prompt

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Editor's Note

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I am pleased to open issue 7.1 of *Prompt* with the news that we have selected new editors for the journal: Rick Fisher, Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Wyoming, and Kelly Kinney, Associate Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. Our journal approaches college teaching as scholarly work that aims to support student learning, and Kelly and Rick both have deep backgrounds in the scholarship and practice of college writing. The next issue of the journal, 7.2, will be the final issue edited by me in collaboration with Managing Editor Holly Ryan. Holly and I have structured the editorial transition in a way that we hope will allow the incoming editors to benefit from our experiences in building and editing the journal while also encouraging them to consider new ideas and approaches that will keep the journal vital and engaging to our readership. I am looking forward to continued conversations during this transition and seeing how the journal grows under their leadership.

I would also like to welcome Christopher Basgier, Director of University Writing at Auburn University, to our Editorial Board.

I am excited to share with you four essays and writing assignments that all seem to be influenced, in various ways, by key conversations driving academe in recent years, including those about the pandemic, the persistence of structural racism and oppression, and climate change. In putting the issue together, I found myself thinking about how I have been editing this journal long enough to start to see the way that history shapes and changes college teaching. As the worlds inside and beyond the university have changed in the last few years, so too has the work educators have done with students. I hope the existence of *Prompt* as a forum for sharing current work on teaching writing helps both our authors and readers think critically about the ways our world is changing us, and our students, as well as the changes we want to make.

In "Field Guide to Lost Futures: A Collaborative Engagement with the Anthropocene," Danielle Taschereau Mamers offers an assignment driven by creativity and collaboration for taking on a painful topic during a difficult time. Students in this cultural studies course jointly authored an online field guide to elements of the world we are losing or expect to lose during the Anthropocene. The idea of a field guide assignment could be imported into many courses, and the field guide produced by Taschereau Mamers's students is available online.

What if the Burkean Parlor were extremely online? In "Using GIFs to Position Students as Scholars," Jamie Henthorn offers an assignment that asks students to use GIFs as a way of entering into critical dialogue with a text. This inventive assignment makes interacting with scholarly writing more interesting and engaging for student writers and helps students build confidence in their ability to respond to difficult scholarly texts.

Samuel Dunn and Sherri Craig will help contribute to discussions of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion within the field of technical and professional communication with the assignment they share in "Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace: A Case-Based Technical and Professional Communication Assignment." They adopt a case study pedagogy to get their students thinking and writing about challenging workplace

communication problems related to identity and culture.

Jackie Hoermann-Elliott and Margaret V. Williams, two self-described "journalists turned faculty," help their students gain the confidence and skills to break into freelance writing in "Scaffolding toward Self-Efficacy: Preparing Underrepresented Writers to Pitch as Freelance Authors." The assignment offers students models and guidance toward a form of writing, the pitch, that is often composed and shared privately and thus would be difficult for writers without existing connections in the journalism industry to learn about and compose.

Field Guide to Lost Futures
A Collaborative Engagement with the Anthropocene

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Abstract

The Field Guide to Lost Futures is a collaborative digital humanities assignment created for an upper-year English and cultural studies seminar. The course engaged with the expansive and complex topic of the Anthropocene, from a humanities and specifically cultural studies perspective. To focus students' engagements with the many catastrophes associated with the Anthropocene, the assignment asked them to profile a single, concrete example of loss related to ongoing environmental crises in a brief contribution to the Field Guide website. Designed with the isolation and dispersal of students due to COVID-19 virtual learning, the Field Guide assignment brought students together in a collective project without the pressures of group work. The assignment was organized as a portfolio of four low-stakes activities that led to the final Field Guide entry. The scaffolded design and experiential nature of the assignment emphasized the multi-stage nature of writing and revision, as well as editorial considerations unique to writing for a digital audience.

Course Context

The Field Guide to Lost Futures assignment was created in response to the distinct challenge of teaching about the catastrophic losses associated with the Anthropocene in the context of the radical losses of the COVID-19 pandemic. The course, "Literature, Culture, and the Anthropocene," was a seminar for upper-year students, which I designed and taught as a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. McMaster is a public research university in Ontario, Canada. The course was a 13-week seminar that consisted of weekly meetings held synchronously over zoom.

As I planned the course in Fall 2020, I was aware of the isolation, burnout, and stress students were experiencing due to abrupt pivot to virtual learning. Alongside this strained learning context was the difficult content of the course itself: the critical assessment of the Anthropocene and the unequal and inequitable distribution of its catastrophic effects. With this context in mind, I re-imagined the 2,500 to 3,000-word final papers typical of my department's seminar courses as a series of scaffolded assignments that built towards a final 1,000-word entry written for a collaborative digital humanities project: The Field Guide to Lost Futures. The Field Guide to Lost Futures is a collection of brief essays that identify beings, places, relations, and phenomena that may be lost due to the radical changes some humans have inflicted on the planet. Flexibility, revision, and a pedagogy of kindness were at the heart of this loss-driven writing (Denial, 2019).

Together, my students and I engaged with the radically divergent causes and experiences of loss from a range of perspectives, locations, and scales in weekly seminar meetings. Our work clustered around loss in three key sites: land, species, and futures. We approached loss as active processes—wherein lands, species, and futures are made lost by activities such as extractive capitalism, colonial dispossession, ecofascism, and environmental racism. We also examined a range of responses to loss, including affective (grief, hope, and rage), narrative and arts-based (elegy, monuments), and policy (platforms, reparations).

Concise Writing Amid Expansive Crises

The Anthropocene is a term that describes the current geological age, characterized by the dominance of human influence on the planet's systems, including climate change, deforestation, proliferation of toxic wastes, and mass extinctions. Much writing and thinking around the Anthropocene projects into a future radically remade by loss. Losses of ecosystems, relationships, lifeways, and stories have been unequally created and are inequitably distributed, yet the Anthropocene is often discussed in academic and popular media in universalizing ways.[1]

A fundamental challenge to grappling with the Anthropocene is the geological scale. Following the research of Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017), my students and I approached the Anthropocene as a phenomenon that emerged at 1610, or "from the beginning of the colonial period, [thus naming] the problem of colonialism as responsible for contemporary environmental crisis" (p. 763). The immense scale, yet spatially and temporally diffused impacts, of the Anthropocene poses an incredible challenge to identifying and reflecting on events or phenomena that are often experienced as unreal, such as flash floods, superstorms, and species extinctions. Amitav Ghosh (2016) has described this as a "crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (p. 9). To intervene in the universalizing tendencies of many prominent analyses of the Anthropocene, our syllabus centred readings from scholars working in Indigenous studies, Black studies, critical animal studies, and settler colonial studies.

How does an instructor ask students to meaningfully engage with the monumental scale of the Anthropocene and the expansive and more minute ways environmental catastrophe impacts different lives, places, and experiences? My answer for this seminar course was to get students to think through a specific example of loss in the wake of environmental change and to work contextually through questions of location, relations, and power. I designed the Field Guide to Lost Futures to assist students with thinking about these massive changes from local and specific perspectives. Rather than trying to think about all the ongoing and looming destructions bundled into the concept of the Anthropocene at once, I wanted students to think about the impact of loss in a specific case study. What are the possible impacts of the loss of a particular being? Of a particular component in an ecosystem?

In the Field Guide assignment, I asked students to pick one thing (e.g., a species, a place, a practice) that might be lost due to human-induced changes to the planet's systems and to think about how the effects of this loss might be felt. The assignment was straightforward: tell the story of loss with as much specific detail as you can and make clear the stakes of that loss to a general reader. Each of their Field Guide entries would be added to a website and shared with our department at a launch party at the end of term. Students were invited to include illustrative elements, such as photography, film, maps, alt-text, and hyperlinks, to build additional context for their written work and situate their research within a broader online environment. As we worked through our course readings that addressed the Anthropocene from critical perspectives, I regularly invited students to try and connect what we were reading to the case study they selected through free writing activities and reflective, small group discussions.

The Field Guide to Lost Futures was envisioned as part time capsule, part memorial, and part speculative experiment. By projecting into the future, I invited students to think about how the Anthropocene and the many losses in the wake of its catastrophes might be remembered. The assignment asked students to craft an entry that identified something they imagined will be lost due to the Anthropocene's wide-ranging yet localized effects. The Field Guide is open-ended. I encouraged students to think about a range of losses, from species and land or water bodies to cultural practices and relationships. My intention was that each entry would contribute to looking forward and backward, to document worlds that were and worlds that are becoming. In an effort to prompt their curiosity, I proposed that these losses may be things we long for

and wish would return, but they might also be phenomena from which we are glad to be free. As a critical digital humanities project, the Field Guide to Lost Futures was created for a broad audience of non-experts. Rather than solely sharing their research and analysis with me, this modest digital publication created the opportunity for students to share their work with a wider group.

Developing the Assignment

One impetus for the Field Guide to Lost Futures came from an experience with writing for online publication and my desire for students to create something together while being physically distanced during stay-at-home orders. As I designed the course, I had the opportunity to write for *The Conversation*—a platform that publishes academic research in brief journalistic articles. The constraints of writing this way and the opportunities for sharing research with a wider audience left me feeling energized. Similarly, the challenge of writing for online readers struck me as an experiential learning opportunity that might benefit students beyond the context of our seminar. Finally, pandemic isolation has thrown into relief the value of community and collaboration. While I suspected that group projects would bring additional challenges, such as students coordinating schedules and the difficulty of cultivating trust online, I hoped that individually crafted contributions to a collective publication would create community without added strain.

When I was developing "Literature, Culture, and the Anthropocene" in Fall 2020, I returned to the idea of the field guide. The field guide is a mode of writing connected to a desire of knowing the world through rigid classifications and, historically, a tool designed to aid colonial acquisition. But perhaps the format of the field guide could still be useful in a course designed around anticolonial perspectives on the Anthropocene? The core function of a field guide—to identify through careful distinctions and provide guidance in contexts where its readers might be uncertain—struck me as a still useful form for structuring an assignment in a course about something as immense as global environmental change.

The final product of the Field Guide to Lost Futures assignment was simple enough: a 1,000 word entry that profiled an impending or imagined future loss, written with a broad audience in mind. I had learned from an earlier attempt at a field guides assignment, as well as previous courses where I asked students to write op-ed columns or review art exhibitions, that writing in a different genre or for an audience beyond the instructor can be a challenge. With this in mind, I developed the assignment as a series of five activities that emphasized research, writing, and revision as a multi-step and often cyclical process. This scaffolded approach also meant that I introduced the concept of a field guide in the first week of the course, and we discussed it as a form repeatedly. Over the course of six weeks, students completed a research memo, a contributor bio post on the Field Guide website, an analysis of their two illustrative elements, a draft of their entry, and their final Field Guide entry. Given the constraints students (and I) were working in, I wanted the assignment to truly be about the process. To this end, four of the five activities were bundled together as a portfolio. I used a specification grading system, where I assessed submitted work as meeting or not meeting specified expectations (Bayraktar, 2020). Ultimately, this helped keep the activities low-stakes, and the students and I were able to focus on feedback oriented towards building the final entry.

I designed the series of assignments by working backwards from the final entries that would appear on the website. The Field Guide website was a WordPress blog, which I set up in Fall 2020 with the assistance of a postdoctoral fellow at McMaster's Centre for Digital Scholarship, and was hosted by the McMaster Library. Students would need ample opportunity for feedback on drafts in order to create a tightly focused and clearly written entry. That entry would also

need illustrations and would require much more background research than would ultimately appear in such a brief piece of writing. Since the final entries would be submitted as website posts with hyperlinks and embedded illustrations, students would also need an opportunity to practice using the WordPress block editor, as well as properly categorizing and publishing their posts. Students submitted their draft entries three weeks before the final version was due, which allowed for three stages of feedback: self-assessment in an in-class writing workshop, a peer review, and feedback from me. For the final version of their entries, students created a blog post on the website and formatted it with hyperlinks to citations, inserted captioned images with alt text, and saved it as a draft, which I then graded and published.

