decontextualize Indigenous knowledge in ways that harm and perpetuate colonialism or employ McGurk and Caquard's (2020) methodology for identifying decolonial elements of collaborative mapping projects between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners.

Conclusion

This Map Composition assignment, then, opens possibilities for students to compose in ways that support development of a broad set of literacies. Haas argues that "rhetoric is always already cultural, although some rhetorics pretend not to be" (Cobos et al., 2018, p. 145). So too are maps always already rhetorical, though some pretend not to be, and it must be recognized that they can reinscribe and support oppressive structures and systems. In each application of an assignment like this, the instructor must guide students toward socially just map composition practices. With mapping possibilities in nearly every field of study, from linguistics to botany to business, this flexible Map Composition assignment can facilitate cartographic literacy, helping students understand the rhetorical possibilities of map compositions as they develop effective composing practices while becoming more critical consumers and creators of a type of text that they will see and use well beyond their university studies.

ASSIGNMENT

Map Composition Assignment

Purpose

Maps combine the visual, spatial, and linguistic modes of communication. While they most visibly help us get from Point A to Point B, our readings have also shown that they can inform and persuade, enable better decision-making, and help people see complex information in new ways. But we've also seen that they can reinforce oppressive social structures and marginalize people and their perspectives. In other words, they are a powerful tool of communication that can be used for many purposes. Learning to make a map yourself will help you better understand the decisions made by map-makers so you can learn to read and use maps more critically, question their perspectives, see the values that inform their content, and learn to counteract their influences when they are used to silence or oppress certain viewpoints.

For this assignment, you will learn to make a map that is intended to help solve a problem you identify or improve the lives of people in a particular location. This semester, we're focused on multimodal writing that promotes action, advocacy, and social change. So through this assignment, you'll be creating a map that has action, advocacy, or social change as its goal. Now, just as no single piece of writing can solve a complex problem, neither can a single map. But just like a single piece of writing can *contribute* to solving a problem, so too can a map. So you should see your map as a step toward solving the problem you identify.

Tasks

As with more traditional writing assignments, you'll complete a series of tasks that will help you move through the assignment. While these tasks are numbered, they are not necessarily linear. You may find yourself moving back and forth among the tasks as you work toward completing the assignment, and your exact process will look different than someone else's based on your own knowledge, strategies, and approaches to the assignment.

1. ***Identify the problem you want to address through creation of a map***

   I recommend that you choose something localized or personal to you here so you can effectively compose the map yourself. Your personal observations, perspectives and lived experiences are valid forms of knowledge that can be mapped. Creating a map that draws on those observations will allow you to make that knowledge visible to others.

   I also recommend that if an idea isn't immediately coming to mind, spend some time thinking spatially about things you're already interested in and care about. Or consider ways you could use prior research to create a map. See below for some ideas.

2. ***Brainstorm and research***

   Before you select a specific mapping approach or technology, spend some time brainstorming what you could put on your map, what the map might look like, and in what context people might use your map.

   Conduct preliminary research on the problem and location you've identified, and seek out maps on similar topics to use as inspiration and to help you see what's possible in map-making.

3. ***Determine the technology you'll use and begin creating a draft of your map.***

You may choose to create a map using map-specific software or other tools.

- Digital map: Lectures in this unit will introduce you to two digital mapping technologies: Google My Maps and ArcGIS StoryMaps. Each technology has different strengths and affordances, so spend some time exploring the examples and tutorials posted in Blackboard before making a decision about which map software to use.
- Creative map (digital or analogue): You may choose to create a map using any creative skills and approaches at your disposal (painting, collage, etc.). See the links in Blackboard for examples and inspiration.

Determine the affordances and limitations of your chosen map technology and determine how to use the affordances to your advantage and address or work around the limitations. (I'll help you identify and investigate these in feedback sessions, too.)

4. ***Get feedback.***

This unit includes both peer and instructor feedback on drafts.

5. ***Revise, answer the Reflection Questions below, and submit!***

Possible Topics

I list possible topics or problems here to help you recognize the many ways that maps could be used to address problems. Use this list as inspiration for your own ideas. And if you're stuck, email me so we can brainstorm together!

Healthcare Inequities

- A map proposing locations for installation of outdoor exercise equipment in parks, walking paths, or other health-promoting features
- A map of trans-friendly health providers with contact information
- A map of free and income-based health services and nearby public transportation options for accessing those services

Disability Access

- A map showing accessible and inaccessible locations (entrances, restrooms, etc.) on campus or in another location to help visitors
- A map proposing changes to accessibility on campus or in another location to promote infrastructure changes

Mental Health

- A map that compares access to mental health resources in rural vs. urban areas or wealthy vs. poorer areas to promote more access in underserved areas

Racial Injustice

- A map that documents how systemic racial inequities have impacted Covid-19's spread (see Mapping racial inequity amid COVID-19 underscores policy discriminations against Black Americans)

- A map of Black-owned businesses in an area
- A map showing the history of racial discrimination in housing (see Mapping Prejudice: Visualizing the hidden histories of race and privilege in the built environment)

Student Life

- A map showing key services and transportation options near campus to help new international students transition to the university
- A map showing nearby outdoor recreation opportunities (camping, hiking, etc.) to promote physical and mental health

Science Education

- A map of birdwatching locations that provides descriptions of species that are likely to be seen at each location
- A map of the environmental impacts of a disaster on the people, plants, and animals impacted by the disaster
- A map of a local park to help children learn about plants, animals, and other natural features
- A map that shows inequitable exposure to environmental contaminants for communities of color (see How Data Can Map and Make Racial Inequality More Visible)

Reflection Questions

After you complete your map, you'll answer several reflection questions to help make your process and decisions visible and to think about how you might apply what you've learned about maps beyond this class.

In your reflection, answer all of the following questions.

1. How do you see your map contributing to solving the problem you address in your map? Who might your map help, and what other types of documents and/or actions could accompany the map to help it contribute to solving the problem?
2. What does your map allow you to communicate that you might not be able to communicate as effectively using other modes of communication?
3. What key decisions did you make during the process of composing your map? How did those decisions impact your map?
4. What is the most important revision you made after receiving feedback? Why did you make the revision, and how did it improve your map?
5. Given additional time, knowledge, or technical resources, how would you improve your map?
6. In our daily lives, we most often use maps to get from Point A to Point B. However, now that you've made at least one map, how might you think about maps differently in the future?
7. What other kinds of problems within your major or intended profession might be addressed using maps? Identify at least two problems and explain how maps could be used to communicate about those problems. For ideas, consider what problems people in your major try to solve to improve people's lives and how those problems are tied to specific locations.

Notes

[1] While students have the option of composing a map in a creative format, such as a piece of cartographic art, most choose the Google My Maps option, so I will focus on that here, particularly since that option has more immediate applications to WAC classes. Allowing space for more creative forms, though, supports map compositions that resist totalizing views of place that too often erase minoritized perspectives.

[2] I also introduce students to representations of spatial communication that are not maps, including the historical *Negro Motorist Green Book* (Green, 1947) and the contemporary travel section of OUT Magazine for LGBTQ+ travelers to acquaint students to civic applications of spatial thinking.

[3] See Herwig (2020) for a gallery of Covid-related Google maps that can also serve as examples.

[4] While I do not require students to use Google My Maps, the tool requires limited knowledge to get started and is less intimidating to new map-makers than some other options, which is why I focus on it here.

[5] Students have given consent for the use of their work but are referred to by pseudonyms.

[6] See Shipka (2011) for more information on assessing multimodal compositions.

[7] The icon search function for Google My Maps is somewhat limited, but thankfully, we were able to find a less chicken-like bird for her icons during a feedback session. Custom icons can also be added.

[8] See also Craig (2020) for a published ArcGIS StoryMap foregrounding white supremacy at Auburn University and Burd (2020) for an application of ArcGIS in History courses.

[9] I introduce cultural rhetorics while recognizing effective engagement with any cultural rhetoric practice, including map making, must be thoroughly contextualized by the instructor, embedded in localized knowledge, and grounded in theories and practices of ethical engagement.

[10] Drawing from Patricia Hill Collins' tenets of Black feminist epistemology, Moore (2018) provides an example of how lived experience can be mapped as part of community engagement projects in technical writing. Additionally, O'Brien's (2020) use of critical mapping practices to create a counter-narrative to dominant tourism narratives that erased Black history in a small South Carolina town points toward mapmaking possibilities that counteract dominant narratives and value inclusivity of voices.

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.v6i2.95.

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Breaking into Print
The Book Review Genre in an Introductory Graduate Seminar in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies

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Abstract
This assignment aims to help nascent scholars break into print and develop scholarly connections between their own areas of interest and the subfield of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies (RC&WS). Drawing on advice from Ballif et al. (2008), students in my graduate seminar write a publication quality book review of a recently published monograph in RC&WS. After a series of priming activities, students engage in a structured peer review that follows guidelines I developed as book review editor at *Composition Studies*.

As decades of scholarship on graduate assistant preparation makes clear, the introductory seminar in rhetoric, composition and writing studies (RC&WS) is often a contested space (Dobrin, 2005; Grouling, 2015; Pemberton, 1993; Pytlik & Liggett, 2002; Reid et al., 2012; Taylor & Holberg, 1999). Such seminars ensure that new teachers of college-level writing have sufficient knowledge of the histories and theories that inform the discipline, but many graduate students in English have never themselves taken introductory writing—let alone a course on writing theory—and some begrudge having to take coursework that is not strictly connected to their scholarly concentrations in literary studies, creative writing, or other subdisciplines in English. While disciplinary hierarchies vary by institution, RC&WS has historically occupied a marginalized space in many English departments, as the field is typically associated with general education instruction rather than with scholarship and creative activity (Dobrin, 2011). At my own institution, the University of Wyoming, for example, RC&WS is growing in popularity, but is still the smallest concentration in our graduate programs. When you acknowledge many students' lack of familiarity with RC&WS, it is no accident that some find the seminar uncomfortable territory. From my perspective, the scholarly book review assignment helps to ease at least some of these tensions, prompting students to make connections between their areas of concentration and RC&WS and to gain a better understanding of their own identity in the larger field of English.

In addition to helping students gain knowledge about disciplinary divisions and RC&WS, this assignment is also inspired by my desire to teach the rhetorical moves that get reviews published. Although this may feel too utilitarian a goal for some, it is one of the stated learning outcomes in our graduate program, and something I take seriously as a former book review editor for *Composition Studies*. Although the journal regularly publishes reviews by established scholars, one of its missions is likewise to take "an active role in mentoring advanced graduate students" (Micciche, 2018). Regarding the larger field, I also see the book review as an excellent genre for graduate courses because, as others have noted, the discipline benefits from the service novice scholars provide through writing book reviews (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 38). While not all disciplines may have these attitudes about graduate students publishing book reviews, my suspicion is that the assignment will translate to many fields, and perhaps particularly to those that value book production. And for those who may question the ethics of encouraging non-experts to review scholarly work, I leave concerns about the quality and content of graduate students' reviews up to the editors who may—or may not—publish their work.

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As I elaborate below, following Ballif et al. (2008) and Erwin (1996), the book review assignment requires students to make an argument about the book's success in accomplishing its aims; gives a summary of its contents; and identifies who will (and perhaps will not) benefit from reading the book. Given my experience as an editor, I likewise coach students that the strongest book reviews often also employ an evaluative thesis, outline the intellectual tradition the author is building upon, and provide readers constructive commentary on the book's strengths and limitations.

Course Overview and Assignment Priming Activities

In the English Department at the University of Wyoming, teaching assistants are required to take ENGL 5010: Rhetoric and Composition History, Theory, and Pedagogy during their first semester in the graduate program. While we also offer a one-hour weekly practicum on the nuts and bolts of lesson planning and responding to student writing, by contrast, ENGL 5010 focuses on the scholarly traditions that inform contemporary writing studies. I've been teaching the course for well over a decade, and over the years the seminar's core readings have included two or three disciplinary histories (Berlin, 2003; Goggin, 2010; Harris, 2012; Hawk, 2007; Miller, 1991; Ruiz, 2016); anthologized journal articles (Miller, 2009; Roen et al., 2002; Villanueva & Arola, 2011); and pedagogically focused guides (Bean, 2011; Inoue, 2015; Milner & Milner, 2007). So, while there is a decided focus on pedagogy in the course, unlike a traditional practicum that focuses on classroom routines, the seminar is scholarly at its core. In keeping, the book review assignment seeks to teach students scholarly conventions in English studies in general, and RC&WS in particular.

We begin talking about the book review early in the semester. Prior to drafting, students have read a few foundational articles in the field and finished one or sometimes two disciplinary histories. Before reading the historical monographs, however, I have them interrogate published reviews of these histories for several reasons: to pique their curiosity in the book, to provide a bit of a context for its aims, and to help students begin internalizing the book review genre's conventions. For example, if we're reading Berlin's *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* (2003), I have them read reviews by Clifford (1997), Reber (1997), and Whitaker (1997); if we're reading Harris's *A Teaching Subject* (2012), they read reviews by Clark (2013), Cooper (2000), and Reynolds (1997).

Our discussion of the sample reviews is informal and non-directive. I ask students to predict what they will like about and struggle with in the book, and I prompt them to voice their general opinion of the reviews we've read. I then put students in small groups to produce a reverse outline of one of the reviews, which is simply the production of an outline of a piece that is already written. A common exercise featured in writing textbooks (Behrens & Rosen, 2011, p. 147; Murray, 2013, p. 125) the reverse outline asks students to describe the focus of each paragraph in the review, followed by a comment on how the paragraph functions to advance the writer's thesis. Each group is given a different review to reverse outline, and then the class as a whole contrasts how the outlines represent structures they might adopt or adapt in their review.

At this point, students are ready to choose a recently published book in RC&WS. I note that they should examine the venue where they hope to get published and pick a title that has not yet been reviewed in that journal. Then I point them to the field's prominent presses, and students usually find choosing their book easy, though occasionally they need assistance finding a book that is in conversation with their subfield. Because students tend to gravitate toward scholarship outside of RC&WS, they must submit their title for my approval, and I note that if they are serious about getting the review published, the book should be no more than four years old. Occasionally a student will request to review a classic in the field that is far older, something that piques their interest or speaks very specifically to their subfield. If the title is in RC&WS, I agree to the request.

Before they begin drafting, we read the assignment prompt aloud (see below). This is useful in eliciting questions about the assignment and models how our program asks graduate assistants to introduce assignments in the introductory writing classes they teach. In fact, the prompt follows a similar structure as the assignments that graduate assistants use in their first-year writing courses: it includes a description of content requirements, an overview of audience expectations, and guidelines for structure and formatting.

During the same class period, I also have students read a book review of my own (Kinney, 2009), which evaluates *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, a professional primer that aims to coach future and current faculty through various watersheds in their careers, including how to write a book review (Ballif et al., 2008). As a form of direct instruction, I point out that my review deliberately follows the authors' advice: it summarizes the book's major sections and evaluates its effectiveness, in addition to outlining the intellectual tradition the book situates itself within. I also point out how my review gently critiques the book without lambasting it. Because offering constructive criticism is an area that students struggle with, I caution them that they should be evenhanded with any criticism they wage, perhaps even acknowledging alongside their criticism their position as a graduate student just entering the discipline. As the authors warn, "Any time you write a book review, but especially at this particularly vulnerable time in your career building, you will want to demonstrate a certain level of collegiality and respect for the work of your future peers and colleagues" (p. 38).

The following week, students bring in a complete draft to class, and I place them in groups to engage in structured peer review based on common forms of feedback I gave as a book review editor. During class time, students read each other's reviews, answer the questions from the peer review prompt (see below), and talk through their responses. We end with a full class discussion where students ask clarifying questions and I share editorial anecdotes, and I often point to additional published reviews that might serve as models for how to revise their drafts.[1]

Given the tips we've shared, students then revise a final draft for a grade. Typically, their final products are strong, though there are common struggles they face, and I address these in the peer review section of the assignment prompt. Developing an evaluative thesis is a challenge for some, which is predictable given their novice status in the field. Similarly, many struggle with developing the intellectual tradition section of the review: again, the course is often their first introduction to writing studies and most don't have a command of the field's foundations.

Regarding general challenges in framing criticism, which I address in more detail below, many have problems mustering any criticism at all, while others have the opposite problem—they pan the book, for instance, because they find it "uninteresting." I generally read this as code for "non-literary" or "lacking a creative aesthetic," two common criticisms waged by students in literary studies and creative writing. Given their traditional humanistic training, another misstep I see repeated in graduate students' criticism of scholarship in RC&WS is that the book's findings are not statistically significant, which I attribute to their lack of familiarity with the range of social scientific methodologies. Just as a political scientist trained primarily in quantitative methods may not be conversant with a range of qualitative methodologies, humanists primarily trained in close reading aren't largely familiar with the mixed methods research employed in RC&WS.

Finally, another challenge students face is staying within word count expectations, and this is particularly the case if they choose to review an edited collection with multiple contributors. Normally my advice is that less is more, and that whether they are reviewing a monograph or a collection, it is better to focus the review on book sections rather than comprehensively address every chapter, pointing instead to specific chapters that illustrate representative strengths or limitations of the book as a whole. Although I restrict my students to reviewing traditional scholarly monographs, I can imagine that students who review multimedia scholarship might face similar challenges.

More often than not, because of the thorough peer review they have already engaged in, rather than having to offer feedback on predictable flaws, I am able to focus my comments on ways to strengthen already strong reviews should students submit them for publication. To illustrate their success, below I showcase ways that several students overcame common missteps in their published book reviews.

