

Composition Forum 26, Fall 2012
<http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/>

College Writing and Beyond: Five Years Later

 [\[http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum\]](http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum)

Anne Beaufort

Abstract: In this essay, I examine the problems I now see with the sample curriculum I proposed in *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for Writing Instruction* in 2007. There are numerous factors that must be considered in designing a writing course: choice of subject matter, choice of genres to assign, sequencing of writing assignments, number of assignments, and using both content and pedagogy to enhance the possibility for positive transfer of learning for student writers. The problems in these areas of curriculum design, both in my work and in writing studies at large, as well as recommendations to eliminate those problems are explored here.

In the last few decades, writing studies scholars have called for a re-examination of our fundamental assumptions about the goals and curriculum in college-level academic writing courses. Challenges to the traditional rhetorical modes approach to teaching writing (Connors), to the expressivist approach (Bartholomae), the cultural studies approach (George and Trimbur; Lovitt and Young; Tate) have been expressed. And the issue of transfer of learning—whether skills taught in first-year composition courses prepare students for writing in other academic courses and beyond—has created a significant new strand in writing studies research and debate (Beaufort “Transferring Writing Knowledge” Beaufort, *Writing in the Real World*; Beaufort, *College Writing and Beyond*; Mikulecky and Peers; Wardle, “Understanding ‘Transfer’”).

In [Appendix A to my second book \[college-writing-beyond-appendix1.pdf\]](#) (*College Writing and Beyond*), I offered a sample course outline and pedagogical suggestions that apply findings from two ethnographies in order to improve learning outcomes, including positive transfer of learning for an academic writing class. But five years later, after further reading, reflection, and observation of difficulties my students have, I would rewrite Appendix A to give students a stronger skill base in academic writing and to foster more positive transfer of learning from writing courses to other contexts for writing. Here I articulate the problems I see with my earlier proposed revision to writing curricula and what I am now experimenting with as I continue to teach writing at college and graduate levels. Specifically, I will address four problems I see with the sample curriculum and pedagogy suggestions in Appendix A:

1. failing to acknowledge the underlying values and assumptions I’m making about goals of academic writing classes and conflating transfer of learning goals with goals for developing academic skills;
2. failing to offer explicit guidelines for choice of course themes in order that the new framework for writing instruction I propose can be applied to a variety of course themes;
3. failing to articulate clearly the necessity to explicitly teach the framing concepts of writing expertise in any context for writing, regardless of the writing tasks;

4. failing to consider what and how many types of writing assignments in a quarter or semester would most likely equip students with skills that they will use frequently in other academic contexts for writing.

As I articulate each problem, I will suggest curricular and pedagogical modifications that I believe will lead to strengthening acquisition of essential academic writing skills and facilitate more positive transfer of learning.

But first, the context for what I am exploring here. My observations are based on two ethnographic studies of writers learning to write in new situations and my own work at three different higher education institutions in the past 17 years as writing professor, writing program administrator, and/or writing-across-the-curriculum coordinator. In my first study (*Writing in the Real World*), I developed a model of the five knowledge domains to be mastered in order to become an expert writer, based on observing what areas of new learning four writers in a non-profit needed to engage with in order to be successful as writers in this new context. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, a longitudinal study of one student (Tim) progressing through college and into his first professional job, made two arguments. First, I proposed that writing curricula need to be designed to explicitly teach all five knowledge domains that writers need to draw on for success with writing projects: discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge. In most teaching of writing I see, one or more of these areas of knowledge are unacknowledged and underdeveloped in the curricula. Second, I proposed that all writing courses should include a goal of aiding positive transfer of learning to other contexts of writing, using principles drawn from the research in cognitive science on transfer of learning. Until recently, transfer of learning has not been a significant point of research and discussion in writing studies.

Within this context, I propose “course corrections” to Appendix A of *College Writing and Beyond*.

First consideration: Clarifying assumptions about learning goals in writing courses

Even though courses may be designated as academic writing courses, texts related to academic writing curricula reveal a range of underlying values and assumptions driving the work (Berlin; Fulkerson):

1. The *expressivist* goal, facilitating self-expression, finding one’s voice, one’s personal truths;
2. The *critical theory/cultural studies* goal, facilitating critique of social hierarchies and cultural hegemonies;
3. The *democratic, rhetorical* goal, facilitating informed participation in civic issues;
4. The *pragmatic* goal, facilitating successful written expression in school and work contexts;
5. The *aesthetic* goal, facilitating an appreciation of the craft of writing and a love of language;
6. The *process* goal, facilitating growth in managing writing tasks.