Throughout the portfolio of assignments, I emphasized that in contributing to the Field Guide, the students were writing for an audience larger than just me. To redirect some of the anxiety that started to bubble up when they began to realize that their work would be online and available to an unknown audience, I encouraged students to think about how they would explain the topics of their entries to a friend or roommate. We discussed the value of narrative writing and balanced the judicious use of direct quotation against the constraints of the very brief word limit. Narrowing focus to a concrete being, location, or issue was a challenge for almost every student. Given the geological scale of the Anthropocene and the complex environmental crises we studied throughout the course, the struggle with limiting scope was not surprising. By working from research memo to draft to final entry, I was able to indicate places where more specific examples were needed. To my pleasant surprise, this challenge was something the students productively identified in their peer reviews.

Ultimately, having a project that we were all working on together brought a special energy to a small seminar of students scattered throughout the province due to pandemic lockdown measures. It took a bit of convincing, but many students expressed enthusiasm about producing work that would have a life beyond our class. In all of our discussions of the assignment, I emphasized my hope that the project would be something the students would be proud of and able to share with friends and family, link to in their portfolios, or use as a writing sample. With each student's permission, the Field Guide will remain active.

I hope to grow the Field Guide to Lost Futures in subsequent iterations of this course. However, it is my sense that this kind of scaffolded, collaborative assignment can be adapted to many other contexts. The core of the assignment—short, focused pieces of writing contributing to an overarching question or theme—can be used in a wide range of courses, particularly those organized around exploring big, thorny topics with high stakes or expansive questions that can be asked from different perspectives. By breaking big questions or themes into digestible pieces, assignments modeled on the Field Guide let students take responsibility for one piece that connects to a whole or a broader undertaking. Similarly, I think this heavily scaffolded approach, particularly with the attention to visual elements included in the final entries, would be useful in courses that seek to include elements of media studies or multi-media skills alongside writing skills. I foresee incorporating many of these elements into future writing assignments, as well as adapting a field guide approach to an array of courses. I will be using the scaffolded approach to field guides in my next iteration of "Alternative Media," and I foresee adapting the assignment for a course I am developing about Art and Politics, where students will create entries to a field guide to the political uses of visual art in Canada.

Student Experience Outcomes

The Field Guide to Lost Futures documents an array of losses. It includes entries examining how species and languages are at risk of extinction due to the combined forces of capitalist extraction and ecological damage; how the loss of controlled burns in the boreal forest is also a

loss of Indigenous knowledge; the ongoing losses of neighbourhoods due to the dual disasters of gentrification and flooding; and much more. Each of these entries highlights only a small example of the radical impacts of the Anthropocene. But through this range of topics, students helped one another deepen their appreciation for just how expansive these impacts will be—and in many cases, already are.

I had proposed to students that they could think speculatively about future losses and encouraged them to think about losses we might grieve, but also those we might welcome. In suggesting a speculative approach, I had hoped that students might consider seemingly fixed social and political phenomena (like fossil fuel dependency, the commodity status of water, or capitalism) as things we might one day be without. In the end, all of the students' entries were about losses happening right now. My sense is that the immensity of loss in the immediate past and present moment provided students with more than enough examples to delve into and that speculating further was a step beyond what they had the capacity for at the time of our course. Given the challenge of imagining the near-future during the uncertainty of living through a global pandemic, this probably should not have come as a surprise. Similarly, I had also invited students to consider engaging in place-based research and examining environmental change and loss in their immediate surroundings. However, we did not have the opportunity to meet in person to practice this mode of inquiry together. As a result, the entries did not take up this suggestion either—perhaps not surprising during a period where no one was leaving home with much frequency.

As they completed the portfolio of assignments, all students struggled to some degree with identifying a concrete example and with the brevity of the paper. As one student told me in a meeting, she was used to writing 1,000 words on a single sentence of a literary work in some of her past English assignments, so figuring out how to present the content of her entry in a substantive way felt impossible. Peer reviews, as well as some free writing prompts we did in class and out of class, helped students clarify their topic and their approach. I have included these prompts in the assignment overview below. Several students reported that the feedback they received from the peer reviews and their self-assessments in our writing workshop were what made the assignment feel possible. In particular, I had given them ten minutes to write in response to a prompt: "what I really mean is…"[2] After the activity, several students commented that they felt much more confident in narrowing the focus of their entries and had clearer senses of where to add details and, crucially, where to cut.

The success of the Field Guide confirmed for me the importance of integrating the research, writing, and revision process into assignments. Having multiple points of feedback—such as proposal comments and peer reviews—and practicing revision strategies such as reverse outlining during our in-class writing workshop helped students connect experientially with the cyclical process of writing. The digital and multimodal context of the assignment asked students to consider questions of intertextual meaning between their written texts and the illustrations they selected. Because their entries were published online, students also had to learn about copyright, fair use, and how to seek permissions from image creators. It is my sense that knowing their work would be published online helped students appreciate that they were writing for an audience—beyond their instructor. At the end of the course, we invited members of our department to a launch party where my students gave brief presentations about their entries. The launch was a true celebration of the Field Guide as a collective and collaborative effort.

ASSIGNMENT

Field Guide to Lost Futures Assignment Overview

The Field Guide to Lost Futures project is a collective and collaborative digital humanities project at the heart of our course. The Field Guide is addressed to audiences a few decades from now who will have endured much more of the catastrophic effects of the Anthropocene than we already have. Each entry in the Field Guide identifies something we imagine will be lost due to the Anthropocene's wide-ranging yet localized effects. From species and land or water bodies to practices and relationships, each entry contributes to a vision that looks forward and back to document worlds that were and worlds that are becoming. These losses may be things we long for and wish would return, but they may also be phenomena from which we are glad to be free.

Entries will contextualize the lost phenomena, with careful attention to locatedness and relationality. To build the Field Guide to Lost Futures, entries will combine a variety of critical theory approaches with the imaginative power of speculative thought. Unlike a traditional essay, the Field Guide is a digital project that is designed to be engaged with as a visual, web-based object. Entries will be written with both the screen and wider audiences in mind, will use hyperlinks for citation, and will be accompanied by three illustrative elements, such as photography, film, or maps.

We will develop our Field Guide entries through a portfolio of four short assignments: a research memo, a practice contributor post, a visual analysis, and a draft entry with peer review. Through these assignments, you will conduct research and analysis necessary for a compelling Field Guide entry, as well as develop required technical skills. For each of these assignments, you will receive a guide that lays out specific expectations. Assignments will be graded as "meeting expectations" or "not meeting expectations." In all cases, students will receive feedback from me and your peers that will help you develop and refine your Field Guide entry. Together, these four assignments will be bundled as 30% of your class mark. This grade will be calculated by how many of your assignments meet expectations: 4 assignments meeting expectations = A, 3 = B, 2 = C, 1 or fewer = D.

Field Guide Portfolio Assignments

Research Memo: Due Week Seven

The research memo is the starting point for your Field Guide entry and will be due on Week Seven. It is meant to: a) get you thinking about your case study early; and b) to maximize the time we have to develop your project together. Here, you will gather the material, from which you will develop your entry and its analytical argument. To create the memo, assemble as much information as you can find about your entry's topic: the who, what, when, why, and how your selected entry topic was lost. This is the info gathering stage, not the analysis stage. Try to stick to facts, description, and examples. You will use the information you gather here to develop the next steps in the Field Guide assignment. The completed memo should be 3-4 pages and should include a bibliography.

Contributor Bio Post: Due Week Eight

This short assignment will give you the opportunity to familiarize yourself with the process of creating and publishing a post on the Field Guide website. By Week Eight, you will login to the Field Guide wordpress site and create a draft post to the Contributors page. The post will include your name and a brief bio. If you like, you can include a photo or illustration. A list of expectations will be provided in advance. Before the due date, I will demonstrate how to create a post and you will have access to video tutorials. I will review the draft posts and will publish

those that meet expectations.

Visual Analysis: Due Week Nine
Your Field Guide entry will feature two illustrations. These can be photographs, maps, video, audio, archival images, or drawings/paintings. You can make your own illustrative content, or you can find them elsewhere. An important aspect of digital publishing is ensuring *you have permission* for using media created by other people. There are several good options for free stock photography and many museums and archives allow the fair use of their materials. All of this requires proper captioning and attribution. To ensure the Field Guide is inclusive, we will also provide alt text so users with screen readers are able to access the visual information included in our entries. For the visual analysis, you will identify the two illustrative elements your entry will include, as well as the appropriate captions, attributions, and alt text. A list of assignment expectations and specifications will be provided in advance. The visual analysis is due on Week Nine and should be two pages long.

Field Guide Entry Draft: Due Week Ten
A full draft of your Field Guide entry will be submitted on Week Ten, for in-class peer review on Week Ten. In the draft, you will build on the information you gathered for your research memo by integrating your observational and descriptive information with analytical frames drawn from critical perspectives engaged throughout the course. The Field Guide to Lost Futures is speculative in nature. For speculations to be compelling, they must be nuanced and attentive to power structures. The draft should contain the text of your entry, as well as two illustrative elements. Images must be properly captioned and accompanied by alternative text (alt text) descriptions. The draft must include proper citations, which will be hyperlinked in the final entry. To give you the opportunity to learn from one another, we will do peer review of our entry drafts. This will give you the chance to consider the ideas and approaches of your peers and to practice giving constructive feedback on the content, style, and illustration of your entry.

Questions and Prompts for Writing
When you are working on your entry, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- What can you notice?
- What have you been expected NOT to notice?
- What kinds of things feel "normal"? Why?
- What or who is at risk in a situation of loss?
- How can we talk about loss and what is on the line in ways that don't only revolve around humans?

If you get stuck, here are a few prompts to help you think about your entry in different ways. I recommend picking one and writing a response by hand. Set a timer for 5-7 minutes and write what comes to mind, without stopping.

- Where are you? Describe the *place* of your entry in sensory detail. Work with one sense at a time.
- What is most important? Why?
- What is least important? Why?
- Stories can be told from many perspectives. Who (or what) could be telling the story of your entry? If you switch perspectives, what becomes more or less important?

- Step away from your notes, you research, your drafts and finish this sentence: What I really mean is*.....*

Final Field Guide Entry: Due Week Thirteen

The final Field Guide entry is due Week Thirteen. You will create a post on the Field Guide for Lost Futures website and leave it as a draft post. I will review and publish each final post. Each entry will be 800-1000 words and will introduce, contextualize, and analyze a lost phenomenon in relation to a specific theoretical lens drawn from the course, such as: race, gender, sexuality, class, species, etc. Contextualization should attend to the specificities of location and relationships. I will assess your entry based on its written content (well-researched context, critical analysis, compelling speculative thought) as well as on illustrations and style.

Additional Notes

The Field Guide to Lost Futures continues to live online. I have further reflected on this course in the *Journal of Environmental Media* (Taschereau Mamers, 2021) and in a hand-drawn zine, both titled "Living in Lost Futures." The zine is available on my website.

Notes

[1]The term Anthropocene was coined by white male chemist, Paul Crutzen, and Veerabhadran Ramanathan in 2000, but they are not the first and far from the only persons to theorize, grasp, and mourn the losses mounting from human-changed ecosystems.

[2]I learned this prompt from a Public Writing Workshop, led by Irina Dumitrescu and hosted by the University of Toronto's Jackman Humanities Institute in March 2021.

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.v7i1.117.

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Using GIFs to Position Students as Scholars

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Abstract

Article analysis assignments are common in First Year Writing. This paper argues that animated GIFs are an effective bridge between informal and formal literacies and encourage students to engage in the more critical elements of the genre. This article helps instructors to incorporate low-tech and low stakes multimodal elements into their assignment cycles.