Responses to the Assignment: The Rhetorical Moves that Successful Book Reviews Make

One of the real pleasures of teaching this assignment is that students who take it seriously have a very good chance of getting their work published. Their success also illustrates the ways that the assignment motivates students in concentrations outside of writing studies to genuinely engage in the field: with any luck, the assignment helps them to see RC&WS not as something distinct from their graduate work, but as a line of inquiry integral to their identity as scholars in the field of English studies, broadly conceived.

Designing an Evaluative Thesis

An MFA candidate in creative writing when she wrote her review, former student Annie Osburn typifies how to write a well-designed and explicitly evaluative thesis. Osburn (2017) begins her piece by framing the research questions that drive her interest in the book, and then develops a thesis that clearly names the reasons the collection is successful:

> How can we create a public space for exploring tensions between communities and discourses in lockdown? How can we create ethical prison writing programs that foremost benefit writers? For me as a reader, Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Standford's edited collection *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out* is successful because it develops a flexible framework educators can use to answer these tough questions. (p. 264)

For me, this thesis is strong because it establishes a clear argument for why the book is worth reading. In a move reminiscent of advice offered by Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008, p. 116), Osburn then uses succeeding paragraphs to name reasons to support this claim. I also appreciate how in her review as a whole, rather than trying to project what a reader in RC&WS would gain from the book, Osburn allows her interest in creative writing to frame her review.

Former doctoral student Rick Fisher likewise uses his scholarly interests to establish why the book that he reviews—Eodice, Geller, and Learner's *The Meaningful Writing Project* (2016)—is successful. As Fisher (2017) argues:

> I am drawn to the book's claim that meaningful writing is often related to an instructor's balance between choice and restriction, to its brief comparison of the author's results to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and to the fascinating, small set of student participants who completed the survey primarily to say that they had never completed a meaningful writing project. As I think about how to engage colleagues across the curriculum in discussions about the kinds of writing projects they assign, these moments in the text seem likely to promote rich discussion. (p. 246)

One of the things I like most about this thesis is that it highlights what less experienced readers may see as a weakness—that is, the "brief comparison" of the NSSE and student data sets—and instead points to this as one of the book's qualitative strengths. Such methodological subtlety is often hard for less experienced students to see, but as an advanced doctoral candidate in RC&WS when he wrote the review, Fisher had the disciplinary knowledge to make the argument.

Framing the Intellectual Tradition

Beyond the evaluative thesis, my editorial preference is also for reviewers to spend at least some time unpacking the book's intellectual tradition. This is crucial, it seems to me, in helping the reader establish whether the book (let alone the review) is worth their time to read. But as I've already noted, being able to place a book in an intellectual traditional is a challenge for novice graduate students. With this in mind, I note to students that there are at least three ways to frame a book's intellectual tradition: 1) mine its preface and introduction; 2) use the scholarship we have read in our class; and 3) draw on their own knowledge of the area under study.

The first of these moves is usually the most effective, and it is something that one of my master's students specializing in RC&WS, Kailyn Washakie, employs well. In her review of Borgman and McArdle's *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic* (2019), Washakie (2021) notes how the authors draw on a range of scholarship on online instruction, including the CCCC position statement on "Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction" (2013), and scholarship by Hewett et al. (2015) and Ruefman and Scheg (2016). All of these titles, predictably enough, are featured in the book's introduction. As I coach students, the intellectual tradition section does not have to be exhaustive, but it is necessary to situate the book's disciplinary contributions.

Former students Justin Neven and Brianna Casey help to illustrate moves two and three. Neven (2015), who was a doctoral student in literature when he wrote his review, cites two historical texts that we read in our seminar—Berlin (2003) and Hawk (2007)—to help him frame the scholarly contributions that Kroll makes in *The Open Hand* (2013). By contrast, former MA student in literature Casey (2018) draws on her knowledge of GLBTQ history to frame her review of Dunn's *Queerly Remembered: Rhetorics for Representing the GLBTQ Past* (2016).

Offering Constructive Criticism

A final move I'll highlight in my students' published work is the way they frame criticism of the books they interrogate. For me as an editor, a good review offers at least some critique, even if it is only to point out the book's limitations in scope. Here I turn to former MA students Raquel Corona and Nolan Goetzinger. Corona, who recently finished her doctorate in RC&WS at St. John's University, doesn't so much critique the book she reviews—Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* (2015)—as describe how classmates reacted to it. As Corona (2016) notes, "I have to attest to the concerns some of my classmates had with Inoue's pedagogy. Perhaps predictably, the racial makeup of our seminar was overwhelmingly white, including high school teachers and college instructors of literature and composition" (p. 218). Here Corona hints at some readers' criticism yet makes clear that she does not hold the same attitudes. In a slightly different vein, now in the doctoral program in literature at UC Riverside, Goetzinger (2017) notes what he had hoped to find but didn't in *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story* (King et al., 2015): "I would have liked to have seen more chapters that were specifically applicable to first-year writing," however, as he emphasizes, "such a critique would miss the democratizing impulse of the authors because the essays provide new, socially aware, and responsible questions" for classrooms beyond first-year writing (p. 214).

While not all students are as successful at designing evaluative theses, unpacking a book's intellectual tradition, or tactfully framing their criticism, the rhetorical acumen Osburn, Fisher, Washakie, Neven, Casey, Corona, and Goetzinger illustrate demonstrates how the book review assignment helps graduate students negotiate publication expectations and their burgeoning scholarly identity in English. To make a few more disciplinary comparisons: just as an economist with orthodox inclinations would stand to learn from reviewing scholarship that has more heterodox leanings[2]—or a microbiologist may benefit from interrogating macrobiological frameworks—graduate students in any discipline do well to climb out of their silos and juxtapose their disciplinary identities with disparate scholars in their field.

Limits, Successes, and Future Applications

Given the high caliber of the book reviews students turn in, I am always surprised that more don't submit for publication. I chalk this up to the busy workload of graduate student life, and perhaps also to the fact that some may wonder if a review of a book outside their area of concentration is worth their effort. When questioned along these lines by students, I typically make two arguments. First, while your area of concentration may not be RC&WS, virtually everyone in English will be called upon to teach writing-intensive courses; thus, future RC&WS colleagues will see your interest in the scholarship of their field as testament to your knowledge of and qualification to teach within it. Second, to rephrase a point already made, engaging a related subfield makes you better aware of your own intellectual identity: it helps you see both commonalities and differences among subfields' methodologies, conventions, and values.

One of the limits of the assignment may relate to the larger profession and the book author's reputation within it. As a reader of an earlier draft of this piece pointed out, while a book review publication is certainly beneficial to the graduate student reviewer, is it really of value to the book's author, particularly if the student is only passing through the discipline? More to the point, would a favorable graduate student review count the same for the book's author in a promotion case as one written by an experienced member of the field? Probably not. So, while fields like RC&WS may see graduate student publication mentoring as intrinsically valuable, faculty in other disciplines will want to consider such questions and gauge their answers according to the standards and ethics of their specific fields.

Another question also remains: to what degree would this assignment be valuable to disciplines in the sciences and professions—that is, disciplines that do not value the monograph in the same ways that the humanities and many social sciences so? I think the answer to this question must also be addressed on a discipline-specific basis, though I could certainly see how following some of the conventions outlined in the book review assignment could be applied to a similar assignment genre, namely the review article. For example, my assignment could be modified according to guidelines established by Crawford (2011), who offers tips on writing review articles for the hard sciences. In order to establish the guidelines for the assignment appropriate to a particular disciplinary community, I recommend locating scholarship in the field akin to Crawford's, as well as examining recently published genres similar to a review, and then performing the same reverse outlining activity my graduate students complete in ENGL 5010.

Disciplinary limitations acknowledged, it seems clear that the publishing success of my students is testament to the assignment's promise. Whether your field lies within the humanities, social sciences, sciences, or professions, if one of the missions of graduate education is to help students learn the rhetorical moves required for publication, then I argue it is vital that all fields—regardless of research division—embed publishable genres into their graduate courses.

As I have tried to gesture throughout this essay, getting to know the expanses and boundaries of a larger discipline requires students to critically examine the conventions of related subdisciplines. This is certainly true of the subdisciplines within the eclectic field of English and—it seems to me—would likewise stand to reason in a range of disciplines. In my experiences teaching the book review assignment, students learn valuable lessons about disciplinary conventions and by extension their scholarly identities, not to mention their subdiscipline's place in the larger field where it resides. I hope this essay helps readers across the disciplines think of productive ways to assign similar genres in their graduate programs.

ASSIGNMENT

Book Review in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies

Assignment Overview

Write a ~1,500-word book review of a single title of interest to you in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. Although the title you examine must be published in this explicit discipline, I encourage you to a find book that speaks to your graduate concentration or potential future professional interests. Generally, publishable reviews examine a monograph published in the last four years.

Writing a review of a recent book in writing studies aids you in learning the scholarly conventions required of publication as well as learning more about an important subfield in English Studies: you will have an opportunity to send your review out for publication, and through the process, learn more about the field and research within it.

To find a title, take a look at the websites of some influential scholarly presses in the field:

- CCCC Studies in Writing and Rhetoric
- Parlor Press, Writing Program Administration Series
- Southern Illinois University Press, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms and Series
- Utah State University Press
- WAC Clearinghouse/Colorado State University Open Press (free book downloads here)

Content

Regardless of where you hope to publish, it is important to remember that the purpose of a book review is to summarize the book's contents and educate readers on whether the book is worth their time and suits their research interests. Identify the author's purposes for writing and then develop a thesis that evaluates whether the book was successful fulfilling these aims.

Audience

You should be writing for scholars who are somewhat familiar with the field, but who have most likely not read the book. I also encourage you to write the review with a specific publication in mind. Academic journals such as *Composition Forum*, *Composition Studies*, *Enculturation*, and *Present Tense* are excellent venues for newcomers. Take a close look at the guidelines for the journal you will target and follow them carefully.

Structure and Formatting

To help you understand a review's conventional structure, take a look at a few published reviews in your target journal. While different journals will have a range of conventions, in general your review should have an **evaluative thesis**, give context about the book's **intellectual tradition**, develop a **general summary** of its major sections, and offer an **examination of its strengths and limitations**. Note: constructive criticism is a staple of most book reviews, but it is commonly considered poor form to harshly pan a book, particularly if you are new to the field. Don't let the constructive criticism you offer overshadow your explication of the book's value to English Studies.

Book Review Peer Review: Common Feedback from a Book Review Editor

I've developed the guidelines for peer review below from my experience as the Book Review Editor for *Composition Studies*. The questions I list identify common missteps book reviewers make.

Does the review have an evaluative thesis?

Identify the thesis, focusing on the degree it is functioning as an evaluation of the book as a whole. What feedback, if any, do you have to make the thesis evaluative?

Does the review devote a section to the book's intellectual tradition?

Identify the paragraph(s) where the reviewer describes the intellectual tradition. (If the review doesn't, note a place where the writer might include it.) Is the intellectual tradition written so that readers will be able to identify the intervention the book makes?

Does the review suggest constructive criticism or limitations of scope?

While it's unwise to slam a book, most reviews offer at least some discussion of constructive criticism or limitations of scope. Identify the place(s) in the review where you find this kind of commentary, or suggest an appropriate spot to place it. If you have advice (how to tone down harshness or add criticism if it is thin or missing), please note as much.

Does the review accurately gauge the needs of its audience?

One common mistake reviewers make is they don't take into account that readers haven't read the book. As you read the draft, make notes of when the reviewer may be taking liberties about readers' prior knowledge.

Does the review follow a conventional structure?

A review that focuses on a book versus one that focuses on an edited collection will look somewhat different, but in either case, it is the job of the reviewer to give a summary of the book's major sections, pointing to aspects that serve as evidence for the book's successes or limitations.

Looking at the review as a whole, are there ways that it could be more engaging?

The best reviews attempt to teach the reader something about the field beyond what is in the book itself. Identify places where the review is doing this or note ideas for how the review might do so. If you have advice on how to make the review more engaging, note it here.

Now that you've read your peer's review, what questions do you have about your draft?

If you did something differently than your peer, make a note to address during class discussion.

Notes

[1] When I teach the assignment again, I can imagine adding additional priming activities. For starters, because I gain so much from reading the reviews, I might ask students to report what they learned from the book to the rest of the class. I can likewise imagine having students read this article in preparation for the assignment.

[2] I thank my friend and former colleague at SUNY Binghamton, economics professor Andreas D. Pape, for helping me call on the distinction between orthodox and heterodox economics.

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.v6i2.112.

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Meaningful Writing in a Certificate-Program Practicum

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Abstract

This assignment, designed for a graduate certificate program in rhetoric and composition, asks students to create a writing prompt for an audience of their choice and to accompany it with a reflective letter written to a stakeholder of their choice. To prepare, students first read scholarship on college writing assignments: what kinds students perceive as meaningful, what kinds are most typical, and what kinds are encouraged in a writing-across-the-curriculum approach. They then consider what elements of this research they can bring into their own context, both in terms of teaching (via the prompt) and in terms of sharing their learning with a relevant stakeholder (via the reflective letter, usually written to an administrator, a colleague, or a student). By allowing students to expressly connect course content to their own contexts in two genres, this assignment enacts features of the scholarship students read. While personalizing learning is valuable in any context, it is especially so in a graduate certificate program, because this increasingly common site of instruction serves students with diverse educational and professional histories and future goals.

Certificate programs have been on the rise in higher education for the last decade. In the field of English, they are often used to certify high-school teachers to teach college-credit-bearing courses (Malek & Micciche, 2017). The practicum class described in this essay, like other courses in the graduate certificate program at the midwestern university where I teach, has been comprised of high-school teachers, newly graduated BAs, university employees, and part-time faculty with advanced degrees in adjacent fields (e.g., education). The prompt invites the kind of learning Joyce Malek and Laura Micciche (2017) argue is valuable in these kinds of programs: it encourages students to envision classrooms as "sites for research and meaning-making" and to connect their teaching praxis to rhetoric/composition scholarship (p. 92). The prompt asks students to develop a writing assignment and then to write a reflection in the genre of a letter that draws connections between their assignment and our course readings. The reflective letter is written to an audience of the student's choice: an administrator or sponsor, a colleague, or a student. In all, this prompt is valuable because it enacts features of the scholarship students studied in the course (Bean, 2011; Eodice et al., 2016) and enables diverse students to personalize the practicum curriculum.

Context

Indiana University's Online Graduate Certificate in Composition Studies program serves a range of students, all of whom are interested in (or coerced by the state to pursue) additional graduate hours in English, but who are not ready to seek a PhD or may be uninterested in doing so. An analysis of students in two of the practicum classes described in this article (n=26) reveals that 57% of students (n=15) were currently teaching high school and needed graduate hours to teach dual enrollment (DE) or advanced placement (AP) English courses. (Some of these are not exclusively English teachers; see Burdick & Greer [2017], who report that DE teachers often have multiple curricular investments and a broad range of teaching experiences [p. 88-89].) A number of these teachers work as adjunct lecturers in Indiana University's Advance College Project program,

prompt
a journal of academic writing assignments

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which is sponsored by the university and enables high-school students to earn Indiana University credit (see "About Us, Advance College Project, Indiana University," n.d.). The program is designed to coordinate an efficient transition of high school students to public colleges in the state, which Malek and Micciche (2017) emphasize is part of a national trend. Another 19% (n=5) were employees of a university (sometimes Indiana University, sometimes another institution) who were interested in teaching writing part-time or making an intra-institutional career move. Fifteen percent (n=4) were adjuncts teaching in the college setting or were grant-supported employees seeking to professionally develop, while the smallest group, 11% (n=3), were newly minted BAs considering pursuing an MA in English.[1] As these numbers demonstrate, the IU Online program serves a diverse group of students who have unique professional aims and whose application of the course content to their contexts is somewhat unpredictable.

As I considered what these students knew and needed to know about the teaching of writing, I deemed my own experiences in practicum courses irrelevant. Both a student and an assistant-instructor, I focused on the nuts-and-bolts of teaching in my practicum classes, which aligned with the scenario Jessica Restaino (2012) explores in *First Semester.* These practicums were on-the-ground spaces for preparing new teachers for a specific institutional context. At Indiana University Online, however, I was not facing an audience of novice teachers. My typical student was, more often, an experienced secondary teacher with long-established approaches to teaching writing. The voices of experienced teachers dominated the class discussion board, and their expertise was impressive. (See Burdick & Greer [2017] who describe a similar subset of high-school teachers who teach DE courses [p. 89]). How to acknowledge the expertise of these students while also offering something new and strong, something that is, as Micciche and Malek put it, more than "a quick how-to" (2017, p. 92)? And how to make the assignments useful for *all* the students in the class, rather than only for students who were teaching high school?

Rethinking Practicum

As I pondered the above questions, I decided to use scholarship from writing across the curriculum to draw students into a conversation about college-level writing instruction as a shared enterprise that extends across the university, starting with first-year composition.[2] I could imagine my various students (e.g., high school English teacher, academic advisor, adjunct) finding this approach practical and engaging, as it addressed often-posed questions such as "What does writing look like in college?"

The assignment detailed in this essay comes at nearly the mid-point in the term and acts as a culminating activity for our first two modules. During these modules, the class reads selections from *The Meaningful Writing Project*, by Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner (2016); *Assignments Across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing*, by Dan Melzer (2014); *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition and Sites of Writing*, by Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak (2014); and *Engaging Ideas*, by John Bean (2011). Across these texts, readers learn what kind of writing undergraduate students report enjoying, what kind of writing promotes transferring ideas from one context to another, and what kind of writing gives undergraduate students room to direct their own learning. These themes—engagement, transfer, and agency—are communicated so clearly in these texts, as are some essential features of assignment design, such as clear writing expectations, a drafting timeline, transparency regarding evaluation, and well-stated connections between course learning outcomes and the writing task. All of these were very much on my mind as I developed the prompt below. I wanted the students to know what I was looking for, to feel an invigorating combination of freedom and constraint, to make connections across disparate contexts, and to engage their full professional lives in the work we were pursuing together. In other words, I was pursuing what Eodice et al.