Introduction

Article analysis papers, routinely taught in first-year writing (FYW) programs, are a challenging genre that asks students to move beyond summary, to break an article into pieces in order to analyze how the parts fit together, and to see themselves as scholars who can evaluate a published work. I argue that incorporating GIFs into an analysis can help students use their reactions to a text as a starting point for parsing an article, helping them to focus on how the article itself works as an informative or persuasive rhetorical piece. Incorporating multimodal elements into their papers, students have an avenue to identify and express personal reactions, which are often discouraged in students' previous writing experiences. Many of my students come to college having been told they should never use "I" in academic papers.

I teach this assignment in a FYW course at a small private college located between two large Southern cities. Our campus attracts students with a wide range of academic preparation, mostly from the local region. Few of my students (only 10-20% of the class) have read an academic article before starting college. In our department, FYW traditionally focuses on research and writing skills. Students take a course that targets argumentation in their sophomore year. In my FYW course, all assignments are scaffolded, culminating into a research review on a topic in writing studies.

In my course, I teach the article analysis early in the semester, after an assignment that asks students to find an academic journal article in the library. The assignment aims to familiarize students with the genre and increase their academic literacy. For the article analysis, students find an academic article on a chosen research topic and develop a multimodal text that explores how academic articles are built. The article also serves as a source for the research reviews[1] they will complete as their major class project. For their article analyses, students produce a 1000–1500-word analysis that summarizes the article, analyzes it as a piece of writing outside of content, evaluates the efficacy and legitimacy of the article, and analyzes their own research and reading practices. Finally, students must include 5-10 GIFs, one of which they make themselves. While the analysis assignment is not new to writing studies, including GIFs into the assignment adds an important layer to this traditional assignment because they bridge informal and formal literacies. In forums, personal text messages, and group chats, individuals are expected to respond thoughtfully in conversation. By using reaction GIFs, also commonly used in online conversation, this assignment asks for similar levels of thoughtful engagement with academic texts.

The need for multimodal writing in FYW

Multimodal composing has enjoyed a moment (Khadka & Lee, 2019, p. 3), though some professors still debate incorporating multimodal work into their writing classrooms (p. 4). Composition teachers arguing for the incorporation of visuals and sound into the writing classroom predates the internet. As Palmeri (2012) argues, "Composition has always already been a field that has sought to help students draw connections between writing, image making, speaking, and listening" (p. 10). Ellis (2013) adds that multimodal writing can happen within traditional genres and can work as a bridge between academic literacies and the more everyday literacies of our students.

My own experience teaching at a small residential college suggests that making tiny changes to seemingly traditional assignments can be more successful in getting student investment than completely "born digital" creative assignments. For instance, students have preferred adding GIFs to an article analysis more than they have enjoyed video literacy narratives or infographic reflection assignments. In part, my FYW students have not been exposed to multimodal writing and have more limited views on what writing is. Multimodal assignments that allow students to archive and share the experience of writing can work to both help students better understand academic research and evaluate their own practices in ways that are easy to return to. For instance, when my students make learning portfolios at the end of the semester, they return to these artifacts and can see GIFs focused on their reactions and understandings of academic writing from early in the semester. Finally, they add an element of fun to an otherwise niche genre that analyzes another niche genre, both of which are relatively foreign to those outside of academia.

GIFs as cultural and educational texts

GIFs are a unique image file format in that they have essentially grown with the internet. Created in 1987, GIFs are by no means a new technology. Aided by early HTML's <img> tag, where no such video tag existed, the Graphic Interchange Format (GIF) allowed creators and web designers to upload small files that would more quickly load on the personal computers of the early internet. The ability to create animated GIFs also allowed early internet users to add dynamic content to their first websites (Eppink, 2014). While GIFs saw a decrease in use in the mid-late 1990s (due to expanding image file types and intellectual property disputes), the GIF made a resurgence during the mid-2000s, when teenagers and young women used them to brand their Myspace pages using applications like Blingee. Because they remain easier to edit than video, they are a standard part of what Douglas (2014) describes as texts that privilege the kairotic moment and user participation over aesthetic beauty (p. 213). Today, GIFs, either the actual file type or any other short looping animation, are ubiquitous. One can find GIFs on Twitter, Tumbler, and even a limited library within Microsoft Outlook—hardly the cutting edge of internet culture.

GIFs have been used recently in a number of instructional settings both within and outside of traditional educational spaces. Giphy, a large GIF hosting site, has multiple channels where GIFs serve as sign language flash cards (Sign With Robert is an excellent example). Math Warehouse (mathwarehouse.com) uses GIFs to show a number of mathematical principles. Additionally, academic libraries often use GIFs for instructional reasons because students are less likely to click on videos (Aleman & Porter, 2016). However, GIF use can extend beyond instructional purposes. GIFs have a strong affective quality, and their looping nature increases memory and retention (Ash, 2015). They are useful in exploring our reactions to texts and help us to remember key pieces, essential to writing that might take place over weeks.

GIFs are a durable file format that is easy to both create and manipulate. The format has
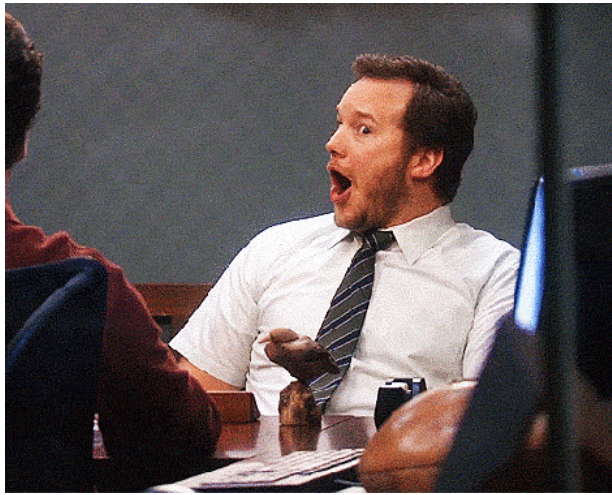
Figure 1. Parks and Recreation [GIF] (2015). This GIF shows Chris Pratt as Andy Dwyer on *Parks and Recreation*. Pratt looks excited as the camera zooms towards his face.

lived many lives and taken on many roles within internet culture. At present, one of the most popular genres of animated GIF is the reaction GIF. Reaction GIFs typically contain expressive faces, and individuals use them to represent their own emotional reaction to news or opinions shared online. Appropriate places to use them are social media posts, forum threads, and private online chats. As an example of this usage, instead of saying that a piece of information was delightfully surprising, a responder could simply share a popular reaction GIF of Chris Pratt from the show *Parks and Recreation*, a still of which is shown in Figure 1.[2]

Reaction GIFs work well to emotionally engage readers with the document itself. They intentionally stand "as proxy for, or expression of, emotion and/or affect" (Miltner & Highfield, 2017, p. 5). They afford writers opportunities to react, reflect, and dialogue alongside text. Tolins and Samermit (2016) call reaction GIFs an "embodied enactment" that make "embodied resources available to the texters to create meaning in a way that was previously limited" (p. 87). "Limited" here includes both text and emoji. Emojis are tightly controlled by the platform used for communication and tend to be conservative in what can be expressed (Miltner, 2018). GIFs are imported from a number of platforms and can represent a wider range of reactions. Students can even make GIFs of themselves.

These visual responses allow students the opportunity to play within the article analysis paper, a genre for a very limited audience (where they are the primary audience, and the professor is a secondary one). Finally, GIFs are their own kind of language, one many students are more comfortable with than academic writing. While not all students are used to creating GIFs, with even a casual perusal of the internet they are familiar with GIF literacy, or the ability "to use them appropriately in fitting contexts such as reactions, appropriation, humor, or commentary" (Gürsimsek, 2016, p. 330).

From student to scholar

GIFs are one way to make analysis feel less formal, and they provide students another way to conceptualize their reactions to a text. Beyond my course, I want my students to see themselves as scholars able to engage with and build on the research they encounter. To do this, they should learn to trust their intuitions and observations about research. Bloom's Taxonomy ranks analysis and evaluation are some of the highest levels of cognitive work we can ask of students (Anderson et al., 2001). One traditional approach to helping students work through highly cognitive work

utilizes metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) discuss the ways that individuals develop mostly spatial metaphors for abstract ideas (e.g., good is up) and create patterns of thinking. We adapt these patterns to our real-world experiences as learning strategies (p. 206). However, metaphor is not only a linguistic technique; visuals allow students the opportunity to represent their responses and observations about complete texts. Later thinkers (e.g., Forceville, 2009) have argued that Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphors needs to be looked at multimodally, in that we should not limit our understanding of the world to merely textual or verbal metaphors.

Students can use visuals like GIFs as language to create their own conceptualizations of texts. Most GIFs are pulled from popular media, and students are familiar with their context. In discussing GIFs as educational tools, Madden (2018) argues for uses and gratifications theory (McGuire, 1974) or using what we gain psychologically from mass media to "provide individuals with labels and interpretations for ephemeral emotional states" (p. 14). Essentially, individuals connect their current observations with previous experiences of watching and identifying with either the original text or, in our case, the GIF. They then use that connection to articulate their reactions to a text before they might be able to do so in written form. GIFs like the Chris Pratt GIF help us to hold onto that initial reaction as we move into a more thorough analysis. In their reflections on this assignment, students have commented that the GIFs helped them to organize their own thoughts around their reactions. They were privileging their individual insights, which they found to be important because I asked to see them. They also felt the GIFs stopped them from overthinking the assignment and injected a degree of fun.

Helping students position themselves as researchers with valid reactions to others' writing helps students engage with academic writing. I want students to see that they are not simply reporting information, but also entering a conversation. Often teachers ask students to produce something that will satisfy them as readers and graders. Students' relationships to their writing processes are traditionally hidden from the documents they produce, even though that process is exactly what educators are often trying to assess.

Teaching this Assignment

A strong analysis should be able to take apart a text, look at the pieces, and discuss what they do for the article and the larger conversation the article is a part of. Summarizing and analyzing texts is a core outcome for many FYW courses, but the genre differs a great deal from the argumentative writing required on primary school state tests in the United States. Because these activities are foreign and complex, I break this assignment up over several weeks into the act of reading, researching, and writing/designing.

Prework: Writing as a conversation

Students need to see their work as entering into a conversation. Such an idea is novel to many students. I introduce it on the first day and have them write "writing is a conversation" at the top of their notes on syllabus day. Additionally, on the day the analysis is introduced, we read and discuss Burke's (1974) "Unending Conversation" metaphor (pp. 110-111). Because most of my students have never heard of a parlor, I encourage them to replace parlor with a house party.

Week 1: Reading

On the day I assign the article analysis, we discuss how to read academic articles strategically. In the first week of this assignment, we go over multiple reading strategies. We discuss annotating texts, but I stress the SQ3R (Skim, Question, Read, Respond, Review) method (Robinson, 1970) that has them read the article multiple times with increasing degrees of attention. Of note, the assignment states that they will only read the article once, but this is a deception as they end

up reading it three times if following the SQ3R method. By being able to anticipate what the text will be about, they are better able to pay attention to patterns and meaning in the article. In class, we read Skylar et al.'s (2002) "Teaching Communication and Professionalism through Writing and Humanities" in class because it is on a possible topic for the future research report and is just long enough to be read in a class period with the lecture.

Week 2: Research

We spend two days in the library. On the first day, a reference librarian teaches students how to use our databases and the affordances of different resources. They get a tour of the library and practice finding specific books. On the second day, I provide a self-guided activity that asks them to find a book on their topic in our library, find the book's bibliography, and then find a journal article from that bibliography in our school databases. In doing this, I am modeling how to identify scholarly articles and books (versus textbooks or popular books on the topic). At the end, they should have two options for their analysis.