(2016) call “meaningful writing” (p. 57).

Seeking Meaningful Writing

Meaningful writing requires student investment. How to show students the connections between our course content and their diverse contexts? The genres of the assignment prompt and the scenario-based reflection solved this problem by inviting students to make the connections themselves.

The assignment prompt allowed students to develop or revise teaching material specific to their own classrooms, or the classrooms they imagined they would inhabit in the future. I made the prompt flexible in terms of intended audience and the number of assignments. (Some students have preferred to create a sequence of two assignments, while others have preferred to focus on one.) I encouraged students to design the prompt for specific classes; in case there was not an easily available curricular context, I offered resources to support a generic FYC context (such as the WPA Outcomes statement). To date I have seen students design excellent prompts for FYC classes, tenth-grade English classes, AP literature classes, adult community writing groups, and others.

Regardless of the curricular context, the conventions of the prompt forced students into some difficult thinking that seems productive considering the course readings: Why *are* their students being asked to do this work? Is the writing process supported through transparent scaffolding? Are the assessment criteria linked to the purposes of the assignment? By emphasizing purpose, process, and alignment, the assignment prompt genre reminded me of a yoga move. It combined freedom and constraint, the qualities that Eodice, Geller, and Lerner emphasize as key to balance in meaningful writing assignments (2016, p. 112).

The reflections, even more than the prompt itself, invited outside actors into the classroom. Students wrote to department colleagues, principals, students, and prospective employers. The tone students used when writing to an imagined audience of their choice is quite different than one they would likely use if they writing to me, demonstrating, as John Bean (2011) puts it, “how variations in the rhetorical context—purpose, audience, genre—can create significant differences in students’ writing and thinking processes” (p. 93). For example, consider this except from a recent student’s reflective letter; he serves as the chair of his English department. He is writing this to his colleagues in the department:

> Over the past 15 years, we have fought the battle of “writing across the curriculum” with other departments. Our last principal was relentless in his expectation that all departments and courses should include some writing. As some of you remember, this was met with great reluctance, but as we modeled what could be learned from having students write in class, more and more teachers saw the benefits of the program and the process . . . . As Melzer suggested and we experienced, the more we encouraged teachers to allow writing to be a tool for deeper learning and examination, the more it was used.

In this passage, the writer vividly recounts a writing across the curriculum initiative that was met with resistance and connects the English department’s response (emphasizing writing to learn) with reading Melzer’s book. Later in the piece, he brings up Melzer again, but this time to push his colleagues to develop assignments that move beyond informational writing, observing that Melzer’s definition of informational writing “unfortunately, sounds like a great deal of the writing we assign.” Changes are necessary, he says, because otherwise “we truly stunt the growth of our students.” Without an assignment that invites an audience-specific reflection, such connections between the writer's professional context and the readings might remain unnoticed or be quickly observed and then forgotten.

For a student in a different situation—she had never taught writing before—the reflective letter provided space to present her newly formed ideas about teaching first-year writing to a prospective employer, the WPA at her local university. She wrote in her introduction: "As I continue through my educational journey to become a composition instructor, I wanted to share this first-year writing assignment I have developed with you. Once I complete this program, my goal is to apply for a position at our university and hope to be considered a good fit for the first-year writing team. Through this letter and assignment, I aim to help you learn more about me and my teaching style." Like the previous example, this student is pressed to make explicit connections between her professional context and course content. Both students have the chance to see their writing as "applicable, relevant, real world" (Eodice et al., 2016, p. 110).

In all, the reflective letter became part of an ongoing conversation about the students' professional development within their unique context, underlining the reality that for our students, like the broader population of DE instructors, that the IU Online certificate program is often one of multiple sources utilized to professionalize (see Burdick & Greer, 2017, p. 91). This alternative reflection invites students, like the undergraduate students in the texts we read, to do more than "gather and report information" (Bean, 2011, p. 93). Instead, by thinking about "purpose, audience, and genre" (p. 93), they engage in higher levels of critical thinking. As students apply the course readings to a specific context, they experience the ideas about assignment design that are communicated in the WAC scholarship we read.

When I originally designed the assignment, I anticipated that students would write the reflection to an imagined audience as a learning exercise. Instead, as I have described here, many students took the opportunity to write to real people and situations in their professional lives, writing, for example, not to a generic "reluctant student," but to a specific student who was currently in their class. In one case, a student who taught high school English delivered her letter to her principal as evidence that her praxis was improving. In another, a student who taught writing part-time at a community college gave her letter, which recommended a shift toward a more transfer-focused curriculum, to her writing program administrator, and reported feeling a new sense of agency and investment. These stories filled me with respect for the work my students were doing beyond our classroom, as well as renewed enthusiasm for our course content. I gained what Burdick and Greer (2017) call "insights into the material realities" (p. 83) of my students.

Discussion

These are four takeaways from this assignment for me as a teacher:

1. Both experienced and novice writing teachers are eager for professional community and fresh ideas.
2. For experienced teachers whose background is in literature, putting writing instruction at the center of the classroom feels novel. (Wilkinson [2019] also reported this finding in her study of DE teachers [p. 92].)
3. Like the students featured in *The Meaningful Writing Project*, students in certificate programs have goals for their educations that relate to audiences beyond our classrooms. Tapping into their goals and audiences helps a class feel relevant and increases students' engagement and motivation.
4. Creating open-ended teaching-related assignments in the practicum context allows the expertise of experienced teachers to shine, something that scholarship

on DE educators has emphasized is important (Burdick & Greer, 2017; Wilkinson, 2019).

Just as I have learned from the writing students have submitted in response to this prompt, so students are also learning. They appreciate, for example, the transparent application of the principles of the course readings in the assignment design. In an analysis of all open-ended final reflections from the spring 2020 course (n=16), 56% of students (n=9) commented on the alignment of the assignment design to the course readings. That over half of the students observed these connections convinces me that the general design of this assignment is sound. Other typical comments indicated appreciation for the variety of genres the assignments invited, as well as the real-world applicability of the course materials. Experienced teachers felt they had been exposed to new ideas that were engaging, while novice teachers reported feeling more prepared to work in a classroom.

Although this assignment has been beneficial, it has not been without difficulties. For example, differing conventions for assignment prompts across contexts caused some confusion. Some students who work as high school teachers struggled to put information that usually existed in other documents—such as lesson plans or unit plans—into the assignment prompt and felt that the inclusion of this information made the prompt unnecessarily bulky for a high school student audience. While my understanding of the genre of prompts is informed by postsecondary literature (e.g. Bean, 2011; Melzer, 2014; "Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, TILT Higher Ed," n.d.), I am not as well-informed about the conventions of high school assignment prompts. One way to address this problem may be to add a scaffolding step, such as asking students to bring in a past prompt and briefly analyze how well it fits (or does not) with the scholarship we are reading about assignment design. Another option is to spend more time with instructional readings on assignment design (possibly pulling in additional resources from the Transparency in Learning and Teaching Project) to help clarify and/or negotiate some of the genre expectations.

For other students, the expertise of the high school teachers was intimidating. One student, for example, wrote in an anonymous mid-term feedback survey: "Not actually being a teacher of writing, I feel pretty inferior to everyone who is." This student is not alone. Although I have tried to position the range of experience-levels as a strength of the course, writing individually to less-experienced students to share how their point of view could enrich the class as a whole, I recognize that not all students feel equally comfortable, particularly when it comes to designing instructional materials. I believe this will be an ongoing issue and is a byproduct of the diverse student population in the certificate program. In an ideal world, students would leave the course feeling like Cameron (who at the time was a recent BA with no teaching experience). She wrote in her final reflection:

> Initially, I was nervous about being the least-prepared person in class. My classmates were educators with years of experience in different roles and environments, and I was worried that I would have nothing to contribute to our conversations. However, I received some wonderful advice from my peers this semester, and I believe that I helped shed some light on some of their questions because I was so recently a student in undergraduate writing classes.

My hope is that all students can similarly find a collegial network in the class, as well as a purposeful role, and the course content can be applied uniquely to each student's future goals.

Conclusion

Traditional graduate education is about creating specialists who then fill professional roles and produce the research that ensures the field's continued relevance. But the field of composition continues to change. The number of teaching positions (e.g., lecturer, teaching-professor, and adjunct) is rising while the number of tenure-track positions continues to decline. Additionally, the development of coordinated paths from high school to public universities creates an ongoing exigence for dual-credit courses to proliferate, which then leads to a rise in certificate programs like the one in which I teach.

The student audience for these certificate programs is complex and merits additional investigation. In the meantime, professors within certificate programs must consider how to best teach this population of composition graduate students, drawing on the resources that experienced DE educators often bring to the classroom (Burdick & Greer, 2017; Wilkinson, 2019). We need to find ways of making graduate instruction meaningful for students who are not going to pursue a PhD in the field, who will not be moving into research positions and teaching graduate classes, who are entangled in different locations in composition's vast web. Inviting students and others who do not intend to pursue doctoral work in composition to name their own contexts, to synthesize information in their own ways, and to pursue their own goals is one way to serve both these students and the field.

ASSIGNMENT

Meaningful Assignments in Our Contexts

Assignment at a Glance:

1. Overview: Develop a formal writing assignment for students of your choice. Write a reflection in the genre of a letter that draws connections between the assignments and our readings.
2. Due Date: At the end of week 7 (in a 15-week course)
3. Length: Assignment should be no more than 3 pages single-spaced; reflection should be no more than 6 pages double-spaced.
4. Format: Please format according to the rules of MLA 8 (the most recent MLA edition). Information on this format can be found on the Purdue Owl.
5. Submission: Please submit the paper as a Word document or PDF to Canvas (Module Two, Week Seven)
6. Time: I expect this writing and revising this essay will take 12-15 hours, spread over two weeks.

Course Learning Objectives / Why do this assignment?

This assignment is designed as the culminating activity of the first two modules of the course, during which we've discussed what kind of writing undergraduate students find most meaningful, what kind of assignments are typically found across the curriculum, and what role first-year writing plays in a student's academic trajectory. Specifically, this assignment was designed to address course learning goals 2 and 3, copied below:

- Explain several theoretical issues associated with writing in the university, with regards to both writing across the curriculum and first-year writing.
- Compose original assignment prompts that are aligned with learning outcomes

for first-year writing courses or other relevant contexts, including guidelines for assessment.

By engaging with this assignment, you will be actively synthesizing and applying the material we've read so far, which will also be helpful for the work that we will do the second half of the course.

Introduction to the Assignment

Designing compelling and clear assignments prompts can be a true challenge, especially ones that will lead to the kind of meaningful writing we have been exploring in this class. This assignment invites you to address that challenge. To complete this task, you will write (or revise) one or two formal and wholly original assignment prompt(s). I borrow the term "formal" from John Bean, who explains that formal assignments that "call for finished prose" and usually "require multiple drafts" (89).

You are encouraged to tailor your assignment prompt(s) to your context. You might revise prompts that already exist. Alternatively, you can design new prompts for classes you hope to teach, such as first-year writing. Whatever approach you take, your response to this assignment will have two components: the assignment sheet(s) and the reflection.

The Assignment Sheet Scenario

Write the assignment sheet to an imagined audience of students. You are free to format the prompt in any manner that you wish. You may use this assignment sheet as a model. There are also sample assignment sheets in the Bean excerpt (page 97-101), as well as our other readings from this term. You can also find many examples online, especially on the journal *Prompt* (supplemental reading for week four). The work you submit for this task should be original. Your assignment should be tailored to the students you are addressing in as much detail as seems realistic to you.

If you are not teaching, it may seem difficult to design assignments for an imagined group of students. In this case, consider designing an assignment for a generic first-year writing class that aligns with the WPA Outcomes for First-Year Composition (reviewed during week one) If you want to incorporate readings into your assignment, you may imagine that you are using the freely available *Writing Spaces* as your textbook, or you may incorporate any readings/media of your choice.

Your assignment sheet should, as Bean indicates, explain the process by which papers will be developed, as well as a definition of the task. Finally, there should be clear explanations of writing expectations (see Bean 97). Although it is not required, consider developing a rubric to make your assessment criteria clear for students.

The Reflection Scenario

Choose a recipient of a letter that draws connections between your assignment prompt and the scholarship we've read this term.

Option #1: A sponsor or administrator

Imagine an administrator or financial sponsor you think would be interested in the writing you've produced. Your sponsor is a sympathetic and invested audience, however she doesn't know much about research in writing studies. Ideally you can imagine an actual administrator you know and use those details to shape your response.

Use this letter as a space to explain to the sponsor why you structured the assignment as you did. How did research in the field of writing studies (represented by readings we've done so far) inform your curricular decisions? Why do you expect that this assignment prompt will be effective for the students you are teaching? Be specific and incorporate short quotations and paraphrases from our texts.

Further, as this sponsor knew you before you designed the assignment sheet, you might comment on how the assignment sheet is similar or different from assignments that you've produced in the past. Panning back, would you say that the opportunity to engage with colleagues and read relevant research in the field is impacting your teaching beyond the creation of the attached assignment? If so, how?

Option #2: A colleague

Imagine a colleague that you think would be interested in the writing assignments you've produced. You should also imagine a particular reason for addressing the colleague. I encourage you to imagine a colleague you actually know and use those details to shape your response. Otherwise, here are a few options:

- A colleague from another department is interested in moving beyond informational writing assignments. He wonders if such a thing would be valuable to students, and how he might prepare such assignments. Using your assignments and our readings, make a case for meaningful writing assignments and introduce him to writing across the curriculum.
- A colleague in your department who is thinking about pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Rhetoric and Composition from but is uncertain that she will learn anything new. Explain how your own praxis, and particularly this assignment sheet, has been informed by the course.

In each case (or one you imagine), you have slightly different purposes in presenting your work to the colleague, and your presentation of the content would be shaped by your purpose. But, as in the case with the sponsor in option #1, your ultimate goal is to unpack the decisions that you made in designing the assignment prompts, to draw connections between those decisions and the wider research we've engaged so far, and to make a "big picture" argument about the impact of this course for on your praxis—and, by extension, the potential it has to positively impact those with whom you work.

Option #3: A reluctant student

You have a student who is bright but unmotivated to complete the assignment(s) that you've designed. Write him a letter, explaining what your hopes are for this assignment, and how you designed it with student engagement and practical applications in mind. Why should he care about this work? How will it benefit him as he continues through his educational career? What's so significant about writing, anyway?

If you choose Option #3, you might shift your focus from how you've developed as a practitioner to the practical role that writing and critical thinking play in college and beyond, as demonstrated by some of the readings we've completed thus far into the term. You also might want to give the student a "pep talk" about how to engage writing assignments so that they can be as meaningful as possible (drawing, again, from our readings thus far).

You are also welcome to design a scenario of your own. Please run it by me in a conference, just so that I'm aware of what you are thinking. It would be especially neat if you were able to share these documents with an audience beyond this class, including principals, administrators, teachers, or students.

Drafting Plan

***Introducing the assignment* (beginning week 6)**

Available on our Canvas site, please find this assignment prompt, accompanied by optional supplemental readings from Bean about developing formal assignment prompts. There are also four samples of excellent student work from past classes, as well as two introductory videos from me (one introducing the assignment; another walking through the student samples).

***Drafting and Peer Review* (week 6)**

We will post partial drafts of our assignment prompts and reflective letters at the end of week 6. These drafts can be as detailed or as general as you would like. We will have an opportunity to ask for the kind of feedback we'd like at this stage. You will receive feedback from a peer and from me. You can also sign-up for an optional conference with me, which can take place by phone or video chat the following week.

***Revising and Finishing* (week 7)**

Optional conferences will take place during this week. Final drafts of this assignment will be due on Sunday, at the very end of the week. There will be no other writing or responding for the week.

Evaluation Criteria:

Assignment Sheet (135 points)	The assignment sheet is clear and easy to follow. The writing tasks are well described and suited for the proposed student audience. The assignment goals or objectives are identified, the process of drafting is outlined, and evaluation criteria are clearly explained. The assignment sheet is wholly original to the writer.
Creative Reflection (135 points)	The activity or assignment connects in clear ways to the readings we've done in class. The writer quotes directly from the readings and shows how they have informed the instructional design. The writer identifies and addresses an audience who has a stake in assignment design and teaching (sponsor, colleague, student) and shapes the content for that audience. In short, the writer considers how taking this course can/will ultimately improve their teaching and/or student learning.
Format and mechanics (30 points)	The essay is readable, follows the conventions of standard written English, and all sources are cited using MLA 8.

Questions?

Contact me using the inbox feature on Canvas. I'll check there daily. I'm here to support your success in this course!

Notes

[1]Note that all numbers add up to 27, not 26. This is because one student fell into two categories (both a recent BA considering graduate school in English, and a university employee).

[2]I was especially disinclined to focus specifically on FYC because, unlike a typical practicum course, I was not orienting students to a particular writing program. In fact, ACP teachers working with Indiana University are unable to change their FYC curriculum, and the writing program at my regional campus does not use the same curriculum.

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.v6i2.81.