Week 3: Writing

On the first day of the week, students do in-class writing assignments. We also break down paragraphs to show how academics, critics, and journalists capture conversations in writing, focusing specifically on where these writers begin to insert their own ideas into the conversation they have developed. Because the assignment asks them to make a GIF of their own, I also show them how to make GIFs in RecordIt, and Giphy Maker.

Rest of the semester: Building

Assignments in this class are scaffolded. Students use this article to develop research questions they use to interview an individual in the field or profession they hope to enter. They use this article, the interview, and other primary and secondary sources to create a research review of writing in their potential future profession.

What students produce

Generally, students produce strong analysis papers that break down how the article was written and the tools that the writer used to construct the argument. They do particularly well at citing specific examples when evaluating the rhetorical efficacy of the text. They also share a lot of GIFs, and this section offers some examples of how students use GIFs to build their papers.

Some students use GIFs to reinforce the content of the article. When the topic is business writing, students share Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* on a never-ending walk to his office. Nursing majors show me nurses from *Grey's Anatomy* endlessly giving each other knowing side eyes. One student used an article with a detailed description of how to set up a meta-analysis on smoking. They included a perfect loop GIF (a GIF where the beginning and end are indistinguishable) of a cartoon rooster chain smoking. These GIFs connect these articles on writing in a discipline with pop culture representations of those same fields of study. They do a lot of work to bridge the way the work of a profession is portrayed and what it might look on a daily basis.

Some students use GIFs to punctuate their reactions to the content they are analyzing. I share this example from Madison Bumgarner (2019). This sample is shared with her permission and the request that I use her full name. Bumgarner analyzed an article focused on teaching writing to accounting majors. In this paragraph, she analyzes how the organization of the article aids in her reading of this new genre:

The authors of this article put the information in a specific order that was very organized to get the information across in a logical way. By using headings and over ten different sources, it allowed the reader to understand the point they were trying to make - that being an accountant requires the knowledge of reading and writing well. They used headings to separate the different types of information, such as why the course is important, what the course consists of and how the students in the course reacted. These help the reader find information quickly and efficiently when looking back at the article. Without the headings, it would be difficult to read and keep interest because it would be one large paragraph. The article also included quotes from multiple sources that supported the reasoning behind creating the course. The quotes proved that the authors conducted adequate research prior to publishing the article, making it a valid source of information. This type of information can be helpful to others because it allows any reader to have a better understanding of how writing is incorporated in the accounting field.

Bumgarner identifies three elements of organization that she would like to analyze based on her correct assumption that this article should be readable for an unfamiliar audience (accountancy instructors learning to teach writing). In that, she identifies ways that the organization meets that purpose: clearly defined content sections that build logically and well-placed source integration that helps the reader build their own knowledge along with the article. She has added to this paragraph a GIF of comedian Kathy Griffin standing in her own closet for an *MTV Cribs* episode saying "I love organization" (Kathy Griffin Neat Freak [GIF], 2019). While the text itself is already complimentary in its analysis, the reaction GIF further highlights this. Likewise, as the GIF stands in for her reaction to the article she's analyzing, we see her identification as an organized person helps her to identify with these elements of writing an effective academic article.

Some students share GIFs of their process. I had one student struggling to find an acceptable article on writing in a specific medical field. When they found one that looked hopeful, the link to the article glitched. The URL was so long that the student's Internet browser could not redirect. Many scholars have had similar "I kid you not" experiences while researching. This student was able to record an animated GIF of the link malfunction and include it in the paper, to both of our delights. The GIF allowed the student to reflect on this frustration visually when it may have felt less appropriate textually. When he brought his analysis to peer review, half the class gathered around to watch, experiencing his own research process through the GIF.

Some students share GIFs of themselves. In one submission, a student calmly presses her forefinger to her lips in the universal request for silence. Her roommate, also a student of mine, enthusiastically jumps on a bed behind her. These two have quite different views on how to use a common living and study space. Students submit GIFs of them dancing in study halls with their athletic teams, pretending to sleep in the library, taking selfies with their siblings, and raising fists of victory at completing the assignment. They are literally inserting themselves into the conversation as best they can.

Finally, some students share a GIF of the character Kermit the Frog frantically typing behind the scenes of *The Muppet Show*, as shown in Figure 2. While I do occasionally see another GIF
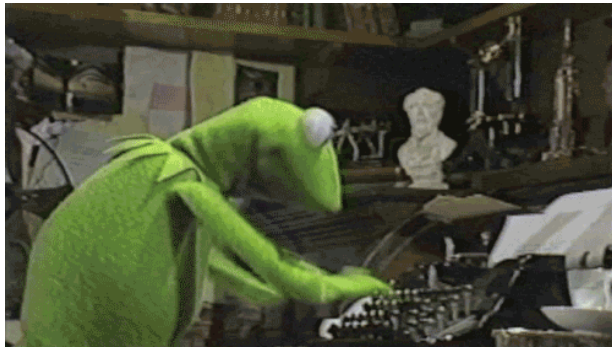
Figure 2. Kermit the Frog reaction [GIF] (2020). Kermit the Frog Reaction GIF. Kermit the Frog, a character on The Muppet Show frantically types off stage on an old typewriter.

specifically on writing, this one is their favorite.

Conclusions

I have just finished my sixth year of teaching this assignment. In that time, I have found it to be very effective in helping students to understand the structure of an academic article and the importance of their own reactions to ideas. Students likewise quickly learn the value of finding a good source that contains a great deal to discuss and analyze over something that can be easily read and quickly quoted. It works as a great introduction to academic conversation, and I have found that students who complete their article analysis tend to engage with their other sources more deeply—though often not as deeply as they do this article.

Students likewise seem to really enjoy the assignment and comment positively on it in their course opinion surveys, despite a number of articles coming out in the past few years commenting on how GIFs are no longer cool. Using GIFs in an otherwise more formal paper feels somewhat transgressive and works well to help students to open up more about their reactions to the reading of complicated texts. There are two key limitations to this assignment. The first is that a visually impaired student would find it challenging, but the assignment can be easily modified in a number of ways to replace GIFs with sound. Stedman (2013) would be a place to start thinking through using sound for similar outcomes. Additionally, some students find the transition from a somewhat informal piece to more formal work later in the semester a challenge. When moving to more traditional genres at the end of the semester, it is important to be very clear about genre expectations. Generally, however, this assignment is an effective option for encouraging students to break down a new and relatively complex genre of academic writing.

ASSIGNMENT
Article Analysis

Worth 100 points (10%)
Due:
Submit a shareable link to a Google Doc via Blackboard

Figure 3. Shia Labeouf magic [GIF] (2013). In this figure, actor Shia Labeouf appears in a *Saturday Night Live* sketch wearing a unicorn shirt. He wiggles his fingers and mouths "Magic" as the words appear in a glittery font across the bottom of the image.

Objectives

- Use basic rhetorical concepts – audience, **purpose**, genre, **style, occasion or exigency – as reading and writing tools;**
- Summarize and analyze individual texts;
- Evaluate information found using bibliographic tools.

Role

Research is key for understanding ideas that are either not your own or come from a place of experience. Research catches us up on conversations that have been going on for years before we entered them. Reading academic articles, however, can be a real challenge if you don't have a lot of practice and/or aren't engaged with the content. Getting the most out of a single reading will save you time and open up the opportunity for more research.

Task

You are going to do an analysis of an academic article or book chapter (called article from here on out) for your final research report. This analysis will be a mixture of text and GIFs. GIF stands for Graphic Interchange Format, which allows for short moving pictures (not video) to be placed in a digital document or website. They look like what is shown in Figure 3.

To complete this assignment you must:

1. Find an academic article on the topic of writing in your future career or on the future of writing. **You can use the article you found in the library assignment.** This article should be from a peer-reviewed journal that you find through either the library databases or Google Scholar. Print the article out as you will want to take lots of notes.
2. Read the article using the SQ3R method, taking notes throughout. As you follow the reading process, note how you feel about each stage and mark the realizations you have as you go through.

Figure 4. Do you even GIF? [GIF] (2013). In this figure, two Pokémon lift weights. The words "DO YOU EVEN GIF?" appear at the top of the screen.

3. Write an analysis that is 1000-1500 words long and includes 5-10 GIFs that show your process of interpreting and engaging with this reading (Figure 4). **One GIF must be a GIF you make yourself.** You do not need to appear in your GIF. Be thoughtful about the placement of your GIFs.

Format

- *Establish background with an audience in mind.* Your reader has not read the article. What do they absolutely need to know? Provide a summary.
- *Explain how the text is organized.* Explain why the author put information in that order. Why they used headings. Why they used quotations and sources when they did. Explain how this information can be helpful to others.
- *Evaluate the piece.* Is it credible? How do you know? How useful could this piece be for your final project?
- *Evaluate your experience.* What worked for reading this piece? What helped you retain the most information? What should you do to better grasp academic articles in the future?
- *Explain takeaways.* In your conclusion, explain what you have learned from this assignment that will be useful for this class or future classes.

This paper should follow MLA as best you can. You should include MLA headings, page numbers, references to the article's page numbers, and a Works Cited that lets me know where your GIFs came from.

Where to Find GIFs
Giphy.com is probably the fastest way to find GIFs. It's a huge, easily searchable, archive of GIFs and has a whole tab just for reaction GIFs.

How to Insert GIFs into Google Docs
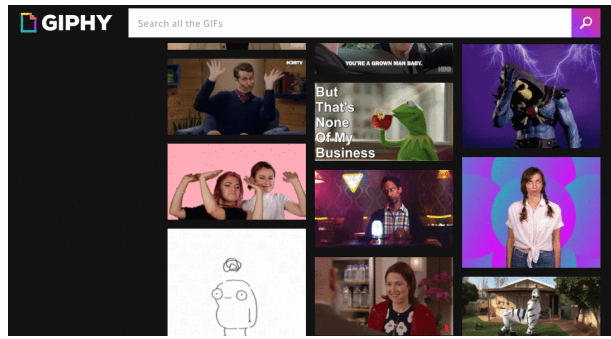The GIF in Figure 5 shows how to insert a GIF into a Google Doc.

Figure 5. A tutorial GIF made by the instructor showing how to insert a GIF into a Google Doc.

How to make your own GIF

You can take video, upload it to YouTube, and then use Giphy's GIF Maker to upload it. For a GIF of myself, I use the Boomerang app on my phone. If you have an iPhone, Live pictures are one step away from being GIFs already. I used recordit.co to make the screencast GIF.

How to cite a GIF in MLA

Creator. "Title of Image." *Title of Website.* Date the GIF was published. URL. Accessed date.

> "Parks and Recreation GIF." *Giphy.* 2015. https://giphy.com/gifs/5VKbvrjxpVJCM.
> Accessed 25 September 2019.

Notes

[1]A research review synthesizes existing research on a topic. It is not argumentative and does not introduce new information.

[2]Because GIFs cannot be animated in a PDF (like this article file), the figures in this article show stills of the GIFs, but the references list provides links to the animated versions.

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.v7i1.94.

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Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace
A Case-Based Technical and Professional Communication Assignment

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Abstract

As questions of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion have come into greater focus in the field of technical and professional communication (TPC), we have developed an assignment sequence in our TPC courses centered on these issues. This assignment sequence reframes our units on workplace communication and correspondence and asks students to practice a variety of genres in addressing and creating cases of intercultural miscommunication, insensitivity, and ignorance in the workplace. We have adopted a case study pedagogy for this assignment in an effort to preempt the resistance that can sometimes accompany discussions of social justice in courses where social justice is not traditionally addressed. We have found that this approach makes the instruction more authentic, provides students with realistic workplace situations in which to practice professional correspondence, and highlights the existence and reality of social issues in the contemporary workplace.

Introduction

In the field of technical and professional communication (TPC) there is a "social justice turn" taking place, "in which the focus of critical work expands beyond analysis to incorporate—even privilege—action" (Petersen & Walton, 2018, p. 417). This social justice turn is meeting a kairotic moment as varied questions of racism, privilege, and social inequity are being brought to the fore in more pervasive ways than this generation of college students has likely ever seen. Given these disciplinary and societal exigencies, we have developed a case-based writing assignment for our TPC courses that brings focus to questions of intercultural competence, social justice, and inclusivity. This assignment is an attempt to move beyond the common situation that Cecilia Shelton (2020) describes wherein "concepts like diversity pepper curricula…but students are enabled and in fact encouraged to skirt a critical engagement with the implications of difference among bodies" (p. 21). In this assignment, we have attempted to center, rather than skirt, such critical engagement with difference.[1]

This two-part assignment named "Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace" was designed to accomplish two goals: 1) helping students learn to identify and address issues related to bias, social justice, and equity that commonly occur in workplace settings, and 2) providing students opportunities to practice composing a variety of common workplace genres.

It is an undeniable reality that our students, upon graduation, will be entering an increasingly diverse and multicultural workforce. In that context, they are likely to encounter subtle forms of exclusion and discrimination such as microaggressions and institutionally embraced power imbalances along cultural/racial lines. For all individuals, navigating diverse, multicultural workplaces has, as Maylath et al. (2013) point out, "inevitably made everyday challenges more

complex and confusing" (p. 68). Complexity and confusion are often perceived as negative and undesirable; thus, by introducing this challenge in a classroom environment, we can explicitly frame the difficult work of navigating diverse, multicultural workplaces as a pathway to healthier and more equitable working environments. By focusing students on the reality of the modern workplace, we are allowing them to learn and practice strategies for identifying and productively working through cultural differences in a lower stakes classroom environment where they can identify their own biases, prejudices, and negative attitudes that could lead to tense, micro-aggression-laden exchanges in the workplace. They also learn strategies for addressing such situations in productive and community-building ways. In this way, the assignment we present focuses on inculcating in students intercultural competence, "the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in international and cross-cultural technical communication situations based on one's sensitivity, awareness, and skills" (Yu, 2012, p. 171).

Given the fraught, political nature of conversations surrounding culture, privilege, and social justice, as we bring discussions of these issues into the classroom, we have found it is almost inevitable that some students will say and write things that are objectionable at best. It is incumbent upon all teachers to identify and address such words and attitudes whenever we encounter them, but we have found that students often say, write, and perhaps believe these things more out of ignorance rather than malice. It is important to note here that we spend considerable time endeavoring to foster an atmosphere of professional empathy and goodwill in our TPC courses. We do this because we consider empathy to be the bedrock on which all communication—professional or otherwise—should be founded. By making empathy a conscientious focal point of our classroom environments, we find that when students say things that are harmful and offensive, we are able to directly address and correct them in ways that are directly in keeping with the pre-established ethos of the classroom. While we certainly can't speak to the effectiveness of this strategy for all students, we find that this approach works well for both the offending students and any students who felt targeted. For the offending students, this tie back to a pre-existing classroom ethic of empathy allows us to address the issue without making the students a target, but instead positively framing their missteps as opportunities to learn and grow in empathy. For the historically minoritized students who may have felt targeted, this approach similarly avoids making them an indirect and helpless target that we, the authority figures, have to defend. In this way we attempt to engage in a mutually beneficial, growth-oriented corrective moment rather than in the rancorous shaming that all too often results in recalcitrance and contempt rather than introspection and community.

Institutional Context

We collaboratively developed this assignment and then taught it at our respective institutions.[2] Both institutions are members of large state university systems predominantly composed of traditional college-aged, commuter students. The course context for Sam was an upper-division, 30-student "Professional Writing" course within the English major, though the course also fulfills a general education (GE) advanced writing requirement and thus draws students across majors and disciplines. The course context for Sherri was a "Business and Organizational Writing" GE course with an enrollment of 25 students, typically business majors.

Case Studies and Genre Analysis in TPC Courses

We have found that in integrating issues of social justice, equity, inclusion, privilege, and cultural competence into our TPC courses, there is often student resistance similar to what Case and Cole (2013) found in their study of first-year seminars focused on privilege, oppression, and

diversity. Some of this resistance seems to occur because such content is not broadly perceived as being integral to the course. TPC courses are often organized around genre analysis and instruction (Luzón, 2005; Melonçon & Henschel, 2013), and while this is an appropriate and effective approach that we ourselves adopt, it can be easy with this approach to gloss over the social forces that shape genres, focusing instead on more concrete and easily identifiable textual matters. To address this situation, we have adopted a case study approach widespread in profession-oriented pedagogies such as MBA programs, clinical medicine, law, and others (Heitzmann, 2008). Case study pedagogy, "allows students to participate actively in the learning process" (Naumas & Naumas, 2011, p. 3) by asking them to engage with topics and problems drawn from realistic workplace situations. The concrete nature of case studies allows students to connect coursework with their future professional lives, enabling us to frame social justice issues as facts of workplace life. In doing this, we find ourselves following a similar path taken by Shelton (2020), as we have specifically developed cases that "[center] those on the bottom, on the margins, and at the periphery of the centers of power in business and industry contexts" (p. 21). Using this case study approach to frame instruction about professional correspondence and communication, students learn to recognize the multiplicity of cultural, identity-shaping factors that they must account for in even the most rote and seemingly mundane genres. Genre instruction in the classroom then becomes social action (Miller, 1984) that reflects the end goal of the social justice turn identified by Petersen and Walton (2018).

Assignment Overview

This assignment takes place in two parts that can be and have been expanded or truncated as curricular goals and course calendars permit. The two parts are assigned and carried out in sequence, not simultaneously, so the discussions, readings, and work completed for Part 1 inform the work students complete for Part 2.

We typically teach this assignment a few weeks into the semester, once the students have had an opportunity to become more comfortable with one another. In the context of the semester wherein this assignment, as presented, was taught, students had just completed their first unit on resumes and cover letters, during which they engaged in significant peer review with many of their classmates. We thus had a fairly established community in place which allowed more thorough and honest discussions about identity, power, and discrimination.

The assignment sheet presented here was used by Sam during the Spring 2020 semester, but this version of the assignment largely reflects how this assignment has been carried out in other semesters.

In Part 1 of the assignment, students are presented with two cases wherein individuals in a workplace demonstrate a lack of intercultural awareness and empathy which has caused tensions to arise on the basis of culture, identity, and status. Students are asked to assume various workplace identities/roles to compose a series of professional correspondence genres addressing these cases.

In the first case, "Smelly Ethnic Foods," a passive-aggressive note has been left on a break room microwave that uses insensitive, microaggression-laden language regarding a culturally marginalized co-worker's choice of food and the smells it produces. The second case, "A Well-Meaning Miscommunication," describes an instance of linguistic bias and cross-cultural miscommunication between an Eastern European employee and her North American female supervisor which takes place over several weeks. The two women navigate microaggressions, awkward personal interactions, and missed opportunities for seeking understanding.[3]

While we developed these two cases in Part 1 to specifically highlight intercultural communication concerns, similar cases might be developed that highlight intracultural or otherwise

intersectional concerns of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This part of the assignment might thus be adapted to highlight other aspects of identity, culture, or current events, by developing other cases, according to instructors' desires or areas of special interest, such as the following:

- A supervisor arranges to have a police officer come to the office to provide active-shooter training for their employees, including several BIPOC, in the aftermath of a police shooting.
- A group of women in an office throw a gender-reveal baby shower for a fellow female employee, but they fail to invite their gender non-conforming coworker for fear of offending them.
- A female-presenting person in a healthcare workplace is asked to wear their hair in a certain style that matches others in the workplace after concerns are raised about hygiene.

In addressing the two cases we have outlined in the project presented here, students are asked to complete two deliverables. The first is an employee complaint email composed from the perspective of either the employee who is suffering from headaches in case 1 or the Eastern European employee in case 2. The second deliverable is a memo from the supervisor in case 1 or the HR department in case 2 addressing the problems that have arisen and how the company is addressing them.

In Part 2 of the assignment, students are asked to compose their own evidence-informed narratives of workplace social justice concerns, with emphasis placed on the fact that good narratives do not have easy or obvious solutions. Because case studies are a common genre in TPC, we call these "case narratives" in our courses. Students then perform research to find public-facing sources of any kind, genre, and medium that address various aspects of the underlying social justice/equity concerns in the case narratives they have constructed. Students use these sources to create an annotated bibliography that could be used and distributed in a workplace setting as an early step in addressing the underlying concerns with environmental culture and the systemic inequalities that allowed the issues at the heart of the case to occur. The deliverables constructed in Part 2 also include an original company logo and branding.

At all stages of this project, from the first day we introduce it through peer review of the final deliverables, we engage in two kinds of scaffolding: 1) more traditional instruction, discussion and practice regarding the constraints and expectations of the various genres the students are producing, and 2) instruction, discussion and practice regarding understanding and navigating the nuances of diverse workplace environments. With regard to this second category of scaffolding, we devote considerable time and attention—through assigned readings (both academic and popular) and structured class discussions and activities—to helping students better understand a variety of important topics and ideas. These include the vagaries of "culture," the existence and persistence of both overt and unconscious microaggressions, the structural inequities and power imbalances that invariably exist in nearly all organizations, the legal/ethical responsibilities of companies, and, perhaps most importantly, that "human beings are different from each other in various ways, and this does not translate into deficiency or deviance when they differ from a traditional norm" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014).

As mentioned, we assign students readings of various kinds to support our instruction. Some of the more formal readings we have found particularly helpful to assign in framing these discussions and practices include excerpts from Yu and Savage's (2013) *Negotiating Cultural Encounters*, Jones and Walton's (2018) "Using Narratives to Foster Critical Thinking about Diversity and Social Justice," Leydens' (2012) "What Does Professional Communication Research Have To Do With Social Justice? Intersections and Sources of Resistance," Colton and Holmes' (2018) "A Social Justice Theory of Active Equality for Technical Communication," and Agboka's (2014) "Decolonial

Methodologies: Social Justice Perspectives in Intercultural Technical Communication Research." We also endeavor to identify current events in more popular publications that illustrate the various issues at the heart of these scholarly works to give the assignment kairotic gravity.

We also intersperse these moments of formal instruction and discussion with more light-hearted material, including clips from workplace sitcoms such as the "Diversity Day" episode of *The Office* (Daniels et al., 2005, March 9), the treatment of "green card marriages" in *Parks and Recreation* (Daniels et al., 2009, December 3), and the innumerable examples of racial misunderstandings in *Blackish* (Anderson et al., 2014–2022), to name a few. These types of classroom activities, based in both academic and popular texts, aid students' depth of understanding as they create stronger, more nuanced deliverables.

This instruction and these discussions surrounding culture, identity, diversity and equity occur throughout the assignment, though their specific place in the chronology of the assignment differs semester-to-semester as sometimes we front-load them early on to provide a thorough theoretical foundation for students to work from, and sometimes we intersperse them more evenly throughout the assignment to drive home the applicability of these issues to the various cases and contexts the students are focusing on.

Additionally, students engage in considerable peer review and revision through all stages of the project as they help one another to identify and root out possible microaggressions, correct misreadings of rhetorical situations, and adjust any insufficient addressing of the issues and/or any language, tone, or content that might be unhelpful or have the potential to worsen the situation.

Discussion and Reflection

With both parts of this assignment, we have found that the biggest hurdle is getting students to get outside of their own experiences and assumptions and to engage thoughtfully with the various issues of intercultural insensitivity and miscommunication. But we have found that requiring a series of deliverables composed from a variety of workplace roles intended for a variety of workplace audiences helps students move beyond their initial reluctance.

In Part 1, the incidents described in both cases have been intentionally designed to appear superficially minor and seemingly easily solved. As such, students tend to assume they immediately understand the problems and how to address them. Their initial solutions are usually relatively simplistic; as one student commented, "These problems could just be solved with an email. It isn't that hard." But as students dig deeper, they see that relatively minor problems are more complex than they might initially have realized.