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Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Assignment in Macroeconomics

Collect, Analyze, Interpret and Implement Policies Based on Economic Indicators

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Abstract

This article shares an assignment that has been successfully implemented in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) macroeconomic courses available to major and non-major undergraduate students enrolled in the City University of New York (CUNY) Kingsborough Community College. While the outcome at the end of the semester is a paper of about three pages, the steps designed to assist students with completing it are important because they provide a detailed research and investigation guide. The assignment is composed of a series of scaffolded tasks that engage students in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation using economic theory of the subject area, presentation of the actual findings compared to predictions of economic theory, and investigation and interpretation for convergence and/or divergence from the economic theory. This assignment is based on prior research on the benefits of assigning writing in economics courses and aims to achieve the outcomes described by the *structure of cognitive process* dimension of the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, 2002).

Introduction and Literature

This assignment is a series of scaffolded steps that leads to the completion of a paper analyzing the economic performance of a student-selected country. The novelty and importance of this assignment are the carefully planned-out steps that engage students in research by laying out an economic investigation map. This map directs students to use the following specific sequence in economic research: 1) data collection, 2) data analysis, 3) interpretation using economic theory of the subject area, and lastly, 4) recommendations that the student discovers using economic theory. These scaffolded steps lead the student to the final paper that describes the various pieces analyzed to evaluate the student-selected country's economic performance and the identified divergence of the findings from predictions of the economic theory. Such divergence prompts students to investigate the reasons and propose recommendations and policy changes. This assignment is based on prior research on the benefits of assigning writing in economics courses and aims to achieve the outcomes described by the *structure of cognitive process* dimension of the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, 2002).

This assignment was adopted in Principles of Macroeconomics, which is an elective for most majors and a core curriculum course for the Department of Business Associate of Applied Science (AAS) program degrees. The implementation of this assignment would be most effectively applied to writing across the curriculum (WAC) sections of principles of economics courses or regular, intermediate economics courses. The move toward WAC programs was made in many universities during 1970s and 1980s because supporters recognized the powerful symbiosis between writing and thinking (Nielsen, 2002). More specifically, the clear consideration of WAC in the field of economics is identified in 1991 through the Siegfried et al. (1991) report, which

prompt
a journal of academic writing assignments

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enthusiastically recommended the use of writing as an essential part of economic courses as the authors claim that "writing clearly is the acid test of thinking like an economist. Students do not understand the theory of rent until they can apply it in their own words" (p. 15). A plethora studies followed the report, and their findings converge to the conclusion that writing improves student learning, but slightly diverge in the types of writing assignments that may be most efficacious in achieving such success. For example, some studies advocate the use of short writing assignments, such as one-minute papers (Chizmar & Ostrosky, 1998), 5-10 minute in-class papers (Crowe & Youga, 1986), short papers with a diverse audience (Simpson & Carroll, 1999), reflective papers of 150-300 words (Olmsted & Ruediger, 2013), and weekly writings (Dynan & Cate, 2005, 2009). Others advocate for longer, various, and scaffolded papers (Caviglia-Harris, 2020; Cohen & Williams, 2019; Schmeiser, 2017).

This assignment has adopted most of the recommendations provided by the WAC literature in encouraging students to research and allowing them to write and revise. This scaffolded assignment is implemented in a macroeconomics course, but it also provides a framework adjustable for other courses across disciplines. The assignment is scaffolded and incorporates several types of writing activities that may include the cumulative benefits identified by the literature review, as well as the scaffolded feature advocated by Cohen and Williams (2019) because it enables the student to "break larger, complex tasks into smaller, more manageable ones that support student learning" (p. 374).

Firstly, this assignment includes short writing referred to as journals, which have shown to be beneficial in student learning. For example, Chizmar and Ostrosky (1998) findings show that the one-minute paper improves students' economic knowledge as measured by pre- and post-exam scores of 256 students enrolled in WAC economic courses at a US public college during Fall 1992, Fall 1993, and Spring 1994. Another important result of their study is that the positive effect is not correlated with the students' ability level or instructors' experience, suggesting its wide applicability regardless of instructor and student bias. Students' active engagement in this learning process through this writing helps students' performance. But also, the respect that faculty show by inviting and encouraging students' opinions improves the efficacy of writing (Chizmar & Ostrosky, 1998; Cross & Angelo, 1988). It may be reasonable to apply this claim to other types of writing if the instructor requests and shows respect for the students' opinions. Second, this assignment includes longer writing tasks in the form of online written discussions, which have shown to be beneficial as well. For example, Crowe and Youga (1986) suggest the use of 5-10 minute in-class papers and list various positive effects on student learning. They claim that in addition to writing being a monitoring tool for student learning, it is an important and complementary tool in linking students' past knowledge to new information. Crowe and Youga (1986) clearly distinguish the learning through passive intake of information via lecturing from the active learning process whereby students use writing to make connections and process active learning.

This assignment combines the various writing tasks because prior studies have shown that a combination may have a synergistic effect. Simpson and Carroll (1999) inquire about the type of writing that might best improve student learning of economics to better equip them for graduate studies and future occupations. Based on a survey collecting information from 189 Davidson College alumni, all types of writing assignments are considered helpful. However, the short writing assignments addressed to a diverse audience were considered the most helpful in future occupations, while the longer and quantitative analysis papers were considered the most helpful in learning economics in graduate studies. Due to such findings, Simpson and Carroll recommend combining short writing pieces in a longer paper that covers the same material. This recommendation provides a supporting argument for the use of the scaffolded project presented in this article.

Longer writing assignments in the form of research papers have been shown to have positive effects as well. This assignment includes such a longer and more rigorous writing assignment based on the positive effects shown in prior studies. For example, Dynan and Cate (2005) find that students in the experimental group who perform writing assignments have statistically higher exam scores than the students in the control group. Dynan and Cate (2009) continue to explore these findings by inquiring whether such learning improvements are attributed to instructors' guidance or the structure of writing assignments. They conclude that structured writing has a higher positive effect when learning is measured through multiple-choice exams referred to as "lower-order learning assessment." Dynan and Cate (2009) argued that structure might have a weak effect on higher-order assessment and recommend the more frequent use of such assessments, which is also addressed in this assignment by continuous and frequent writing tasks. Olmsted and Ruediger (2013) had similar findings using data from 168 students, where students in the experimental group, those who performed reflection papers, had statistically higher exam scores compared to the students in the control group.

While prior studies focus on selecting one writing type, more recent studies focus on using a mix of writing types forming a scaffolded assignment. For example, Marshall and Underwood (2019) compare "the cycle of data analysis—plan, collect, organize, compute, and document—which mirrors the recursive writing process in many respects—pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing" (p. 18) and Cohen and Williams (2019) explain that the detailed steps of scaffolding allow for the breaking down complex ideas into clear and smaller tasks. While scholars continue their exploration of the best practices of creating and assessing a writing assignment, the agreed objective is not only to improve students' writing, but especially to help students gain a more profound understanding of the subject matter (Martineau-Gilliam, 2007; McLeod & Maimon, 2000). In helping students with writing and critical thinking, Martineau-Gilliam recommends including activities across disciplines, such as journals and short writing assignments that also allow for peer and faculty feedback. Such faculty and peer feedback paired with the opportunity of revision helps students with their learning, as argued in Bean's (2011) book *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. All these types of writing were incorporated in this scaffolded assignment to empower students with all the benefits that each task provides.

I believe this assignment could be successfully assigned to any college students regardless of their prior skills and discipline of study. The implementation of similar projects across the curriculum may provide a synergistic effect. As Gentile (2006) points out, one semester may be insufficient to learn the skill of writing, but it may provide the framework. Therefore, instead of providing students with an isolated experience, it may be reasonable for faculty of various disciplines to implement similarly designed assignments throughout their courses and help students build this framework and skills of writing and thinking as a researcher throughout their college education.

Assignment Structure and Sequence

This assignment is built upon three stages which cover all six objective layers of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). The assignment is composed of a series of scaffolded tasks that, cumulatively, make up 50 percent of the final grade. These tasks develop horizontally as students conduct sequential application of the economic theory as the theory is unraveled throughout the semester. These tasks also develop vertically as students revisit their research and application of theory through different stages starting from informal writing towards the formal writing. Table 1 provides the time sequence of the three-stage assignment over a

Table 1. Time Sequence of the Three-Stage Assignment

Time	Stage 1: Informal Writing	Stage 2: Semi-formal Writing	Stage 3: Formal Writing
Week 1–4	Journal 1: GDP	Discussion 1: GDP	Draft 1: Identify country's latest recession and contributing factors
	Journal 2: Recession	Discussion 2: Business cycles	
Week 5–8	Journal 3: Unemployment in relation to recession and recovery	Discussion 3: Unemployment rate	Draft 2: Revisit the latest draft and having identified the latest recession, show the effect in unemployment and inflation rate
	Journal 4: Inflation in relation to recession	Discussion 4: Inflation rate	
Week 9–12	Journal 5: Government policy and bailout	Discussion 5: Fiscal policy	Final: Revisit the latest draft and add your policy recommendations
	Journal 6: Fractional reserve system and monetary policy	Discussion 6: Monetary policy	

twelve-week semester. The final task is a short paper that includes: 1) students' interpretation of the economic performance of a country by measuring various economic indicators, such as production, unemployment, and inflation; 2) convergence and/or divergence of actual data versus the predictions of economic theory; and 3) recommendations that may emerge due to the identified divergence from what is predicted and expected according to the economic theory. While the final task is the research paper, the importance and novelty are the design of the scaffolded steps that lead to such destination. The layout of these sequential tasks encourages students to complete all the following: 1) follow a step-by-step map in conducting research; 2) apply a theory throughout the semester using a single case study rather than unconnected examples; 3) avoid procrastination; and 4) allow students to choose their own case (e.g., country to examine) which is in alignment also with culturally responsive teaching (Malo-Juvera et al., 2018). This series of tasks is linked in such a substantive way that it is more beneficial to share them as one assignment rather than to present each step as a separate assignment.

In stage 1, as shown in Table 1, students are asked to write in-class journals during which they define terms, articulate economic occurrences using their own words and prior experience, provide their own examples, and explain a situation using new information. This free writing exercise is designed to help students acquire the expertise to achieve the measurable outcomes that are expressed in the first two dimensions described by the *structure of cognitive process* dimension of the revised Bloom's taxonomy: remembering and recalling (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215). These in-class journals are a focused form of free writing and students are asked specific questions, such as: "The US government can purchase computers manufactured in UK or US. Using the definition and your understanding of GDP, which decision should the US government make?" These journals are a hybrid of one-minute paper (Chizmar & Ostrosky, 1998) and the 5-10 minute in-class paper (Crowe & Youga, 1986) which have shown positive effects in student learning.

The activities in stage 1 count towards the final grade, but they are not formally graded in order to allow students the freedom of expression. Students receive a discrete score in the form of complete or incomplete rather than a continuous score (e.g., 0 to 100) because students are likely to feel comfortable communicating their ideas knowing that they are graded on their efforts rather than content. Students are informed that their free writing work will only be observed by the faculty and will not be shared with their peers. However, to provide effective feedback to students, the instructor is encouraged, in the next follow up lecture's session, to bring up some common mistakes or misunderstandings noted in the class journals without identifying the student.

In stage 2, students build on their initial free writing exercise. At the beginning of the semester, each student is asked to select a country of their choice other than the United States. Throughout the semester, students engage in reading, collecting, and analyzing economic data, and preparing an economic analysis report about the selected country. Having had the chance to explain terms and economic indicators that help explain the performance of a country's economy through their class journals, students are now asked to dive into research. After selecting the country, students collect, display, analyze, and interpret the data regarding the economic indicators of that specific country. The two main sources recommended for data collection are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Students are asked to display and share their findings via online discussions accessed in Blackboard learning management system. This online discussion allows students to read and respond to each other asynchronously. Through this activity, students receive feedback from faculty as well as their peers. Reading others' work is also a good way of learning about other countries' economies and comparing the scenarios to their own selected case. In these discussion forums, students are encouraged to include the definition of the economic indicator (e.g., GDP), graph the data collected, and relate to other indicators to make a multi-dimensional conclusion about the economic performance. The tasks in stage 2 are designed to help students acquire the expertise to achieve the measurable outcomes that are expressed in the third and fourth dimension described by the *structure of cognitive process* dimension of the revised Bloom's taxonomy: apply and analyze (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215). These tasks could also be considered a hybrid of the following type of writing: the 5-10 minute in-class paper (Crowe & Youga, 1986), short papers (Simpson & Carroll, 1999), reflective papers of 150-300 words (Olmsted & Ruediger, 2013), and weekly writing (Dynan & Cate, 2005, 2009) which have shown positive effects in student learning.

In stage 3, students compile a country report that will use their findings from their prior conducted research and data analysis. The country report provides their analysis and interpretation of the most important economic indicators and the performance of the country's economy. For example, students are asked to identify the latest recession experienced by the selected country using the historical real GDP data collected in stage two. Having identified the time period the recession occurred, the student is asked to relate it to other economic indicators, such as inflation rate and unemployment rate during that specific time making use of prior activities in stage 1 and 2. Students are able to submit the report three times throughout the semester which allows them to receive continuous peer and/or faculty feedback. Drafting this report three times allows them to build it in steps throughout the semester.

In this last stage, students incorporate their prior findings from stage 1 and 2, provide explanation when results divert from expected theory, and provide their own recommendations in a formal writing. In addition to explaining the interrelation of the economic indicators and alignment with the theory expectation, students are expected to research and identify external factors (e.g., labor laws) that may have led to the divergence of practice from theory. Finally, students are called to provide their own policy recommendations for improving economic performance of the selected country. For example, students are first asked to align themselves with a type of policy advisor: either a Keynesian economist who believes in an extensive government intervention into markets, or an Austrian economist who believes in *laissez-faire*

Table 2. Research-Based Learning Implementation Stages

Title	%	Learning Objectives (Bloom's Taxonomy Revised Dimensions)	Activity Description
Stage 1 Informal Writing	10%	**Remember & Understand** • Define economic terms using their understanding and prior experience. • Explain the definitions of macroeconomic terms from the reading assignments and provide their own examples. • Describe a situation using economic theory.	• Students define terms and articulate economic occurrences as prompted through the questions in the Stage 1 assignment prompt. • The student journal is not shared with other peers. • The student journal counts towards the final grade, but it is not formally graded.
Stage 2 Semi-formal Writing	20%	**Apply & Analyze** • Collect, analyze, graph, and provide economic interpretation. • Compare and contrast the economic performance of the country across time (e.g., recession vs. recovery periods) or among other countries.	• Students choose the country they will analyze. • Students collect, display, analyze, and interpret the data about the country's economic indicators. • Students display and share findings via asynchronous online discussions.
Stage 3 Formal Writing	20%	**Evaluate & Create** • Relate economic interpretation of the data analysis to interdisciplinary aspects, such as business law, psychology etc. • Evaluate economic policies undertaken by the country. • Formulate fiscal or/and monetary policies to improve future economic performance.	• Students interrelate the economic indicators analyzed in the prior stage and show whether findings are in alignment with the theory expectation. • Students identify contributing factors (e.g., labor laws, etc.) leading to the divergence from theory. • Students position with one of the two opposing economic school of thoughts and provide their recommendations for future economic prosperity.

and minimal government intervention. After positioning themselves with one of these two economic school of thoughts, students propose the type of recommended intervention, which could be interdisciplinary, connecting economic theory to business law, psychology, or drawing on other theories. For example, a student argued that labor laws of a selected country made it difficult for foreign businesses to shut down their subsidiaries and lay-off employees. This explained the low unemployment rate during a recession which, if viewed in isolation, indicates a good economic performance according to theory. However, the student observed the facts in context rather than in isolation and claimed that this law effectively increased exit costs, leading to discouragement of foreign investments and decline of potential domestic production. This task is designed to help students acquire the expertise expressed in the last two dimensions of the revised Bloom's taxonomy: evaluate and create (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215). A summary of the measurable outcomes by each stage is shown in Table 2.

Time-Saving Applications

One of the biggest challenges of adopting this scaffolded writing assignment is the grading workload. Cohen and Williams (2019) offer several ways of reducing instructors' labor time in grading writing assignments, such as scaffolding, allowing for peer review, using plagiarism software, such as Turnitin, and using university resources such as writing centers. These tools can be used in this assignment as well.

First, the scaffolded steps relating to the same content allow the instructor to build on prior feedback. It can save time when the instructor practices grading in a sequence and refers to prior grading. A second time-saving technique is the use of a grading rubric, which is organized in a way that the student can easily review and understand the feedback. In my rubric for this assignment, the number grid is simple, where the maximum points are set as 10 items earning 10 points each for best possible performance, leading to 100 points (A); or 10 items earning 8 points each for good performance, leading to 80 points (B), and so on. The rubric has a two-fold duty. It sets clear expectations prior to submission, as well providing standardized detailed feedback that students can understand after submission leading to less customized feedback.

An additional time-saving tool might be the use of peer review. Peer review is a process in which students evaluate and are evaluated by their peers. This could take two forms in this assignment: 1) an informal peer response in the online discussion where students are asked and graded on their written response to other peers based on their constructive feedback, and 2) a formal peer evaluation where students provide a score and use a grading rubric. There are several benefits to peer responses. These responses can save time for the instructor and also provide faster feedback to students. The literature indicates several pedagogical benefits as well. Matherly and Burney (2009) claim that faster customized feedback leads to improvement in writing skills. Phillips' (2016) findings show higher benefits in outbound feedback when students actively give feedback through peer review compared to passively receiving it. Furthermore, Schmeiser (2017) argues that during the outbound process when students provide a review to their peers, they are exposed to new ideas and approaches, as well as sharing similar struggles with peers. A longer list detailed by Cho and Cho (2011) provides the benefits of peer review which could be easily implemented in the several stages of this scaffolded assignment.