For example, early in discussing this project, Sam has asked students to get into their assigned project groups and complete a small in-class assignment mapping out the various problems and concerns in one of the cases. As they do, they identify specifically who was affected by the case events and the possible effects of the events on each. Students identify if and to what extent these effects constitute additional problems or concerns, as well as potential issues that might arise if a concern is left unaddressed. Each group then briefly presents their issue maps to the class.

In such small group and class discussions, students often find that their interpretations of the situation differ from their classmates, which helps them see that their perspectives on the issue(s) are not universally held. Occasionally these differences in perception and opinion have led to tense discussions that, in a few instances, have required us to proactively intervene and mediate, particularly when there are considerable differences in culture and identity represented among the students. In doing so, we invite everyone to step back, and perform an informal rhetorical analysis of the exchange that has just taken place, identifying

which comments sparked strong emotions and how and why they did so. These instances of mild contention have provided some of the most lasting educational moments, as they provide authentic situations of miscommunication and misunderstanding that the whole class experiences. Such moments often turn into more general discussions of positively and fruitfully engaging in difficult conversations and working productively with others who have differing experiences and perspectives. It also allows us to emphasize the importance and difficulty of engaging in the mental and emotional labor of empathizing with a person who perceives things differently than you, and of allowing that empathy to color your response. In doing this we make a concerted effort to emphasize to students that this kind of diversity of perspective is precisely the strength of a multicultural, diverse workplace as it allows for more creative and innovative approaches to any work they might be doing.

To demonstrate to the students how this can happen, we often explain the genesis of this assignment and, more generally, the working relationship that the two of us enjoy. Namely, we embody a series of identities and lived experiences that exist in a stark contrast to one another. To name a few, we are a man and a woman, we are thin and fat, we are tall and short, we are white and Black, we live on the west coast and the east coast. As a result of these contrasting identities, the various projects on which we have collaborated, including this assignment, have come to demonstrate a much richer, nuanced, and more careful understanding of the topics we study and address. But we only arrive at these richer work products after working through myriad misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and overgeneralizing assumptions about the world(s) we inhabit.

When having these discussions about the value of multiple perspectives and doing the at-times difficult work of empathizing with those different from them, we make a special point of acknowledging that there are certainly people in many organizations—often those in positions of organizational and societal power—with whom it will not be possible to have productive relationships. We emphasize to students that they need not feel obligated to perform the aforementioned mental and emotional labor when dealing with parties who are unwilling to reciprocate and engage in that labor for themselves. We encourage students to critically consider, if and when they are confronted with such individuals, what level of toxicity they are willing to endure and to proactively plan exit strategies when necessary, recognizing that "exit" can mean many things, and not all of them require a two-week notice. To illustrate this kind of adaptability in the context of this assignment, we ensure students are aware that if such a toxic environment arises in the collaborative portions of the project, they are welcome to approach us with their concerns, and we can and will make alternative arrangements that will be more amenable to them, including, as appropriate, reassigning them to a new group or even allowing them to complete the assignment solo.

As mentioned above, we intersperse discussions and instruction about intercultural communication and inclusivity throughout Parts 1 and 2, because, despite extensive discussion of these issues in Part 1, students often struggle to connect those discussions to the case narratives they develop in Part 2. The first drafts of these narratives are often brief and underdeveloped, lacking nuance and sufficient depth of insight. Additionally, the narratives often focus on identity explorations that either reflect the kinds of experiences of discrimination that they might face (e.g., young white men writing about ageism) or that draw on stereotypes (e.g., a woman who dresses unprofessionally experiencing sexual harassment). In pushing students beyond these superficial case narratives, we encourage them to get outside their own situations and consider the experience of others (and *Others*) in more authentic ways. This active encouragement to move beyond the superficial is similarly required with the annotated bibliography.

In beginning to work on their annotated bibliographies, we often see students struggling

to transfer the research skills they learned in previous courses, perhaps partially because we ask them to engage popular, non-academic sources such as YouTube videos, comic strips, and "professional" content produced by organizations with murky leadership structures. We have found that as we encourage students to attend to questions of credibility and veracity of sources, students tend to put issues of social justice, diversity, and equity on the back-burner. We have found, however, that by pushing students to maintain focus on issues of social justice and inclusion, they are better able to evaluate sources, as the notion of "credibility" takes on a realistic context. As students make this connection, and as they practice evaluating sources through the lens of their case narratives, they exhibit an increased ability to empathize and get outside their own perspectives, resulting in reciprocal improvement to their case narratives.

Conclusions, Future Revisions, and Applications

As we have taught our "Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace" assignment over several semesters, we have found that it challenges students in ways they perhaps weren't expecting in a TPC course. Even the most resistant students usually come to see that questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion—questions to which many of them have not given much thought (and which some students regrettably dismiss as trivial)—have larger implications than they might initially acknowledge. They ultimately find the project rewarding regardless of major, identity status, or life experience.

In our experience, students previously had the tendency to consider units focused on the genre expectations and constraints of professional emails, memos, and other interpersonal communication genres as either unnecessary repetition of things they have already learned, or, more positively, as a necessary but dry part of the course. But in framing this instruction through the lens of case studies of intercultural communication and conflict, we have found that students approach the content with more energy and enthusiasm and come to better understand how these seemingly innocuous genres both reflect and shape a workplace culture with regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In previous iterations of Part 1 of this assignment, we have included additional components that have been excised in the present form of the assignment to allow more time for Part 2. We have found these to provide fruitful areas of discussion and work for students, the collaborative work in particular. Here are some such components:

- A supervisor/HR representative email sent as a kind of rhetorical triage to acknowledge and preliminarily address the situation soon after the incidents in the cases occur but before a more detailed and thoughtful response can be composed and approved by company figureheads
- A collaborative proposal outlining specific recommendations that the company might take to directly address the roots of the problems
- Corporate rules/regulations regarding DEI issues, with an accompanying company mission statement that places greater emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion

In sharing this assignment our hope is that other instructors will find, as we have, that conversations about social justice, intercultural competence, diversity, and inclusion do not have to be awkwardly shoe-horned into existing assignments or one-off soap boxes. Rather, these conversations can be integrated into the fabric of writing assignments and courses without changing the expected outcomes, all while enhancing student engagement with realistic workplace concerns. As we do this collective work, students can complete the unit and/or course well-versed in specific genres, writing habits/processes, habits of mind, and research practices while also being more attuned to the politics of language, their own intersectional identities,

and their personal responsibilities for being responsive to inappropriate communication in all aspects of their lives. This in turn can, we hope, provide students with concrete steps they can take in the effort to build a more sustainably diverse and welcoming workplace and world.

ASSIGNMENT
Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

Assignment Goal

1. Practice composing and designing various workplace correspondence genres such as emails, letters, and memos
2. Consciously and critically consider ways that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds/identity statuses and who have differing expectations for and styles of communication can come into conflict in workplace settings
3. Explore strategies and best practices for addressing and resolving workplace conflicts and difficult situations

Assignment Overview

This assignment will consist of two parts, each part with two deliverables. You will submit all four deliverables as a portfolio at the end of the unit.

Part 1 - Responding to Intercultural Conflict in the Workplace

You will select one of the cases (found at the end of this assignment sheet) of intercultural conflict and miscommunication in the workplace, and you will address the various concerns of the case from a variety of perspectives.

Deliverable 1 – Employee Complaint Email (150-200 words)

You will compose an email from the perspective of either the employee who is suffering from headaches in case 1 or Milena Mrozinski in case 2. Your email should include the following:

- Attention to professional email standards and expectations, including an appropriate subject line, greeting, and signature
- A clear and accurate description of your concerns with the situation in the office
- Empathetic acknowledgement of the complexity of the situation
- Sensitivity to the cultural identities and concerns of all parties

Deliverable 2 – Supervisor/HR Representative Memo (300-400 words)

You will compose a memo from the role of the supervisor in case 1 or the HR representative in case 2. Your memo should include the following:

- Professional memo formatting including header
- Discussion of how the situation is being handled, including steps that will be taken to prevent similar events from occurring in the future
- Clear, concise language
- Easily scannable design that facilitates readers' ability to easily identify key information

For part 2 you will invent a case of workplace conflict and/or discrimination (implicit or explicit) based on one or more of SCAAR+ categories (sex, class, age, ability, race). Additionally, you will gather a series of resources that lend insight into your case that might be distributed by the company in response to the issue presented.

Deliverable 3 – Case Narrative (500-600 words)

In your narrative you invent a scenario in which one or more individuals experience discrimination or conflict due to some aspect of their identity. In good cases there are no obvious or easy solutions to the concerns raised, and the individuals/characters involved should have real and logical (if misguided) motivations for acting in the ways they do. In describing your case, you should discuss answer some of these questions:

- What occurred?
- What cultural factors (company or societally) allowed this to occur?
- Who is involved in the event/scenario?
- What are their respective roles in the company?
- What power/privilege(s) do they have/experience?
- How might this incident influence performance?
- What are the values/assumptions/motivations of those involved?
- What blind spots might those involved have regarding how others might experience the scenario/event?

Deliverable 4 – Annotated Bibliography

You will perform research and collect 15+ sources that address the various concerns and issues that arise in your case narrative. You will collate these resources into a single, visually appealing document that the company in your case might distribute to their employees. Please include the following:

- A brief contextualizing summary of the topic and issues explored in the list
- 15 publically available resources such as infographics, articles, reports, interviews, news stories, apps, etc. that address some aspect of the case topic/problem
- Correctly formatted APA/MLA citations
- Brief annotations and explanations that summarize, evaluate, and discuss how each resource addresses the case

Case 1 - "Smelly ethnic foods"

Jaewon Park has recently started working at a tech startup for his first job out of college. After working at the company for a couple of months, Jae sees that a note has been left on the microwave of the communal break room that reads:

"Please DO NOT bring smelly ethnic foods to work for lunch! When you heat it up in the microwave it makes the office smell AWFUL, and it gives everyone who works next to the break room a headache! You know who you are. (especially you Mr. Kimchi-for-lunch-every-day) For the sake of your officemates, PLEASE stop!"

Jae feels that the note is directed to him because he always brings kimchi as a side dish for his lunch. He feels offended and singled out, but because he is so new to the company, and because the company prides itself on being relaxed and relatively informal, he decides not to say or do anything about it. Two days later, he goes to the same kitchen and finds some hand-written responses to the note. One of them (on the left of the image) reads, "RACIST!" in all caps, while

another (on the bottom of the image) reads, "No! You stop, Mr. Taco Bell-for-lunch-everyday!" Another commenter has sarcastically written (on the right of the image), "Please do not use Comic Sans. It gives everyone using the microwave a headache!"

For several days everyone in Jae's division seems to be talking about the note, and he has several co-workers ask him what he thinks about it. Every time they do, he feels singled out again, and wishes it would all just go away.

Case 2 - A well-meaning miscommunication

Linda Kramer is a mid-level manager at a technology company, and is having difficulty with an employee in her organization, Milena Mrozinski. Milena has been with the company for two years and has a generally strong performance, but recently, she has been markedly quiet in the weekly team meetings and rarely participates in her unit's discussions. Linda has noticed Milena's lack of participation and repeatedly calls on her in meetings, and in trying to understand the problem asks "Do you understand me?"

Midway through a big project, the company's annual performance reviews were released. Linda met with each of her employees to discuss their reviews, and in meeting with Milena, Linda informed her that she had received a lower than average review. She encouraged Milena to put more effort into her work so they could get a strong response from the client. After the meeting, Milena began to call in sick more frequently and failed to submit a number of reports for the weekly meeting. Linda, noticing Milena's ever-decreasing involvement and communication, decided to visit Milena at her home, where Linda received no response even though it was clear Milena was at home.

Since Milena started with the company, she has felt that her coworkers make fun of her and single her out because of her struggles with English, and so she has started contributing less in public settings. In doing so, Milena has proceeded to feel further demoralized because of Linda Kramer's comments during the meetings, and it all came to a head following the annual review. Milena knew Linda was trying to help, but because Linda assumed that Milena was doing poorly due to lack of effort, Milena has felt depressed and completely unmotivated. To make matters worse, Milena knows that one of her colleagues has missed several meetings due to his being hungover, but Linda has never visited him at home or reduced his performance reviews.

After talking with some friends who work for another company who have experienced similar issues, Milena concludes that Linda has biases against international employees, especially those who are non-native English speakers, and decides to write an email to the HR representative to seek redress.

Notes

[1]While a thorough discussion of literature that discusses topics of intercultural competence, social (in)justice, imbalanced organizational power dynamics, inclusion, and other such topics in TPC scholarship is an important element in preparing to teach assignments such as the one presented here, the scope of this article does not allow for such. That said, in addition to the scholarship we discuss directly in this article, we include here a noncomprehensive list of sources that have influenced our work and that we have found particularly insightful in both crafting this assignment and preparing our day-to-day classroom practices: Nancy Blyler's (1998) "Taking a Political Turn: The Critical Perspective and Research in Professional Communication," Angela Haas' (2012) "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Technical Communication Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy," Natasha Jones' (2017) "Modified Immersive Situated Service Learning: A Social Justice Approach to Professional Communication Pedagogy," and Jeff Grabill's (2005) "Globalization and the Internationalization of Technical Communication Programs: Issues for Program Design."

[2]At the time Sherri developed and taught this assignment, she was at West Chester University.

[3]It has been noted that in titling this second case "A Well-Meaning Miscommunication" it can appear that we have understated the degree and severity of the supervisor's fault in perpetuating linguistic bias through her microaggressive language. We would note that this title is intended as irony, drawing attention to the fact that power-imbalanced microaggressions and displays of cultural insensitivity are often wrongfully dismissed using language of this sort, with

the offenders excusing their actions on the basis of *intent* while ignoring the *effect*. We make this clear in presenting the case to our students, but we recognize that it may not be clear as presented here. In future iterations of this assignment, we intend to place scare quotes around "Well-Meaning Miscommunication" to draw more explicit attention to the irony.

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.v7i1.100.

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Scaffolding toward Self-Efficacy
Preparing Underrepresented Writers to Pitch as Freelance Authors

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Abstract

This article describes a Pitch Assignment, designed by two journalists turned faculty, to increase support and self-efficacy for writing majors enrolled at a minority-serving institution (MSI). Pedagogical theory to support pitching processes and development is substantially undertheorized. Much of the extant literature focuses on academic writing and editing for undergraduate research; this article extends that discussion by focusing on the needs of underrepresented students seeking careers in nonacademic fields. Those needs include opportunities for increasing confidence and skill for such nonacademic work as freelance writing for newspapers and magazines. For this assignment, students write a pitch for a preview or review feature they will write later in the course. This assignment scaffolds how to analyze, prepare, and successfully pitch to target publications of students' choosing while developing a sense of self-efficacy that will transfer into future professional writing contexts. The authors conclude by reflecting on how this assignment might be approached differently by other instructors and how support for diversity might be offered in other ways.

Exigency and Diversity

In 2010, sociologist Debra Osnowitz investigated the rise of freelance professionals in the American economy,[1] noting the sweeping "reconfigur[ations] of organizations and internal labor markets" that have "altered career trajectories" (p. 8) and created a paradigmatic shift in journalism and the professional writing workforce. Newsrooms, for example, have seen a 28% workforce reduction since 2008, according to the nonpartisan Pew Research Center (Walker, 2021), but there has also been a corresponding rise in freelance writers and editors whose work is entrepreneurial and flexible but often less financially rewarding (Salamon, 2020). Interestingly, running parallel to these trends is the significant increase in the number of undergraduate writing majors in the last two decades (Loewe, 2021; Phelps, 2019). Students must now learn to market their skills as free agents in a publishing industry that has become larger, more capitalistic, and more contingent than ever before. And yet, when it comes to research and theory on how instructors can support ready-to-graduate writing majors, much of what is available focuses on supporting undergraduate research projects aimed at careers in academia (Conference on College Composition & Communication, 2017; DelliCarpini et al., 2020; Miller & DeLoach, 2016) as opposed to careers in industry.

Likewise, available scholarship is frequently lacking in diverse perspectives or institutional contexts, although attention to the intersectional identities of all students is of critical importance at most American colleges and universities. As the American Council on Education reported in 2019, the number of undergraduate students who identify as people of color rose from 29% in 1996 to 45% in 2016 (Espinosa et al., 2019). Some scholars have taken the helm in discussing how social justice-informed pedagogical approaches have transformed their classrooms or assignments. In Haas and Eble's 2018 collection on teaching professional and technical com-

munication in the twenty-first century, Jessica Edwards (2018) writes, "[I]f we do not consider race and racism in our field, we fall short in helping students to connect with the details associated with communicative processes that are realities in American society" (p. 269). Likewise, in a previous issue of *Prompt*, the guest editors asked authors to consider "their own social identities and the role those play in crafting assignments and teaching for justice" (Green et al., n.d.). We agree, while noting that continued discussion of assignments that "blend the conceptual with the practical" through scaffolding is needed (Loewe, 2021, p. 141), particularly for learners at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), who plan to enter the workforce soon. In this article, we take up the very helm we describe to share how we, as two white faculty and former journalists, co-designed and co-taught a senior-level course for English undergraduate majors wanting to transition into freelance journalism. For this course, we designed a pitch-writing assignment that offers more scaffolding than we received in our professional training. Pitches are often a first step in querying editors and securing freelance work. This task also prepares students for a larger (P)Review Assignment that asks them to compose a preview- or review-style feature. We offer a brief overview of our institutional and course context, key concepts, and assignment goals to acquaint our audience to the purpose and outcomes of the Pitch Assignment.

Institutional and Course Context

Texas Woman's University (TWU) is an MSI growing in size and diversity each year. According to *U.S. News & World Report 2021* "Best Colleges" rankings, TWU was ranked the most diverse campus in Texas and the fifth most diverse institution "nationally out of more than 1,500 regionally accredited schools evaluated" (Flores, 2020). Of the 19 students enrolled in our class, for example, approximately 48% identified as non-white (21% Hispanic, 11% Black or African American, 11% Asian, and 5% other). Furthermore, approximately half of our institution's students are first-generation college students and 44% qualify for Pell Grants (TWU, Institutional Research & Data Management, 2019). We also anticipated a handful of journalism minors enrolling in our course of mostly English majors. At our current institution, undergraduate English majors can choose to pursue a minor in journalism from a neighboring institution, a partnership that allows our students to take courses at the only accredited journalism school in our state while still earning a Bachelor of Arts from TWU. Therefore, we decided early on that students needed to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and improved facility in pitching on their own, outside of the classroom.

Scaffolding and Self-Efficacy

As an essential part of any learning experience, self-efficacy is a contributing factor to successful writing practice and skill development (Mitchell et al., 2019; Pajares, 2003; Ragula, 2017; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy, as it is classically defined by Albert Bandura (1986), is a person's judgments "of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Unlike the concept of motivation, which deals specifically with an individual's desire to achieve, self-efficacy pertains to an individual's beliefs about their ability to achieve. It is well documented that instructional scaffolding increases student self-efficacy and performance across assignments, disciplines, and institutional contexts, but the benefits of scaffolding have not been studied as closely in industry circles (Grothérus et al., 2019; Valencia-Vallejo et al., 2018, 2019). In our classroom, we aimed to increase students' feelings of self-efficacy through increased knowledge of and practice crafting effective pitches as well as feedback and experiential learning scenarios imitating real-world writing contexts.

In part because of the dearth of literature on pitching pedagogy and the lack of diversity

in writer bylines for such publications as newspapers and magazines, we turned to The Op-Ed Project as a model for addressing self-efficacy. This organization facilitates programming for public workshops, webinars, and fellowships to uplift "underrepresented expert voices, including women, and to accelerate solutions to the world's biggest problems—problems that cannot be solved justly or sustainably without a diversity of voices, expertise, experience, and identity" (The OpEd Project, n.d.). The Op-Ed Project's facilitators frequently cite one study from *The Washington Post*, which tracked the gender of writers submitting opinion editorials (or op-eds) across a five-month period, finding that 90% of submissions came from men, and as a result men claimed 88% of bylines. When men pitch more than women, they are published at almost the rate at which they pitch, leaving a gaping gender gap, one of note for teacher-scholars serving a predominantly female population. Other studies indicate that such trends persist, albeit with some improvement: according to the Women's Media Center, men claim 65% of the bylines and women 34% (Walker, 2021). Intent on overcoming barriers for students, we decided to incorporate a Pitch Assignment into a bigger project; we designed this task to increase students' sense of self-efficacy and chances of being published.

Assignment Goals and Sequencing

As an assignment-within-an-assignment, the Pitch Assignment was designed to teach students how to compose in common freelance genres, but none of those skills would transfer into real-world publishing success without self-advocacy for their work. That is, students needed to learn how to craft a pitch, which we define as a persuasive writing proposal often framed as a query and composed for an editorial audience. With this challenge in mind, we embedded the Pitch Assignment directions within our second major project, for which students were to compose a (P)Review feature. We also recognized the need to break down the Pitch Assignment into manageable steps that would support students' work later in the sequence.

For these reasons, we tried to paint a course arc for students, from the first unit to the last. Scaffolding for writing pitches, for example, was layered into the first course unit, which asked students to analyze an article from a publication they hoped to compose a review or a preview for in the second unit (see the assignment sheet for details). That unit asked students to summarize their findings in a memorandum (see Supplementary Materials) and included a peer-review session—one of several incorporated into the course. Recent research in the journal of *Educational Technology* confirms that peer review leads to more sophisticated writing and increased self-efficacy, particularly in multimodal writing contexts (Liu et al., 2016). The Pitch Assignment bridged students into the (P)Review project. The culminating project was a professional portfolio showcasing the writing the students had developed throughout the class. Ultimately, our shared goal was to have students leave the course with deliverables and to believe that they were all capable of pitching and publishing, therefore making the pitch assignment essential.

Preparing to Pitch

After three weeks of laying the groundwork for pitching through extended analysis, discussion, and modeling, students moved into the second assignment's genre-based study. On the first day, we offered students the chance to explore examples of our published work, which we hyperlinked on our assignment sheet. Next, we moved students into small groups based on their chosen texts and genres. They read these selections first, then discussed genre conventions. This activity took a little more than half of our 80-minute class period. We finished the class by responding to questions and discussing the guidance provided in The Pitch Assignment section

of Assignment II.

About one week later, we revisited the art of writing effective pitches. Jackie shared with the class three different pitch emails she had submitted to former editors that resulted in published articles. Some example pitches were of a much higher quality than others (mostly due to Jackie's familiarity with the editors), which made for an engaging, spirited discussion about what to do and what not to do when composing a pitch. Margaret added the perspective of an editor accustomed to receiving and evaluating such pitches. We encouraged students to critique the pitches in terms of the genre conventions of pitch emails, which we outlined in an additional handout. As pedagogues interested in supporting social justice, we wanted to bring more transparency and vulnerability to our conversations on freelance writing, so we dedicated some time to talking with students about our writing processes in *medias res* and our challenges pitching to mostly white, male editorial audiences. For example, Margaret shared an experience pitching a weekly column focused on local environmental issues to her former publisher and news editor (both white men), who countered with suggestions involving locally known experts (also white men) who might be a better fit. Margaret persisted, with the gig eventually leading to full-time work that included managing a new, annual publication, *The Green Building Directory*. It would behoove all teachers to demystify the process of communicating with editors whose intersectional identities or values may differ from those held by our students.