Success and Limitations

This assignment has been implemented in several WAC sections of Principles of Macroeconomics offered at City University of New York (CUNY) Kingsborough Community College from Spring 2016 through Fall 2019. Students have shown a great appreciation for the scaffolded activities that mapped sequential, well-timed, small steps leading to the completion of a larger project. Students have shared their feedback informally and listed several benefits, such as improvement in: 1) technical and writing skill; 2) time management; and 3) learning the habit of edits and updates due to several rounds of feedback throughout the semester. Firstly, students expressed a great appreciation and improved confidence in their communication and interpretation of economic topics. Most students expressed clarity in their understanding and interpretation of graphs, connecting the various economic indicators, and providing their conclusions and recommendations. Secondly, they expressed less anxiety and procrastination due to the step-by-step activities connected and leading to the final writing assignment. For most of the students, this was their first formal long writing assignment. Thirdly, students appreciated the instructors' feedback provided in the form of continuous online discussion and detailed grading rubric.

One limitation on this assignment might be the implementation of peer responses. In general, as shown in the literature review, peer responses can provide a pedagogical benefit because students are exposed to other peers' examples during the outbound process and receive simpler and more understandable feedback during the inbound process. The implementation of peer responses has to be carefully organized and timed properly to allow students sufficient time to make revisions to their work, provide feedback to other peers, as well as understand and implement feedback from the instructor and the peers. In future iterations, students might be organized in teams solely for the purpose of peer review, to allow students to build upon prior feedback as well as observe the continuous improvements of other peers.

Discussions and Extensions

This article described an assignment that has been successfully implemented in WAC sections of Principles of Macroeconomics. This assignment is built on three stages which cover all six layers of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). This series of scaffolded tasks provides a framework applicable to courses across various disciplines as well as different teaching modalities, including remote teaching. In fact, all tasks in stage 2 and 3 have been run through online learning management systems already even if the courses were face-to-face. The implementation of similar projects across the curriculum may provide a synergistic effect. As Gentile (2006) points out, one semester may not be sufficient to learn the skill of writing, but it may provide the framework. Hence, this paper is offering a model for such work as well as encouraging faculty to implement similarly designed assignments in different instruction modes and throughout their courses. Cumulatively, these assignments help students build the framework and skills of writing and thinking as researchers.

ASSIGNMENT

Collect, Analyze, Interpret and Implement Policies Based on Economic Indicators

Stage 1: Informal Writing

Students will be asked to write in-class journals. This work will be reviewed by and graded by the faculty but will not be shared with other students.

- Journal 1: Please define GDP using your own words. The government will be replacing its employees' PC. If you were an economic advisor, would you advise for the government to purchase PCs manufactured in UK or US? Why?
- Journal 2: Please define recession. Please, list three factors that lead to a recession and three consequences that result from it.
- Journal 3: How does unemployment rate change if: 1) production decreases; 2) new technology is adopted that automates fast food cooking; 3) GM moves manufacturing from US to China. Which of these three scenarios is a cyclical unemployment and is a result of recession?
- Journal 4: What is inflation? Would you consider the following scenarios as desirable: 1) inflation rate increases from 3% to 33%; 2) inflation rate decreases from 3% to -33%? Would consumers buy or postpone the purchase if they observe prices of auto, pc, apparel, etc. go down by 10% every week? What happens to C and GDP?
- Journal 5: Do you agree with the US government decision to bail out some large companies that were about to go bankrupt during the recession of 2008? Please list two positive and two negative effects.

- Journal 6: Fractional reserve systems create money. Is money creation the same as value creation?

Stage 2: Semi-Formal Writing in Asynchronous Online Discussions

Discussion 1—Gross Domestic Product

You have chosen a country. Perform some research and find its GDP (nominal vs. real). Graph its GDP over the past five to ten years OR provide a short description of its economic performance and GDP. Post your response and then read and reply to classmates' posts.

Suggested sources

It is important that you consult other sources. Below is a list of other sources that can assist you in learning this material and conducting research. Use at least one of the following sources in responding to your post above.

- The World Bank - http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD
- International Monetary Fund http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/02/weodata/index.aspx

Discussion 2—Business Cycles

Please watch this short video on business cycles, and explain whether business cycles show the movement of Real or Nominal GDP? Use this video and another source to graph the economic performance of your selected country (please expand and edit your Discussion Forum 1). Please, identify the latest recession in the graph?

Video on Business Cycle (1:07)

Discussion 3—Unemployment

Please explain what unemployment is and how it is affected by business cycles. Graph the unemployment rate (split by education or gender) in the last fifteen years of your selected country. What pattern does unemployment rate have in relation to recessions and recoveries?

Discussion 4—Inflation

Please watch this short video on inflation, and explain what inflation is and what it does to purchasing power. Find the inflation for the last five to ten years of your selected country. Show your findings in a table or graph.

Video on Inflation (1:09)

Discussion 5—Fiscal Policy

Having watched the videos and reading assigned, what do you consider yourself, Keynesian or Classical / Austrian Economist and why? What position is your selected country holding on this matter?

"Fear the Boom and Bust" a Hayek vs. Keynes Rap Anthem (7:33) Transcript
Fight of the Century: Keynes vs. Hayek Round Two (10:10) Transcript

Discussion 6—Monetary Policy

Show how the fractional reserve systems 'creates' money. Is money creation the same as value creation?

Stage 3: Formal Writing

Task

Select a country of preference (excluding United States since we will be discussing this in class). Imagine that you are working as an economic advisor for the government. The president has gathered its cabinet to discuss the economic performance of the country and its future policies. As the economist of the team, you are asked to write a written report on its economic performance and expectations. Critically evaluate its economic performance relying on the material and the concepts covered in our course.

Note: The president and his advisors are not acquainted with economics terms.

Your report will include the following elements:

- Description of the current state of economic condition of your selected country or region, based on at least a couple of credible sources, which can be news or scholarly. When preparing this section, indicate the unemployment rate, inflation rate, and where the country is in the business cycle. You should include graphs and tables and rely on your Discussion Forums, as well as instructor and peer review.
- Description of forecasts and what is the economic condition expected to be in the next five or ten years. How is that related to the past historical performance?
- Summation of your findings, including at least two policy recommendations for future economic improvements. You may also include here any findings regarding the current fiscal and/or monetary policy that the country is using.

Goal

The goal of the project is to enable you to research, identify and implement the economic parameters and models learnt in this course.

Deadline and Revision Process

This project has several stages. You will be required to revise this project based on peer response and instructor review. You are expected to follow these instructions in order to edit any grammar and spelling mistakes as well as content and organization. You should always include the prior drafts along with your new submission.

- In-class Journals
- Asynchronous Online Discussion forums
- Draft 1 & Instructor Feedback on Draft 1
- Draft 2 & Instructor Feedback on Draft 2
- Final Report
- Presentation (optional)

Grading

In-class journals comprise and online discussions count 10 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Draft 1 and 2 will count 10% while your final submission will count 10% of your total grade. Hence, both draft and final will comprise 20%. For details, please refer to the Country Report Grading Rubric.

Format

You should use and cite at least three reliable published sources to support your positions and arguments. Standard APA style rules apply and clarity is important. Resources on APA Style are: American Psychological Association: Learning APA Style, and or Purdue OWL: General APA Guidelines (see https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/).

Your country written report should contain proper documentation of the article(s) or other references used. If direct quotes are used (not contained in the article), appropriate footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations must accompany the quotes.

Length

Between three to five double spaced pages. Papers are graded on quality of content, not quantity.

The paper should include the following:

- Title page
- Insert page numbers. A Running Head is fine but not necessary.
- Abstract – *not required but recommended*
- Table of Contents – *not required but recommended*
- Section Headings – *not required, but recommended*
- Citations – cite all references in the body of the text and in the Reference list.
- Plagiarism – Do not copy text from another author or Web source unless it is cited.
- Appendices – Not necessary but may be appropriate for raw data.

Grading Rubric for Formal Writing

Editors' note: Because of the size and complexity of the table at this point in the assignment, it is not reproduced here. To retrieve a copy of the full assignment, including the table, please visit Supplementary Materials.

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.v6i2.99.

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Inquiry Journal Facilitation

A Writing Assignment for Practicing Exploratory Speech

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Abstract

The Inquiry Journal Facilitation is a project that helps preservice teachers develop habits of mind for engaging in critical dialogue about the situations they confront in their teaching contexts. In this project, preservice teachers compose a piece of writing that examines an idea, question, or issue that emerges from their clinical teaching site and lead an inquiry-based discussion about the ideas raised in their writing. Pairing the activity of writing with the activity of discussion creates a context for preservice teachers to create "exploratory speech" (Smagorinsky, 2013) collaboratively. In doing so, preservice teachers practice intellectual moves—framing observations, explaining those constructions, and posing questions—that are essential for teacher-learning.

As a teacher educator, I aim to teach preservice teachers how to critically explore the ideas, questions, and issues that emerge from their teaching contexts. This goal is important because effective teaching requires ongoing learning that develops in relation to everchanging teaching contexts. I could not anticipate, for example, that recent graduates would need to learn how to revise their instruction for delivery in a remote context during a pandemic. This situation, however, underscored my commitment to helping preservice teachers learn how to critically dialogue about their pedagogical actions and questions with their professional peers.

When teaching toward this aim, it can be challenging to help preservice teachers understand the importance of seeking multiple perspectives on teaching situations, rather than rushing to judgment. Kennedy (1998) documented this challenge when she shared how preservice teachers responded to hypothetical teaching situations that she presented in an interview setting. Rather than reflecting upon the situations, the preservice teachers provided pointed answers. Reflecting upon this pattern, Kennedy writes:

> It is hard to imagine novice physicians offering detailed responses to hypothetical medical situations. They would be more likely to say something like, "I don't know how I would handle that situation; I have not yet completed my medical education." Yet only rarely did the teachers in this study resist answering our questions.… They rarely indicated that they were considering two or more alternative ideas or that the situation presented certain ambiguities to them. Even before they had studied teacher education, teachers were sure of their responses to most of the situations we presented to them. (p. 172-173)

While the students' overconfidence may stem from their lack of experience, we know that experienced teachers can also rush to judgment when encountering a teaching situation. The tools and motivation to critically explore teaching situations do not come inherently with further teaching experience. Because rushing to a conclusion is not just a mistake of less experienced teachers that will resolve itself with time, it is important for teacher educators to provide strategies for seeking and exploring multiple perspectives.

prompt
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The Inquiry Journal Facilitation is an assignment that I use in my Teaching Literacy in Diverse Classrooms course to help preservice English teachers slow down their decision-making and critically examine how they arrive at their thoughts about teaching, as well as search for perspectives beyond their own. Such thinking is necessary for grasping the socially-constructed nature of literacy. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening—the four areas of literacy instruction in secondary English classrooms—are practices that are created in and mediated through social contexts. Therefore, what counts as "good" or "successful" uses of literacy are contextual and connected to power. For this reason, National Council of Teachers of English (2018) has called upon secondary teachers to "acknowledge that we all have cultural frameworks within which we operate, and everyone—teachers and students alike—needs to consider how these frameworks can be challenged or changed to benefit all peoples" (para. 10). Identifying, considering, and (at times) disrupting the connections between cultural frameworks and instructional practices are challenging tasks, and this intellectual work is central to becoming a literacy teacher.

My Teaching Literacy in Diverse Classrooms course provides a good context for practicing critical thinking because it is an upper-level undergraduate course that is paired with a 30-hour clinical experience in a secondary English classroom. Because the preservice teachers enrolled in this course participate in coursework and the clinical experience simultaneously, they have the opportunity to engage their peers in discussion that critically explores their observations of mentor teachers, their own teaching actions, and their philosophical questions about teaching and learning. In this course, we are able to create a professional community because I have worked with nearly all the students in a prior course, most of the students already know each other, and the course is capped at 15 students. These conditions are optimal for creating a professional community; working with each other over time allows class members to build the trust and vulnerability that is needed for practicing these conversations.

The assignment requires preservice teachers to identify and narrate a teaching situation by writing a one-page "inquiry journal" and to facilitate a whole-class discussion about that teaching situation with their peers. I have designed the inquiry journal and accompanying facilitation expectations so that students are prompted to produce "exploratory speech," speech that can "represent an idea *and* contribute to the formation of an idea" (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 194). Exploratory speech—as applied in my classroom— is language (both written and oral) that is produced to promote further learning and results from engaging in inquiry-based thinking, which recognizes that "inquiry both stems from and generates questions" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 56). Many of my students affectionally call this work "questioning their questions." Exploratory speech allows preservice teachers to voice their questions and learn how and why other teachers may frame and/or address those questions differently. Prompting preservice teachers to produce exploratory speech provides practice with habits of mind that are necessary for the kind of deliberation that supports teacher-learning in ever-changing teaching contexts. It also helps preservice teachers understand the value of learning from teaching situations, rather than rushing to solve them. Through this assignment, then, I aim to highlight how teachers can engage in an inquiry-based process for addressing the ideas, questions, and issues that are most pressing for their ongoing teacher-learning. With this assignment, students have explored many situations, including student protests, teacher burnout, administrative demands, student motivation, technology's role in learning, standardized assessment, and much more. While individual reflection through journaling is a common practice in teacher education, the collaboration that occurs during the facilitation makes this assignment unique. Pairing the activity of journal writing in the inquiry journal with the activity of discussion in the facilitation creates a context for students to create knowledge collaboratively. Journal writing, in this assignment, serves the important role of initiating reflection, rather than representing the end of reflection.

Description of Assignment

This assignment involves two steps. First, students compose a one-page "inquiry journal," which is a piece of writing that examines an idea, question, or issue that emerges drawn from their 30-hour clinical experience. In this writing, students address the following questions:

1. What is a significant idea, question, or issue emerging in your clinical experience? Please describe the matter.
2. Why is this idea, question, or issue important for you and other teachers to notice and explore? What's at stake for different stakeholders if we do or don't attend to this matter?
3. What educational theories or principles are shaping your understandings of this idea, question, or issue?

I explain to my students that their inquiry journal is a place to explore the relationship between educational theories and practices, and I encourage them to cite direct quotes from scholarship as needed to support their ideas. This scholarship can include assigned reading from my class, reading from other classes, and personal reading. My students are invested in the topic of their inquiry journal, so they often engage in independent research to explore the matter further. I ask students to cite sources to help them begin to identify some of the sources that have shaped their initial thinking on the matter. I also emphasize that excellent inquiry journals demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of teaching and learning by acknowledging multiple perspectives on this matter and/or exploring the potential consequences for attending or not attending to this matter from multiple perspectives. After composing the inquiry journal, students share their writing with their peers on their assigned date by posting it to the course's online discussion forum.

Secondly, students facilitate a discussion about the ideas raised in their inquiry journal with the whole class. This part of the assignment is important because it provides students an opportunity to practice interrogating their ideas and raising questions with colleagues. When I introduce the assignment to students, I make clear that we will not aim to "solve" the teaching matter; instead, we will practice exploratory speech. As facilitators, students are expected to lead the conversation in a way that evokes multiple perspectives. I suggest that students may encourage their class members to examine specific examples from their current or former teaching/learning contexts and consider how the inquiry journal supports, challenges, and/or complicates their pedagogical thinking.

Students facilitate these discussions throughout the second half of the semester so the coursework from the first half of the semester can inform their thinking. Each facilitator has 20 minutes to lead a discussion, and we participate in no more than three facilitations during a class meeting. All class members are expected to read the inquiry journal prior to the facilitation date and bring questions and comments that will contribute to our collaborative exploration of the matter. Near the end of each facilitation, I ask each facilitator to synthesize the comments from the conversation and express how those comments are tentatively shaping their understanding of the matter. This structure allows us to look across the range of issues discussed and draw some larger insights about the ways we conceptualize our learning as teachers.

Structuring Exploratory Speech

Exploratory speech is produced through three activities that occur during the writing and facilitation process. First, students frame their observations in their inquiry journal by writing a narrative description of the teaching situation and explaining why their observations are worth noticing. How they choose to narrate the situation (Who does the action in the story? What is the conflict? What is the setting?) and the reasons they provide for sharing this situation help students identify and explore the beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape how they understand the teaching situation.

One student, for example, wrote her inquiry journal about the issue of providing written feedback to writers in a 7th grade English class. She began her inquiry journal by explaining her observations of the learning context and her mentor teacher's instructional goals when teaching a five-paragraph essay format. Then, she explained that she became interested in this situation when the mentor teacher asked her to grade and respond to some of these essays. The student narrated the problem in the following way:

> She told me that she likes to do marginal comments, however she wanted these papers ready for parent teacher conferences (which were that evening). So, she decided to forgo the marginal comments. She then told me to give the students feedback in the format of two paragraphs. The first paragraph was things the student did well. The second paragraph was ideas for improvement. She also had me fill out a rubric for each student.
>
> The format of her feedback seemed relatively standard until she proceeded to pull up a word document. In the word document was a list of 3 or 4 potential things the student could have done well such as: "good thesis statement" or "great job using your sources." Then there was a list of 3 or 4 potential things the student could work on such as: "Read your paper aloud to catch mistakes" or "try and narrow each paragraph to a single idea." The teacher told me I could choose one or two from each list and just copy and paste them into a student's feedback box. She explained to me that most students struggle and excel in these 3 or 4 areas, so it saves her time to copy and paste the feedback. In essence her feedback was generalized rather than individualized. When the teacher told me about her style of giving feedback, I was a bit taken aback. Initially, it struck me as unethical that the feedback students were receiving wasn't authentic, or at least authentic in the way I perceive it. However, I will admit as I read the essays, I did see the reoccurring problems that her list addressed.

In this narration, my student explained the directions provided by her mentor teacher and why these directions seemed problematic, thereby identifying her values as a teacher. For her, feedback should be "individualized" and "authentic." She began to question her notions, though, in her admission that her conception of "authentic" feedback might be too narrow, especially as the standardized comments addressed reoccurring issues that were present in the essays. Deciding how to respond to student writing is an important and common question for preservice English teachers, and this inquiry journal helped all class members consider the kinds of relationships and learning conditions that are created through the process of composing and sharing feedback, as well as how those choices are situated in the broader context of teacher work conditions.

While questions one and two from the inquiry journal writing prompt ask students to frame their observations, the third question helps students *explain how* they have framed their observations. In other words, students articulate the assumptions, values, beliefs, and theories that shape their current perception of the situation. In doing so, students have the opportunity to articulate how their understanding of a situation is constructed and how that construction shapes their response to the situation. In the example from above, the student explained that her commitment to “individualized” and “authentic” instruction is shaped by her commitment to differentiated instruction, a core concept in our teacher education program. Citing one of our class texts, she explained that her definition of a differentiated classroom is one that responds to the “unique needs of students.” She wrote, “The practice of giving feedback in this class was by no means differentiating instruction for students. However, the teacher was pressed for time and the issues did in some ways fit.” By making her commitment to differentiated instruction visible, the student identified a tension between a pedagogical commitment (differentiated instruction) and a teaching constraint (time).

With this tension identified, the class was positioned to explore that tension during the facilitation. To support such discussion, the student posed questions in her inquiry journal. She wrote:

> I would like us as a class to consider two primary points that this particular example highlights. The first is the ethical nature of this means of feedback and what it means to give students feedback in general. The second is how do we as teachers decide what to sacrifice in regard to time management, because as much as we would like to be able to do it all—we can’t.

During the facilitation, the student guided the class through a conversation of these questions and questions that emerged from our exploration.

From my perspective, the conversation began with many students expressing a negative reaction to using generic comments. As the conversation continued, however, students wrestled with the fact that the generic comments seemed to address areas for improvement in the essays. In this conversation, we grappled with the ongoing tension between supporting the development of the writer versus supporting the development of a piece of writing. This conversation led us to further consider the instructional role of written commentary. Together, we explored the uses of written feedback, the other instructional practices that can support written feedback, and the limitations of written feedback. Following her facilitation, the student shared with me some of the most salient points she heard in the conversation. She noted the following assertions: “Meaningful comments take time but are worthwhile. Genuine improvement is derived from genuine feedback. Writing is very personal, and so it deserves personal feedback.” In her own summary of the conversation, the student shared that “as a general rule, we agreed it’s better for the teacher to take longer to grade than to give generic feedback.” She also concluded that “students may not even read the feedback I give, but at the end of the day I will be satisfied I did my part in trying to help them improve their writing.”

My student’s notes and tentative conclusions demonstrate that she maintains her commitment to crafting personalized feedback. But the tension she writes about in her journal—one between a pedagogical commitment (differentiated instruction) and a teaching constraint (time)—shifted. Following the facilitation, she shared with me that she is considering “breaking essays into smaller portions [to] allow more time for targeted feedback.” Her comment indicates that she is now considering how she can use her instructional time in a way that supports a teaching practice that she values. In this way, her conception of time in this situation deepened. Rather than imagining time as a constraint, she is now thinking through how time—through the use of lesson design—can be used as a resource to support her pedagogical goals. Her peers, as a community, helped her affirm her commitment *and* explore ways that she could reconceptualize instructional time. In doing so, students challenged the cultural assumption that seemingly efficient teaching practices are preferrable to less efficient practices.

The assignment’s three activities—framing observations, explaining those constructions, and posing questions—are “tools of cognition” (Bazerman, 2009) that facilitate intellectual exploration because they make the connection between problem-posing and problem-solving evident. As Dewey (1938) reminds us, inquiry involves searching for possible solutions to the problematic situation *and* accounting for how that situation has been defined. As students discuss and extend the problem-posing provided in the inquiry journal, all class members critically examine the connection between problem-posing and problem-solving, especially for different stakeholders. Working with others through conversation in the facilitation enables a process of "making current arrangements problematic [and] questioning the ways knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated, and used" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 121). In doing so, students learn how to slow down their decision-making and engage in exploratory conversations that can create deeper understandings of teaching situations.

To prepare students for these conversations, I provide instruction that illustrates the need for exploratory speech. For example, I use Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," to illustrate how our stories about teaching situations shape our observations as teachers. I also use the STORRI website, a project sponsored by Teachers College at Columbia University (n.d.), as an example of inquiry-based teacher-learning. On this site, teachers share narratives of moments when their belief systems wobbled, and, in doing so, the teachers illustrate how classroom moments can be instructive. Because my course focuses on literacy instruction, I also use Sfard and Prusak's (2005) narrative learning theory to provide a framework that can help students explore the connection between the stories we tell and how we learn literacies. I also share my own teaching examples to highlight and explain the role of exploratory speech in teacher-learning. All these resources hold in common the notion that how we frame teaching situations—a process that often occurs through narrative—shapes how we address those situations. Exploratory speech, then, becomes a tool for crafting and trying on new narratives, thereby creating new possibilities for teacher-learning.

This assignment is one of my favorite projects because it creates a context to learn from, work within, and stretch the intellectual frameworks my students bring to the course. While it can be intellectually and emotionally challenging for new teachers to slow down their decision-making and engage with the complexity of teaching and learning, the practice of exploratory speech provides a strategy for working through pedagogical questions in a critical way with colleagues. As I reflect upon ways to improve the project, I am considering the tension that emerges when students aim to learn *from* each other's stories and perspectives and *with* each other through the dialogue process. My students successfully focus on the task of exploration during the facilitation, possibly because we have developed trust together in prior courses, but our conversations sometimes lean toward consensus at the end. While I state explicitly that we do not need to come to consensus and try to describe the value in not arriving at consensus, I have noticed this trend. I understand why my students, as classmates, listen for connections among their comments and questions during the discussion, and I want to continue to help them listen for difference and dissonance, too. As Gallagher et al. (2002) argue:

> Reading [and listening to] teacher narratives for mutual interruption, for difference and dissonance, creates a productive context for pedagogical development. Like moments of resonance, moments of *difference* in teacher narratives can become instruments for critical and collective inquiry into pedagogy. In this way, teacher narratives become a means not only for sharing "best practices,"—but also—and we believe more importantly—for mutual critical engagement. (p. 49)

While I currently use my voice in the facilitation to model listening for resonance *and* dissonance, I want to better support students in their ability to listen in ways that further inquiry. As I continue to refine this project, I plan to help facilitators pay attention to the distinction between analyzing assumptions in cultural frameworks and evaluating consequences for teachers' actions. Both notions are related and important for inquiry-based discussions that support teacher-learning. I have noticed, however, that it is easier and (perhaps) more natural to evaluate the consequences for teachers' actions, rather than analyze assumptions in cultural frameworks. In the future, I want to continue to help facilitators push their peers to tackle both kinds of questions in the discussion. The group may continue to feel compelled to reach consensus when discussing the consequences for teachers' actions, so we may find more room to listen for dissonance when analyzing how cultural logics shape assumptions about teaching and learning. It is my hope that paying better attention to this distinction will build upon the good work students are already accomplishing and improve their ability to critically explore the most pressing ideas, questions, and issues that emerge from their current and future teaching contexts.

ASSIGNMENT
Inquiry Journal Facilitation

In this facilitation, you will have the opportunity to lead a conversation about an idea, question, or issue emerging in your clinical experience. To prepare for this facilitation, please compose an "inquiry journal," a piece of writing that describes the topic and its significance. Your peers will have the opportunity to read and consider your thinking in this journal prior to the facilitation.

We will sign up for the facilitation dates in class. Please use the schedule below to plan your specific due dates.

Inquiry Journal Due	**Facilitation Date**
Week 9	Week 10
Week 10	Week 11
Week 11	Week 12
Week 12	Week 13
Week 13	Week 14

Part 1: Your Inquiry Journal

Your inquiry journal is a place to explore the relationship between educational theories and practices. To facilitate class discussion, please address the following questions in your one-page inquiry journal:

1. What is a significant idea, question, or issue emerging in your clinical experience? Please describe the matter.
2. Why is this idea, question, or issue important for you and other teachers to notice and explore? What's at stake for different stakeholders if we do or don't attend to this matter?
3. What educational theories or principles are shaping your understandings of this idea, question, or issue?

Please cite direct quotes as needed to support your ideas. Excellent inquiry journals will successfully address each question and place this matter in conversation with pedagogical scholarship. The writing will also demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of teaching and learning by acknowledging multiple perspectives on this matter and/or exploring the potential consequences for (not) attending to this matter.

Part 2: Your Facilitation

We will view each inquiry journal as a pedagogical text. This means each inquiry journal is a moment of pedagogical meaning-making and worthy of study. As a class, we will aim to engage with your ideas just as we might respond to published pedagogical texts. As a facilitator, then, your job is to lead a conversation about the matter in a way that evokes multiple perspectives. For example, you may encourage class members to examine specific examples from their current or former teaching/learning contexts and consider how the inquiry journal supports, challenges, and/or complicates their pedagogical thinking. We won't aim to "solve" the teaching matter; instead, we will practice interrogating the ideas and raising questions. Our conversation should be a place of "exploratory speech" (Smagorinsky, 2013). Ideally, the facilitation will provide a place to wonder, helping us all understand the connection between problem-posing and problem-solving. Excellent facilitations will be interactive, foster an awareness of both problem-posing and problem-solving, and connect the conversation to our emerging understandings of teaching literacy in diverse classrooms.

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.10.31719/pjaw.v6i2.109.

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Studying the Rhetoric of the LMS in the Online Composition Classroom

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Abstract

Learning management systems (LMSs) are a common software many higher education institutions rely on to facilitate online, hybrid, and web-enhanced courses. However, while our students use the LMS for online learning, less often do they study the LMS as a cultural artifact that shapes how learning happens. This assignment prepares first-year writing students to disrupt the perceived neutrality of LMSs. Students study the LMS and grapple with issues related to technology, power dynamics, audience, and purpose that are foundational to their reading and writing of other texts. Before engaging in this project, students practice conducting rhetorical analysis and inquiry research that prepare them for the kinds of thinking and questioning required for the final LMS project. The final project for the course is a three-part LMS project that culminates in a digital presentation.

Introduction

In 2009 Kevin Eric DePew and Heather Lettner-Rust argued that many distance learning interfaces privilege the instructor's knowledge and evaluation. For DePew and Lettner-Rust (2009), the interface used for distance learning "sets up a power dynamic in which the capability to share the roles of creating knowledge is juxtaposed with the instructor's capability to normalize the students and reify their own authority through their gaze" (p. 174). Moreover, DePew and Lettner-Rust argue that the design of the interface has effects on how communication, classroom management, and writing instruction occur. Almost a decade later, in 2018, Alison Witte (2018) made a similar argument that these learning systems can be a site of tension in the classroom because they have the power to shape how students and teachers interact and how students raise questions; they also determine who has access to what materials. Witte (2018) draws on genre theory to "think of the interface not as a tool, but as a text with both expectations and formal conventions attached to it" (p. 50). Like DePew and Lettner-Rust, Witte further argues that learning management system interfaces function to replicate the top-down structure where the teacher delivers content. For Witte, the interface tends to be used to create genres as opposed to it being a genre. When users think of the interface as a tool used to create genres, it problematically suggests that the interface is neutral. This conceptualization of the interface as neutral reinforces the warning from Selfe and Selfe (1994) that when technology is considered neutral, its normalizing power is strengthened. Taking this idea further, Mckoy et al. (2020) asks us to think about interface and design through a race-conscious lens to identify if and how racism is encoded into the technology through a myth of neutrality that often privileges whiteness.

In my own first-year writing (FYW) courses, I have found that my students overwhelmingly find technologies, including learning management systems (LMSs), neutral and only beneficial to their learning processes. This benefit students see with the LMS might translate to a false sense of neutrality, where they see it simply as a tool that allows them to submit assignments, including participating in discussion forums without thinking of the effects those tools have

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on their work. This line of thinking could affect their continued interaction with technology, particularly preventing them from seeing the ways in which the LMS could reinforce hegemonic norms. Thus, I argue that designing projects that ask students to study LMSs is one way we can begin to pay more attention to the power of technology. In other words, students should not only use LMSs for online learning but should also study them for the effects they might have on their learning. Because our instruction and course design are important aspects of the LMS, inevitably some of the students' investigation will also entail studying how the instructor chooses to adopt the LMS. Indeed, students also study and pay attention to the tools that have been made available to them and emphasized by the instructor. Because students' perspectives have not been centered in much of OWI research projects to date (Martinez et al., 2019), a project, such as the one I share here, which requires students to interrogate power structures, can provide "excluded members of society access to systems of power and grounds on which those systems can be challenged and ultimately changed in meaningful ways" (Banks, 2005, p. 2). Preparing students to develop a robust awareness of power, agency, audience, and purpose requires that students and their instructors think more critically about online education and the interfaces with which they interact.

Thus, drawing inspiration from scholars that ask us to challenge the perceived neutrality of technology (DePew & Lettner-Rust, 2009; Mckoy et al., 2020; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Witte, 2018), I designed this assignment because I believe that FYW courses should create the spaces for students to study the effects of the LMS with which they interact. Moreover, this assignment supported students in achieving course learning outcomes related to studying rhetorical, ethical, and methodological conventions and locating, analyzing, and synthesizing information to produce works in a variety of genres. As McCorkle cautioned in 2012, scholars must shift what we ask students to pay attention to. Not only is it important that we teach multimodal composition but that we also prepare students to "develop a robust awareness of the tools" so that they learn not only how to use the tools but particularly so that they "recognize how such tools operate as manifestations of broader sociocultural forces" (McCorkle, 2012, p. 175).

Assignment: Scaffolding to Enhance Meaning Making

This assignment takes place at a four-year public research institution in the Detroit Metropolitan Area and within a general education writing course, which is part of a writing foundations requirement. This LMS project is the final of three projects in the course. First, students spend roughly three weeks writing a short textual analysis paper, where they select a current newspaper opinion essay that addresses issues related to access, technology, or online education. The purpose of this first project is to prepare students to study language and its effects on audiences and to engage in analytical work that prepares them for the second project, an inquiry-based research paper. The inquiry-based research paper builds on students' analytical work by asking them to conduct research on the same topic as their textual analysis paper. Through their roughly six weeks research, students practice important skills such as asking questions, locating and analyzing key sources, and synthesizing information. These skills are foundational to students' success in the written portion of the final LMS project.

The LMS project itself has a written and a digital component. For the written component, students spend roughly two weeks researching the LMS company in order to gather information that would contextualize their findings of the LMS itself. To support students in this research, I provide them with a list of questions and work with them to modify those questions and design additional ones. Students investigate factors such as who the investors are, what visual elements are present on the website, who seems to be represented on the site and who is not, where the company is located, among other factors. While students are researching the company, I also invite them to draw on sources from their inquiry-based research paper, to help them make sense of issues related to access and representation they might encounter on the company's site. Students also participate in a group forum to discuss one of four scholarly articles including Oswal's (2015) "Physical and learning disabilities in OWI," Witte's (2018) " 'Why Won't Moodle…?' Using Genre Studies to Understand Students' Approaches to Interacting with User-Interfaces," Arola's (2010) "The design of Web 2.0, the rise of the template, the fall of design," and Duffelmeyer's (2000) "Critical computer literacy: Computers in first-year composition as topic and environment." These activities result in a short paper about the LMS company that they draw on for the digital component of the project.

The digital component of this LMS project asks students to then take their findings and present a claim about the LMS in a digital format. I present students with a list of design options, which I adapted from Ball et al.'s (2018) *writer/designer*. I asked students to select the design option that best allows them to effectively present the claim they are making about LMSs. Most students chose to design infographics and Google Slides with a few creating video essays. In their digital composition, students also relied on their weekly reflections and personal experiences with the LMS in conjunction with what they learned about the company from their research to present their claim.

Each week since the start of the semester, as students work through the textual analysis project, the inquiry-based exploration, and the final digital LMS project, they also write weekly logs documenting their awareness, expectations of, and experiences with the course's LMS. The weekly logs are a crucial part of the course because they set the foundation for students to develop "critical computer literacy" (Duffelmeyer, 2000, p. 359) by paying attention to the role of the LMS in relation to the work they are producing in the course. In other words, students practice seeing the LMS as an integral part of their learning ecology and not a separate entity where they simply submit assignments. Moreover, as scholars have identified, metacognition is a key component for knowledge awareness and transfer across contexts to be effective (Kurt, 2007; Soldner, 1998; VanKooten, 2016; Zinchuk, 2017), so the logs help students develop this keen awareness of the LMS throughout the semester.

Reflection: Developing Consciousness about the LMS

My favorite aspect about this project is that it requires students to realize their learning is not taking place in a vacuum. Just as how the material classroom space and the bodies that occupy that space shape how learning takes place, the LMS likewise shapes how that learning happens, and this project requires that students recognize the effect. For example, I ask students "What features about Moodle do you dislike? Why?" and also "What aspect of Moodle, if any, do you believe should be designed by students?" Questions such as these invite students not only to move beyond simply using the LMS but also to truly pay attention to possible problems that exist within the LMS and how to respond to those problems. Moreover, questions such as these allow students to delve into what they practice through the inquiry-based research project, where they have to rely on personal experiences with the technology and draw on those personal experiences to solve potential problems. As Bawarshi (2003) argued, equally as important as what writers write is what contributes to their agency in determining what and how they write.