Another point of support we scaffolded into the Pitch Assignment involved proposing to us what topic they, the students, would pitch and to where or to whom. Unlike the pitch, the initial proposal was set up as a preliminary, low-stakes step preceding the submission of the pitch, and for which students received a completion grade for submitting. To each proposal, we replied with feedback for further development or refinement of content for each individual student's intended editorial audience. In our assignment sheet, the proposal section details how we collected information via this scaffolding step. Anecdotally, most of the students approached the proposal stage with relative ease because their in-depth analysis conducted in the memorandum prepared them for this step. Other steps included: 1) proposing a topic they wanted to pitch on, 2) receiving feedback on their proposed pitch, 3) drafting their pitch, 4) addressing and submitting their pitch to us as if we were their editorial audience, 5) and including with their pitch their finalized preview or review feature as an attachment. Once topics were approved, students were provided with in-class work time, an additional peer-to-peer review session, and student-teacher conferences with individualized feedback from us.

Going to Press

Because we hoped to see some writing majors published prior to graduation, we approached the grading and feedback processes with an eye on revision for publication. What surprised us was that even through extensive preparation (analysis, discussion, peer review, proposing, and pitching), many students expressed hesitation when we suggested they send their pitches to editors. In reviewing the extant literature, we were heartened to know that Wilma Clark (1982) shared an experience like ours when encouraging advanced composition students to publish pieces written for her class in 1982. She neatly outlines the barriers students face in publishing particular genres (including critical reviews), saying, "My students' problem was not intellectual but rather psychological" (p. 29). Despite Clark's students' demonstrated proficiency in writing at an advanced level, the thought of writing for a public audience at times blocked their ability to pursue publication after the class had ended. We sense that little has changed over the years. In our course, despite encouragement and offers to meet with students to assist in pitching, they were reluctant to submit pitches to editors. Students reported worrying that their work was not good enough or that editors would not accept a pitch from an unpublished student-author.

With midterms looming, many of them also lacked the mental bandwidth to revise and submit. In the next unit, one that focused on digital publishing and/or blogging, we found a similar resistance to our supportive nudges. Despite many students enrolling in the class because they wanted to be published, few possessed enough self-efficacy (at the time) to follow through and send in their pitches.

Nevertheless, two students did successfully pitch and publish their work before the semester ended.[2] As a class, we celebrated their accomplishments but took special care to avoid other students feeling inadequate or lacking in self-efficacy. Rather, we emphasized that what was possible for these two students was possible for all students. We trust that this knowledge of pitching served or will serve all future students. Case in point, two years later one student (who had not published before the semester ended) wrote to Jackie requesting a letter of recommendation for graduate school, and in her email she credited our class for her success landing a gig freelancing online content for a law office. We attribute this student victory and others we have shared to the careful scaffolding of pitch writing that began in the first unit and was intentionally built into subsequent units. The pitch assignment provided the missing piece of writing pedagogy that many students need to transfer what they have learned in class into real-world writing contexts.

Reflections and Teaching Notes

If asked to teach this course again, there is much we would keep the same about the Pitch Assignment. For one, having students draft and submit "the proposal" was a critical first step toward their success in this unit. A few students struggled to differentiate between the proposal they were writing for us as opposed to the pitch they were composing for an actual editorial audience, but most students clearly understood the difference and purpose of each. We would once again require students to draft, peer review, then send us pitch emails promoting their writing and thought leadership to potential editors. Composing and sending a pitch to an editor can be intimidating to all writers, particularly undergraduate students lacking previous publication experience. By exploring with students every step of the writing for publication process—from the initial point of connection with editors all the way to the celebrations that come at the end—we were able to demystify the process of writing for publication and to witness some students' self-efficacy grow as they achieved publication.

One challenge of teaching this assignment was that we were having to constantly remind ourselves that we were teaching an assignment-within-an-assignment, in a genre connected to two other genres. Assignment II, the (P)Review, is a contemporary, corollary version of the more well-known review genre, but the two are still distinct enough to merit separate discussions and scaffolding activities in and out of class. We decided that teaching these two genres in tandem did not feel too daunting, but there were also two of us to respond to students' questions and to provide feedback. Giving students the preview-or-review option might not be the best choice for every instructor, especially those wanting to build students' sense of self-efficacy at an MSI where students may require extra support and scaffolding to empower them to publish. However, our individual experiences writing in both genres made us feel comfortable switching between pitching vs. (p)reviewing genre discussions. In hindsight, we wonder if students might have benefited from the Pitch Assignment being made even more distinct from the (P)Review. We also would have developed two separate rubrics—one for the pitch and one for the (P)Review. In the assignment sheet provided, we have updated the rubric to reflect how we would assess the pitch differently now.

As a final note, if we teach this course again, we will try to identify a more diverse group of writers and editors to talk with students about their pitching processes. This outreach could

reveal different approaches for navigating the still predominantly white power dynamic that determines who is supported in pitching and who is not. We would also advocate for guest speakers to be paid an honorarium so that their time and labor are compensated fairly. In hindsight, this is an essential step in supporting students that we did not think to take. We had three guest speakers visit with students in the middle of the semester, but none of these guests were writers or editors of color. We encourage other instructors teaching such a course to consider how guest speakers we invite from our networks might misrepresent the pitching processes students will encounter, especially for students of color, neurodivergent students, or other writers inadequately represented in mainstream media.

Having shared all that we have about our Pitch Assignment and the most relevant points of scaffolding that informed this assignment, we hope that readers will take up the helm we described earlier in this piece. In light of recent economic crises, fluctuating labor markets, and protests calling attention to racial inequity in the United States, we feel an incredible sense of responsibility to equip writing majors with the skills they need to be successful in publishing. And to help them achieve their professional goals, we must scaffold in ways that increase self-efficacy for all students, especially those underrepresented in the freelance publishing market.[3]

ASSIGNMENT

Prompt: Writing a (P)Review + a Pitch

For this assignment, you will compose and pitch a **review** or **preview.** These genres represent two common opportunities for freelancers—both as entry-level work and as sustainable niches in the industry. Reviews and previews also offer writers a chance to demonstrate analytical skills, strong ethics, creativity, and a "critic's" voice.

Reviews cover events, performances, a new product, or a particular media (a book or books, a film, a song or album, a video game, a YouTube video, and so forth). Restaurant reviews fall in this category, too. There's also a market for **previews** of upcoming events and performances (a book reading, a festival, a live band, a concert, a conference). Both previews and reviews sometimes include a profile of a key person (a performer, author, and so forth), often based on an interview.

The Proposal Assignment

This assignment also requires you to **pitch** your idea to the editor. A good pitch requires **research**, which you will summarize in an email proposal that includes the following:

First, identify a publication you're interested in submitting your work to (such as the publication you reviewed for Assignment 1). **Second**, examine the submission guidelines. What's the process—email an editor, fill out an online form or …? Do the guidelines identify what types of submissions the publication accepts or is looking for? **Third**, how well does your idea fit the publication and how timely or otherwise relevant is your idea? In other words, put yourself in the editor's shoes and consider the publication's target audience. **Then** summarize this research as a proposal via email to Drs. Hoermann-Elliott and Williams by the end of week 4. This email should contain the following:

- Publication name
- Owner of publication (company or individual)
- Interesting historical or contemporary info on the publication (briefly)
- Editor(s)' name(s) (hint: find the right editor for your idea)

- Genre of your proposed submission
- Focus of submission (briefly)
- Anticipated word count
- How you'll appeal to the editors
- Questions you have regarding the publication or pitch process

The Pitch Assignment

As noted above, your **pitch** should be a separate attachment. Here are a few suggestions for developing short, effective pitches:

- Craft a compelling, interesting, and appropriate **subject line.**
- Use appropriate **salutations.**
- **Introduce** yourself (briefly).
- **Connect** with the editor—either by referencing a past encounter or noting something she or he wrote that you enjoyed.
- Explain any relevant **expertise** on the subject matter.
- Get to **the point** quickly. Keep the email short.
- Place other contact information in the **email signature** line.

The Key Features

1) **Audience awareness, appropriateness & expectations:** Meet the needs and expectations of your target audience and publication (for example, *Rolling Stone* magazine doesn't publish reviews of classical opera). Also, include relevant information about the subject, such as its genre, media, and performers (if applicable); scheduling/ticketing information; publishing & citation information; and so forth. What does this audience want from your review/preview? A recommendation? New and/or interesting info? A fresh and/or creative perspective?
2) **Review criteria/evidence:** Support conclusions and recommendations with clear criteria and evidence—in other words, provide details that back up your key points.
3) **Critic's voice, style, and mechanics:** Demonstrate knowledge about what's being reviewed and why it's timely. Write in a style suitable for your target audience/publication—and minimize errors in grammar and other mechanics.
4) Follow the **genre and ethics conventions** of the rhetorical situation. For example, good movie reviewers avoid giving spoilers about the plot; and scholarly versus pop-culture book reviews follow significantly different genre conventions.
5) Craft an engaging **title** and lede that **hooks** your audience with an interesting, creative, and/or engaging angle; and finish with a good **ending.**

The Samples

"A Reviving Mural" (art review); "Earthly celebrations" (event preview); "Twelfth Night Shakes Gender Order" (theater review); "Just down the road" (food-scene review); "Blue Texas" (book review); "Finding Mañanaland" (art-gallery review); "Asheville's 12 Bones launches comfort-food cookbook" (book/food review); "White Christmas: Winter Wonderland" (theater review)

The Final Submission

By the end of week 6, complete **a draft** of your review/preview, as well as your **pitch**, and bring them to class for that day's peer review session. Bring your notes, too. The target word range for this assignment is **800-1,200 words**. You will be given a follow-up **work day** for this assignment,

and you'll have additional **conference time** to ask questions related to this piece.

By the tentative due date for this assignment (the end of week 7), email your **final submission** to Drs. Hoermann-Elliott and Williams with the **pitch as a separate attachment**. Please use the email submission as a **cover letter** in which you will describe:

1) Any peculiarities of the publication or submission guidelines that influenced your creation of the piece (links are helpful).
2) What you found most rewarding about this assignment.
3) What you found most challenging about this assignment.
4) If or how you plan to submit this piece for formal publication.

Rubric: Writing a (P)Review + a Pitch (15%)

Aside from organization/formatting, each of the categories below is explained in the assignment sheet. For a **"Better"** rating, the writer will have exceeded expectations or been so thorough or impressive in another way so as to suggest mastery in that area. A rating of **"Good"** indicates that the writer did an overall good job; however, a few oversights or errors may be present or detracting from the quality of the piece. An **"Unsatisfactory"** indicates that an aspect of the piece is substantially lacking in terms of quality, readability and/or attention to detail.

[Editors' note: The following lists of criteria appear in tabular form in the original assignment artifact.]

The Proposal
- Cover Letter
- Title, Hook & Ending
- Audience Awareness, Appropriateness, Expectations
- Review Criteria, Details & Support
- Organization and/or Format
- "Critic's" Voice, Style & Grammar
- Genre Conventions

The Pitch
- Proposal Submitted
- Subject Line
- Salutations
- Introduction
- Editorial Connection
- Relevant Expertise
- Brevity/ Efficiency
- Email Signature

The writer will receive a check mark for completion of each of the following or an X for missing, inadequate or incomplete items.

- Word Count
- All Necessary Documents Submitted
- Peer Review Participation

Notes

¹Freelance professionals—also known as contract professionals, contractors, or freelancers — are "mobile workers hired temporarily to apply specific knowledge and skills. Rather than salaries, they receive hourly wages or, less often, project fees" (Osnowitz, 2010, p. 4).

²One of the students published a book-tour preview about one of her favorite authors in our local newspaper. A few days later, we learned that another student published an article focused on supporting parents of special-needs children.

³If you'd like to dialogue with us further about this assignment, please feel free to email Jackie at jhelliott@twu.edu and Margaret at mwilliams54@twu.edu.

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.v7i1.105.

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