Furthermore, students are essentially working on this project for the entire semester through their weekly reflections. From the first day when they log into the Moodle course, skim the units, click around on different pages, and view their classmates' profiles, they are interacting with the course and the LMS in ways that will continue to evolve and shape their relationship with the system. Essentially, this project supports instructors and students in what Morris (2018) calls "becoming conscious" not just "becoming knowledgeable" (para. 11) of digital interfaces and their effects. This level of consciousness that students develop is evident when in their reflections, they employ concepts such as "affordance," "effects," and "constraints." These ways of thinking and the connections among all the project show students that they are not engaged in busy work.

Despite its benefits, there are also some elements of this project that I would pay closer attention to the next time I assign it. Just as important as the results of the project is the process of creating it. For example, it is very important to shape the questions with the students. The first time I assigned this project I did not include my students in the design of most of the questions, and I did not spend enough time setting up the context for why this inquiry was important. This resulted in student responses where many simply summarized information from the LMS company website and indicated that the LMS itself was useful, but only a few provided any analytical evidence of why they drew these conclusions. While I was glad that many of my students found the LMS useful, my feedback to most students asked them to support the conclusions they were forming. This analytical support is particularly key given issues of access that surround LMSs for some users. For example, Oswal (2015) argues that some LMSs are designed only for "ocular efficiency" (p. 267). This idea brings to the forefront that although LMSs might be wonderful and useful for some students, they can also have harmful effects for others.

I also found myself rethinking the assumptions I made about the kinds of technology students are using to engage in the course. Toward the end of the course when I read students' reflections, one of my most surprising realizations was that multiple students were taking my online course using their mobile devices. Rodrigo (2015) argues that there are a growing number of students using mobile devices for online writing courses. This is something I was not aware of earlier on at the beginning of my own course. When students take courses with their mobile devices, it affects how they interact with me and with the course, and this is something I believe instructors should be aware of at the beginning of the course.

Conclusions

Preparing students to disrupt the perceived neutrality of LMSs, and technology more broadly, is foundational to their growth as critical thinkers and writers. Thus, it is important that students not view this assignment as a kind of usability test of the LMS. Instead, they should view it as a scholarly inquiry into the LMS they use to learn because they can identify how the shape of the interface reflects who is in control of the interaction, reflecting the "balance of power and control" between the user and the interface (Laurel & Mountford, 1990, p. xii). The goal is for this inquiry to lead to a deep understanding of the LMS as a dynamic system with effects and for them to develop the habits of mind that helps them to ask questions about the LMS and other systems with which they engage. Of course, not all writing courses are facilitated through the university LMS. In many ways, the work of studying the LMS can still take place even when writing courses are facilitated through, for example, websites or other platforms. While instructors are provided with access to LMSs, university issued emails, and other digital interfaces, instructors still have the agency to determine the extent to which the systems will shape our own pedagogy.

Most students who take my writing course are also taking other classes that require some engagement with the LMS. Thus, this LMS project also invites students to pay attention to the complexities and variations in how they learn in each class based on how the LMS is framed. This is where much of the transfer happens, too. Oftentimes students do not recognize how the approaches to thinking and their work with different media transfer from one class to another. In fact, VanKooten (2020) argues that digital writing is one way for students and instructors to better understand the transfer of writing knowledge. In my own project, this meta-awareness about transfer manifests particularly when students create their digital project to share their findings. Also, my institution utilizes Moodle as its LMS. Although my students studied Moodle, it is noteworthy that institutions' choice in LMSs vary and change constantly, so this assignment can be modified accordingly based on whichever learning system the instructor or university uses.

In all, the overall goal is not for students to be familiar with the LMS itself; instead, it is for them to develop the habits of mind necessary to pay critical attention to the function of LMSs and how these functions create assumptions about how teaching and learning occur.

ASSIGNMENT

Learning Management System (LMS) Digital Writing Project

Weekly Reflections Questions

Each week you will write a reflection that documents your experiences with this course's Learning Management System (LMS). In your one paragraph reflections, consider a combination of the following questions:

- What features about Moodle do you like? Why?
- What features about Moodle do you dislike? Why?
- What, if any, social networking sites do you have experience with?
- How is Moodle similar to and different from any social networking site that you have experience using? For example, study the interface layout, navigation, notifications, where tools are located, color scheme, etc.
- After focusing on the similarities and differences between Moodle and social networking sites, explain whether you believe those similarities and differences were helpful or harmful to your own *learning* of rhetoric and composition. In other words, discuss the relationship between the design of Moodle and how it might have helped or hurt how you learn writing. How does the design of the Moodle interface affect the work you (are able to) do?
- What aspect of Moodle, if any, do you believe should be designed by students? In other words, if you could change any aspect of Moodle to better support you as a student, what would it be and why?
- In what ways does the design of Moodle impact how you communicate with me and your peers and how you come to practice writing?
- What assumptions do you think the LMS interface makes about you, the student, about how you learn? How do these assumptions affect how you engage with the course, your classmates and/or the instructor? What and/or who seems to be privileged through the design of Moodle?
- Do any of the tools in the LMS make you think about issues of power, oppression, race, gender, agency, accessibility, disability, etc.?

Part I: LMS Digital Writing Project (written component)

You have been studying and practicing writing and rhetoric by conducting textual analysis and inquiry-research. You have also been writing weekly reflections on your interactions with the LMS. Now you are ready to practice creating your own rhetorical situation through this inquiry-based project called the Learning Management System (LMS) digital writing project. This project has two components, a written and a digital.

Learning management systems are a common and important aspect of learning, especially online learning. Many institutions rely on them for instruction. For example, they are used for submitting assignments, completing quizzes, posting grades, and engaging in class discussions, etc. Throughout this course, you have used Moodle in a variety of ways, and you have been reflecting on your experiences engaging with the LMS. This project asks you to build on your experiences using Moodle by drawing on your rhetorical analysis and research skills to conduct a thorough investigation of and analysis into the effects that Moodle has on your learning. Importantly, I am not looking for a basic description of Moodle. Instead, focus on your own argument about LMSs based on *the effects* of Moodle on your learning. Visit the Moodle website, and gather information that responds to a combination of the following questions:

- Who is involved in the creation of Moodle? What do you know about the creators? Do they list their credentials on the site? Is there any way to contact them?
- What images are displayed on the website? Who and what is (not) represented?
- Does anything on the site make you think about issues related to identity, representation, diversity, or inclusion?
- Are there any investors? advertisers? Who is funding the company?
- How is information presented? What modes are adopted?
- Does the information seem accurate? Is there any bias? (cultural, political, religious, etc.)
- Is the information recent?
- What can we learn about the company that can teach us about the LMS we use here?
- What did you learn about the company (any politics behind it) that can inform any choices made regarding the design of the LMS interface? Pay attention to multiple interfaces here. You might look at how assignments are submitted, how the discussion board is framed, and even how communication such as chat and email are designed.
- How do scholars who study issues related to technology, issues, interface, and online pedagogy, etc. conceptualize the LMS and what conceptualization do you find most engaging and productive that might speak to your own experience?

Part II: LMS Digital Writing Project (digital component)

Now that you have gathered details about the LMS, this final part of the project asks you to share your findings with your audience by presenting an argument about the LMS. Both your weekly reflections and your research of the LMS company were to prepare you for the final digital writing presentation. Importantly, you are not expected to share all of your findings from your inquiry; instead, consider that your audience are students new to online learning and/or to the university, and determine what they should know about the LMS based on your own personal experiences and your own research.

As we have learned from Ball, Sheppard, and Arola (2018), selecting technology to share your project depends on a number of factors such as the rhetorical situation of your project, the most appropriate modes and media to fit that situation, and any affordances that are available for you to create your project. Below is a list of commonly used media. Explore each page before deciding on which you would use to share your findings. This list simply offers suggestions, so feel free to use any tool you are comfortable with. For more examples of technology choices, see Ball, Sheppard, and Arola's *Writer/designer: A guide to making multimodal projects.*

Infographic (Venngage, Piktochart)

Presentation (PowerPoint, Google Slides)

Movie (iMovie [Mac], Moviemaker [Windows], YouTube Editor)
Website (Google Sites, Weebly, Wix)
Audio (Podcast, Audacity)
Images (Poster, Storybird, Fotor)

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.v6i2.102.

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Mapping the Conversation
A Graphic Organizer Tool for Synthesis Assignments

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Abstract

College students struggle with synthesis assignments, often producing serial summaries of texts (for example, Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Bloom, 1956). Graphic organizers visualize the connections between information in multiple texts (for example, Daher & Kiewra, 2016; Hall & Strangman, 2008). This essay introduces the Mapping the Conversation exercise as such a graphic organizer and discusses its set-up and execution. The exercise challenges students' critical thinking and actively engages them in the writing process, ultimately aiding students in producing complex and concise syntheses. The exercise was originally developed for a first-year writing course but can be adapted for advanced writers and courses across all majors.

In my early years teaching writing, I encountered a situation where all instructors were expected to teach a synthesis assignment in their first-year writing classes. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, how many examples my students and I dissected, how many exercises we completed, how many peer review sessions or conferences I offered, most students kept failing at producing successful syntheses. I realized that to resolve the situation I had to develop what was, for me, a new kind of exercise. Ultimately, I designed a graphic organizer exercise, which I named Mapping the Conversation. This mapping exercise, by using sticky notes and colorful markers, creates a visual and tactile engagement with texts, moving students from a linear reading of texts to a complex synthesis of ideas and topics represented within those texts. In this essay, I discuss the exercise's preparation, its four main steps (note taking, clustering, drawing connections, discussion), its adjustments to teaching in virtual/hybrid or settings other than first-year writing, as well as the exercise's challenges and successes.

A successful synthesis identifies the complex network of themes, core ideas, and main concepts within and across texts. Students, then, showcase the connections in a concisely written paper. Because writing is an integral part of knowledge production (Aitchison & Lee, 2006), synthesis is an extraordinarily challenging task for students at any level of education (Bloom, 1956). I often find that synthesis is further complicated when students work with different textual genres, print and electronic, as they now not only deal with comprehending content, but also different rhetorical affordances, such as *ethos, pathos*, *logos*, and medium. Students also often struggle with different synthesis tasks within the same course, but also between different courses. For example, asking students to provide an original argument should result in a different synthesis than asking them to present information or to conduct a comparison.

Throughout the research and writing process, students must resolve a number of problems. The main issue students must resolve is that of joining the ongoing scholarly discussion surrounding their topic. Kenneth Burke's (1941) parlor metaphor comes to mind; he describes a participant who attempts to join an ongoing discussion without ever being able to retrace all aspects of it.[1] In other words, when we are asking our students to synthesize, we are asking them to immerse themselves in an ongoing (scholarly) discussion with which they are largely unfamiliar and then to portray that discussion in writing. As a teacher of a variety of writing

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courses, such as first-year academic as well as upper-level professional writing, I am no stranger to students' difficulties with synthesis assignments. When I work with my students on synthesis, I expect them to move from a linear reading of texts to an interconnected, iterative, and highly complex understanding of that content before translating their newly gained knowledge into a synthesis that retains and displays the highly complex network of idea. Not surprisingly, many students struggle throughout this process of translating information.

For example, already during the reading and note-taking stage, students should move from the linear reading of texts to connecting information in their notes. This process causes difficulty for many students (Du & List, 2020); it sets them up to create serial, also referred to as parallel or linear, summaries of the texts (Daher & Kiewra, 2016) rather than the desired synthesis. The reasons why students default to serialization are varied, including cognitive challenges (Blondy et al., 2016) and established writing habits, such as students' past experiences with annotated bibliographies that ask for, and therefore reinforce, the serial presentation of texts. Moreover, proven strategies for teaching synthesis remain rare (Blondy et al., 2016), and students often note a general lack of clarity in instructors' communications of expectations and desired outcomes (Lillis & Turner, 2001). After a number of years teaching first-year writing and adjusting my teaching and feedback, I still kept encountering those same challenges detailed by many researchers of writing studies. I kept asking myself, how could I move students away from serial summaries and toward synthesis?

Writing Studies research shows that students who spend more time in the pre-writing stage produce more complex and concise drafts (Escorcia et al., 2017) and that students who invest in writing as an active procedure, "de-constructing and re-constructing, dis-connecting and re-connecting, as well as shaping and re-shaping" (Badley, 2009, p. 209) their work, are more likely to produce complex syntheses. Based on this knowledge, I set out to develop an exercise that would encourage my students to invest in their pre-writing and writing. My scholarly interest in embodied knowledge led me to design an exercise that would move students toward experiencing and interacting with texts in a more tactile, physical manner, resulting in what I have come to call the "Mapping the Conversation" exercise. I now understand that such mapping is a form of graphic organizer; these are also known under many other names, such as concept maps, diagrams, matrices, knowledge networks, and advance organizers, and can take many different forms (for example, see Hall & Strangman, 2008). Graphic organizers are tools that can help students actively engage in the writing process during and after the pre-writing stage. Such organizers have been found to improve learning outcomes and are effective in helping students visualize how information connects (Daher & Kiewra, 2016; Hall & Strangman, 2008). Furthermore, graphic organizers are beneficial for students from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities (Deshler et al., 2001; Ellis & Howard, 2007) and novice writers (Lee & Tan, 2010). What all organizers have in common, however, is the use of graphic elements that visually depict connections and relationships between themes, ideas, concepts, and terms (Hall & Strangman, 2008) in a non-linear fashion.

To teach students how to synthesize information, I use Mapping the Conversation as a low-stakes learning to write activity, which can be assessed as a pass/fail or nongraded assignment. Usually, I consider the assignment as part of students' participation grade for the semester. I first developed and used this exercise in first-year writing courses, but it can be easily adapted to the needs of upper-level courses, including non-writing specific courses in the majors. I provide some further discussion on adaptations of this exercise for advanced writers and in digital formats at the end of the article. In first-year writing courses, students complete the mapping exercise twice, once in small groups with the same texts, and next individually with texts specific to their individual research project. In upper-level courses, the first run-through of the exercise can be shortened to a discussion of the exercise and the presentation of a few examples. Whatever the procedure, once carefully prepared and set-up, the Mapping the Conversation exercise can be divided into 4 steps: Note taking, Clustering, Drawing Connections, and Discussion.

Preparing the Exercise

Mirroring Burke's (1941) parlor metaphor, my students imagine synthesis as a conversation. We begin on familiar territory: I ask students to picture a dinner conversation, maybe their family's Thanksgiving dinner, and to think of the conversations that take place. Just this semester, one student provided a most vivid retelling of their family's spirited discussion around the dinner table, with some members agreeing on a topic, others disagreeing, some loudly interjecting, others quietly making their point. The class not only had a good laugh, but also quickly agreed that a conversation is a back and forth of voices, never a sequence of monologues without response or interaction between speakers. While, or maybe because, this is a simple exercise, it is one that has never failed me, neither at a prestigious research university on the West coast nor a small religious institution in the Midwest; it has been successful with undergraduate and graduate students alike. First, most students have experiences with family dinners; if they have not participated in one, they likely have seen one portrayed on TV. But maybe more importantly, situating the class discussion in personal experiences rather than academic expectations takes away the pressure of "getting it right." The energy in the classroom unmistakably lights up as many students share in the conversation.

From here, I shift our classroom discussion to the texts we study. I ask students to imagine the authors of their texts sitting around that dinner table, deeply in conversation. What would they say to each other? Who would agree with whom? Who would disagree with whom? Which author would be able to provide more in-depth information to something another author introduced? Do all authors speak to all topics? Do some remain silent? Is there an identifiable reason for the silence? Finally, do all authors speak with the same authority and *ethos*? This imaginary conversation is the synthesis towards which the students strive.

As we move into the mapping exercise, I provide my students with the following materials: a handout that explains the exercise (presented here as the assignment), sticky-notes of different colors, large pieces of paper (or, if available and practical, space on a whiteboard), and colored markers. Step 1, Note Taking, varies in time depending on the number and complexity of texts. Steps 2-4 take about 100 minutes. Depending on available class time and students' familiarity with content and/or synthesis, Steps 2 and 3 can be (partially) assigned as out-of-class activities.

Step 1: Note Taking

Note taking is a crucial component of the reading process, and students who take notes while reading were found to better understand intertextual relationships than those who did not (Kobayashi, 2009). I provide students with a "Reading & Note Taking Worksheet" to encourage note taking (see Supplementary Materials). This handout can be shared as hardcopy or in electronic format, depending on the needs of the students and instructor. The handout asks them to identify the text's author(s), title and genre. In addition, and more importantly, students also identify and note main ideas, concepts, terms, and keywords, and copy particularly noteworthy quotes. Finally, students are challenged to record any connections the text has with other sources they are familiar with, including, but not limited to, texts they study for my or other classes' projects. As with many writing and reading strategies, some students take to these handouts and make extensive notes, others provide only a few comments. Similarly, some students adopt the technique as they move on to reading new texts; other students never use the handouts again. Despite the mixed engagement with the note taking handout, I find value in all students having at least some keywords and ideas identified as they move into the mapping exercise as these notes provide the backbone to their discussions with each other.

Once students have read their texts and completed the accompanying handouts, they are provided with the sticky notes onto which they transfer their notes. Using sticky notes during this step will help students during the next stages of the exercise. I also provide two main recommendations: First, use different colored sticky notes for each text (for example, Text 1—green, Text 2—yellow, Text 3—blue), and second, write only one concept/definition/term/etc. on each sticky note. The different colors function as a simple citation device, keeping track where each piece of information comes from. Limiting information on each sticky note to a keyword or a short phrase helps students move information around as they think and re-think connections. While it is intensive work, perhaps even tedious, to copy notes from the handout to the sticky notes, the step allows students to refresh their memory and knowledge of the text(s) they have read; it also invites discussion within student groups as they decide which information to copy onto the sticky notes and how to focus information from the note taking worksheet.

Step 2: Clustering

Step 2 asks students to cluster information and map connections. I provide them with a large blank canvas, either space on a whiteboard or a large piece of paper, upon which they can attach, and move around, their sticky notes. Students begin by organizing notes into stacks or clusters. Each cluster focuses on one particular topic, concept, etc., which they name and label. Then, they identify subtopics, sub-concepts, etc., within each cluster and further organize and re-organize their notes. This step can be difficult for many students because it challenges them to move away from a serial consideration of the texts and into synthesis. I have found that it helps to model a few examples and provide students with a starting point. Students also find it helpful to see examples of previously completed maps (see Figure 1); however, showing them maps that are based on the same texts on which they are working often leads to mimicry rather than true invention. While the groups work, I move around the classroom and provide feedback and encouragement that visually combining the texts, rather than keeping them separated on the page, is the correct idea.

Step 3: Drawing Connections

As students begin identifying common themes and topics, I ask them to consider the relationships between those themes. For example, are they discovering any historical connections, a chronology of sorts? Are there disciplinary connections; can they find information on how different academic disciplines have studied and addressed the phenomenon? What cultural or social, regional or national, ethnic, racial, or gender relationships can they identify? As students begin identifying and labeling topics and themes, they also begin discovering the relationships within and among the texts they study.

At this point in the exercise, students seamlessly transition from clustering notes to moving them around on their canvas. Through the use of lines, arrows, and circles, they visualize the relationships between the previously identified clusters. Adding different colors, fonts, font sizes, forms, or even images creates a visual map of the network of ideas presented through the texts (see Figure 1). For example, students may visualize that one cluster is subordinate to another cluster or that one cluster constitutes a requirement/pre-requisite toward another cluster. The connections, now quite literally, emerge in front of their eyes.

Depending on how students conceptualize each cluster, it may become necessary to challenge

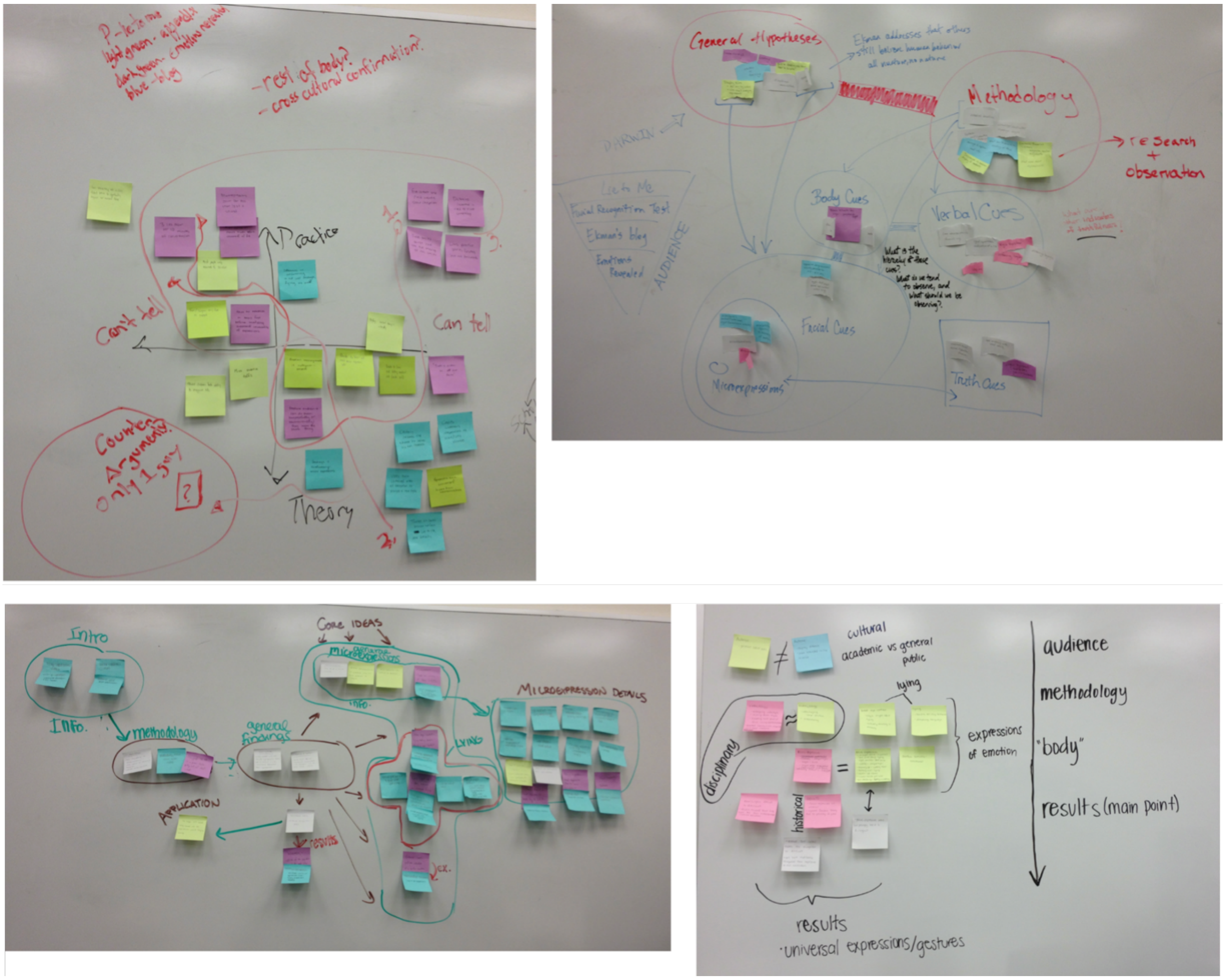

Figure 1. Sample maps created by students. All maps were created by student groups and are based on the same four texts

them to not only map the connections between clusters, but also to draw connections between information within each cluster. For example, students may label a cluster as "Methodology" or "Body" and can express that the Body section builds on the Methodology section. Similarly, they may use topic descriptions, such as "facial expressions" or "lie detection," and can visualize the former as a sub-topic to the latter. However, students often struggle to show connections within each cluster, that is, to show synthesis between texts on a more focused level. Pointing back at the Dinner Table Conversation metaphor and/or showing a few examples can help students label connections, such as "builds on each other," "contributes," "opposes," etc. Students may also have to be encouraged to rethink and reorganize the placement of their notes. Completing this step of the mapping exercise assists students in recognizing the complex network of ideas and themes that connects their texts. Once students are satisfied with their map, I challenge them to think about in which order they would present the information in an essay, thereby leading them from a conceptual, visual map to written outline.

Step 4: Discussion

The fourth and final step of the mapping exercise, discussion, can take different forms. For example, when my first-year students work in groups on the same texts as other groups in the class, they will present their final map to their peers. Doing so supports student understanding that there is no one right way to connect information. They also learn that different maps emphasize (or deemphasize) certain connections and information. In contrast, when students work on their individual research projects, I meet with each student one-on-one to discuss their map. Such a meeting can take place during class time when I circle around the classroom or during one-on-one conferences to which students bring their maps (the actual physical or virtual map or a picture of their physical map) and any other notes or drafts they have worked on. Students narrate their map to me, thereby verbalizing how they interpret the network of ideas they visualized before we read together through their written synthesis and discuss it. Such a discussion, aided by the map, allows insight into the student's conceptual process. For example, I have found that students may still fall back on producing written serial summaries, despite having produced a detailed map and being able to orally discuss the complex connections. Without the map, I might believe that the student failed to synthesize the information. Instead, students explain to me their belief that serial summaries are the only way to discuss texts as this is what was taught to them in the past, e.g., through annotated bibliographies. Once this misunderstanding is revealed, I encourage them to translate their visual map and oral discussion into a written synthesis. For example, I explain to the student that their oral narration of the map was a truly complex synthesis and that their writing can and should follow their own narration. However, if the student's map or narration of the map was still partially serial, the map becomes a useful tool to model connections before asking the student to find other connections on their own. When students submit their completed synthesis for grading, I also require them to submit their map; this allows me to consider process and final product while grading.

Going Digital

Because most of my teaching takes place in traditional classrooms, I usually conduct the mapping exercise with analog tools, such as the previously discussed sticky notes and paper/whiteboards. However, the exercise can also be translated into a virtual classroom setting, using digital tools, whether for the use in online or hybrid classes or to accommodate students who missed class. The step-by-step process of the exercise, as conducted in a traditional classroom, can be followed in the same order for online or hybrid classes. However, if the exercise is being moved virtually for a student who was absent from class, it should be adjusted. For example, a student who misses the early stages of the exercise set-up and/or group meetings may be asked to develop an individual map and bring that map to a later class meeting; then they receive feedback from their group or the entire class. A wide variety of digital tools exists that can be used for this exercise. In what follows, I will focus on three digital tools with which I am familiar and have found easy to use in the online classroom. These three digital tools are Miro, Microsoft Office 365's Whiteboard, and Jamboard by Google.

Miro (www.miro.com) is an online whiteboard tool that can be used for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration and is free of charge with an educational account. The software allows users to write and draw on the whiteboard background, upload images and other documents, and even offers a "sticky note" function. Each note's color, shape, and size can be adjusted due to the user's needs. Users can also type into the sticky notes. Lines, arrows, circles (pre-defined and free form) can be used to visually connect sticky notes, images, and text. Because Miro can be used synchronously and asynchronously, and users can switch back and forth between both modes, instructors can introduce the mapping exercise in class and have students complete it at home, either individually or in groups. Of the three digital tools discussed here, Miro offers users the most customization options, but for me, it was also the software with the steepest learning curve.

Microsoft Office 365's Whiteboard is available to all Microsoft Office 365 users after logging into their Microsoft Office 365 account; its functionality is comparable to Miro's. However, because Whiteboard is tied to individual users' Office 365 accounts, access must be granted via a share link. Instructors using this software can choose setting up one or multiple spaces for their students and share access or ask students to set up their own space and share the respective link with the instructor and/or class. Of note, Microsoft provides a web version and an app of its whiteboard tool; the web version is more limited than the app. I have found differences between web and app versions can be confusing when teaching a software to users and troubleshooting issues they are experiencing.

Finally, Jamboard by Google (jamboard.google.com), like the other two digital tools, offers a whiteboard space with the option to add text, freehand doodle, upload images, and use sticky notes. The sticky notes are limited to five color choices and are square only. Users creating Jamboards need to log in with a Google account, but the documents can be shared with others via a unique link and without the need for them to possess or log in to a Google account. Depending on the security setting chosen by the document's owner, other users can view or edit anonymously. In most cases the instructor will create all the whiteboard spaces for their students; therefore, this software can create more work for instructors when preparing the mapping exercise. However, because Jamboard's usage provides fewer options (e.g., fewer color choices for the sticky notes and no change of form), I have found it very intuitive to use. In addition, its functionality is very similar to Google Drive documents, with which many instructors and students have experience (since Google Drive documents are commonly used in many K-12 and college-level teaching settings) and, therefore, will not have to learn a new software interface. As with all instruction tools, digital and analog, I recommend that instructors explore these and other options to learn what most suits their and their students' needs.

Beyond the First-year Writing Course

Adapting the mapping exercise from a first-year writing course for a course in the majors or graduate students is possible and can combine the benefits of a learning to write and writing to learn activity. The mapping exercise encourages students to move beyond an understanding of individual texts in a mostly isolated and parallel fashion, as is, for example, the focus in annotated bibliography assignments. Mapping can be used to teach students how to write in a specific genre within their discipline, e.g., a literature review in a research article or their thesis or dissertation (learning to write), and also familiarizes them with authors, texts, concepts, definitions, arguments, etc. within their field of study (writing to learn). The mapping exercise can be conducted as described or can be adapted by eliminating the reading and note taking handouts (see Step 1: Note Taking) and/or group exercise and moving students directly into working with their individual research topics and resources. More independent students, for example Ph.D.-level graduate students, can succeed without much initial classroom time to set up the exercise. However, upper-level undergraduate students and new Master's-level graduate students seem to benefit from time in the classroom, even if it is only 30 minutes, to set up and begin the exercise. Such time allows for answering questions and to help students "get going" on the assignment. It may be tempting to forgo feedback with advanced students while they are working on their maps. However, good feedback benefits students of all levels; it addresses cognitive and motivational factors—informing students how to develop their work and allowing them a feeling of control (Brookhart, 2017). Advanced students can provide thoughtful, in-depth feedback on their peers' maps in a peer-review workshop. These students, like their first-year counterparts, also benefit from one-on-one feedback by the instructor and a presentation of their map to the class for group feedback.

I have also adapted the mapping exercise for students preparing presentations based on their research, in particular for projects in a business writing course where students worked with a local non-profit business on resolving issues the non-profit had encountered. The mapping exercise asked students to visualize the information they had gathered throughout the semester and previously communicated via a written recommendation report. Now, students had to pivot to adapt their communication to a listening audience and its unique needs. Visually organizing their information in a map enabled students to see the hierarchy between topics and their subtopics, supporting evidence, and other information they had compiled. Quite literally seeing the connections provided them with new insights into their project. The strength of the mapping exercise lies in the nature of graphic organizer tools: While the tool remains the same (or very similar) for all levels of students and instructional contexts, the depth of knowledge and the complexity of information represented in the map are determined by the students themselves. In other words, the more advanced the student's understanding of the subject matter, the more advanced their map will be and vice versa. Using the same tool will not inhibit advanced students from going deeper into their synthesis, and it will not overextend more beginner writers and researchers.

Successes and Challenges

The greatest success of the mapping exercise comes from shifting students away from seeing texts and ideas in isolation and moving them into visualizing the network of connections between ideas and concepts. That happens when students create their own maps and visualize their own organization, rather than simply filling in a provided, empty graphic organizer "shell." Students often tell me how they experience the topic/argument emerging before their eyes when they, quite literally, see the connections mapped out in front of them. One of the most successful maps I have seen over the years was by a student who visualized a tree structure (and cut a tree from cardboard paper with sticky notes attached all over), including a trunk (the basic, foundational texts), larger main branches (main arguments and evidence), and smaller side branches (supporting arguments and evidence as well as related topics). Their map represented a different kind of metaphor than that of synthesis as a conversation; the student visualized synthesis as a growing and living entity, a tree.

The exercise's main challenge is to guide students to that moment of insight. Not all students will immediately understand how to connect ideas visually and/or create a (detailed) map. The following two activities help students to get started. First, students can benefit from discussing major concepts, definitions, etc. and from modeling some connections between them. Such discussions can build on the reading and note taking handout (see Supplementary Materials) that students complete during Step 1 of the process. Second, dedicating class time to the beginning and end of the mapping exercise, rather than assigning the entire exercise as homework, assists in getting students started and provides them with time to review and complete their map, respectively. During that in-class time, I make sure to circulate through the class (or breakout groups during virtual classes) for short "check-ins" with the students to address questions and help overcome thinking blocks or misunderstandings. It may take some trial and error for each instructor to understand how much time to dedicate to these check-ins, but I would recommend dedicating about five to ten minutes per individual student or student group as starting point.

Graphic organizers are a powerful learning tool. The Mapping the Conversation exercise moves beyond the use of graphic organizers merely as templates students study and/or complete. Instead, it actively engages students, challenges their critical thinking, and advances their writing skills. The map itself functions as a writing tool and opens the opportunity for discussion and feedback between student and instructor. Mapping is a skill that is advantageous to novice and advanced writers. As indicated, while the exercise was originally developed for a first-year writing class, it can be easily adapted for any setting that requires synthesis writing and therefore benefits students throughout their college career and beyond.

ASSIGNMENT

Mapping the Conversation—Finding Connections

Step 1: Note Taking

Now that you've completed reading all texts and taking notes (see your Reading & Note Taking handout),[2] put all the different pieces of information you collected on sticky notes. Capture details, even small ones. Think about using different colors for different texts.

Step 2: Clustering

Capture details, even the small ones. Use your physical space—cluster the sticky notes according to the texts.

Map out ideas & Get deeper into your analysis

See if you can find themes, problems, or topics across the different texts. Include context whenever necessary and helpful. Mix and match your sticky notes.

Here are some relationships you might find:

- Historical—think about the "before and after" of your topic; how was it a product of its particular historical circumstances
- Disciplinary—multiple academic disciplines often study the same phenomenon
- Cultural or social—consider national, regional, ethnic, racial, gender, or other kinds of social identities

Step 3: Drawing Connections

Start with anything, perhaps a problem or a common theme. Organize the ideas in your clusters. How do clusters and ideas connect? Why do clusters and ideas connect? Move the sticky notes across the whiteboard; use markers, pens, colors, paper to visualize the connections you discover. Write and draw. Play with fonts, arrows, shapes, and sizes, and images. Do whatever helps you visualize the connections you are drawing.

And repeat! Rethink, reorganize, keep asking why.

Step 4: Discussion

What topics have you identified? What connections have you discovered? Have you found conflicts? Who agrees with whom and who disagrees? How do the different ideas build on each other? What is missing in the conversation? Think about the authors and their audiences—how does that help you put the texts in perspective? Where can you take your research from here? What other texts do you need to find and read for your own research?

Notes

[1] Critics of Burke have long pointed at limitations of his work, for example, on race (Martinez, 2014), gender (Condit, 1992), and class (Tate, 1969). Some explore issues particularly relevant to the Composition classroom, for example Trainor (2013) on literacy development and Pfeiffer (2015), writing as an undergraduate student, on the power structure inherent in Burke's parlor that can limit or forbid undergraduate students from joining the conversation.

[2] *Prompt* readers, see Supplementary Materials for this handout.

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.v6i2.91.

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