These goals, interwoven but often unstated in multiple venues within the discourse community of Writing Studies (composition textbooks, scholarly articles and presentations, awards, etc.), are based on values from several sources: personal beliefs, institutional goals, and societal norms. Consideration of any proposal for new curricular guidelines requires first examining whether there is agreement with

intended learning goals. I skipped this step in the proposed curriculum in Appendix A instead of inviting readers to understand and evaluate the fit, or not, of my underlying assumptions and goals with theirs as they considered my proposal. An emphasis on one set of values and assumptions or another about the goal(s) of academic writing classes leads to different research agendas and different curricular emphases.

Here is an example: as part of my case study of Tim's experience in two quarters of first year writing at an elite university, I reviewed Carla's curricula (Tim's teacher for both courses), observed classroom activities, and talked at length with her. I began to understand her aims—expressivist and civic. When Carla reviewed the manuscript of *College Writing and Beyond* before I submitted it to the publisher, she disagreed with most of my recommendations, in part, I suspect, because of different values and assumptions she held about the purposes of academic writing courses.

Also worth noting is how Tim evaluated the curriculum fueled by those assumptions at the end of his freshman year. His interpretation of the expressivist aim was "Ah! I can have fun with language!" But after he'd completed the first year writing courses and faced the demands of writing in history and in engineering, he dismissed the expressivist writing he did in first-year composition as "trivial." And his interpretation of the civic aim was "Writing for someone else sucks." The civic project Carla's students had to undertake—writing for a nonprofit organization—was Tim's most frustrating experience in Carla's class because there was a lack of proper scaffolding for him to be successful in the task. And he also demonstrated negative transfer of learning when he inappropriately applied expressivist and literary principles to writing his history essays and had a repeat of his service learning experience in engineering classes in which he was required to write for a "real" engineering company. Of course, Tim was not privy to Carla's assumptions and values when he took his required writing courses, yet they established the parameters for what he would learn in those courses.

Underlying values and assumptions about academic writing courses influence outcomes. Furthermore, those statements of course goals on our syllabi contain code words for our values and assumptions in teaching writing. Students don't know how to decode our language, so they are less than fully equipped to understand the particular framework for a writing class and the instructor's biases.

In the introductions to both of my ethnographies I state the problem I am seeking solutions to, namely, writing curricula that will prepare students with the analytic skills and rhetorical skills to write clear, convincing arguments, as well as give students knowledge of the fundamental concepts necessary to be able to adapt, change, and add writing skills in new contexts for writing. Lack of these skills and knowledge, witnessed in my ten years in corporate communications with a technology company and in the data from both ethnographies, drives my choice of goals for academic writing classes. Although I value self-expression as a humanizing act, become almost ecstatic when encountering creative, artistic written expression, and take seriously the need for informed citizenry equipped with the critical thinking and rhetorical skills to evaluate social needs, hegemonies, and policies, my highest priority in academic courses is the pragmatic goal.

Whatever the choice of aims for academic writing courses, teachers and program directors, myself included, will develop the best possible curricula for their particular goals if they are clear with themselves, with colleagues, and with students about what those overarching goals are. Furthermore, transfer of learning goals need to merge with, interweave with any skills-development or knowledge acquisition goals of a given curriculum.

In addition to not stating my values and assumptions as a preface to my proposal in Appendix A of *College Writing and Beyond*, I conflated my pragmatic curricular goal and my transfer of learning goal. What was uppermost in my thinking was how to teach and reinforce the big concepts of the nature of writing expertise and facilitate their application in different problem-solving writing tasks

(i.e. facilitate positive transfer of learning). Looking at that curriculum now, I would not alter any of the analytic (pre-writing) exercises that were aimed at teaching key concepts to facilitate transfer of learning to other writing contexts. But I would alter the writing assignments. In hindsight, I see that the major writing projects proposed in Appendix A are not the best for helping students gain analytic skills and rhetorical skills in typical academic genres. Students are asked to write in too many genres in a single writing course and in genres that are not widely used in a lot of other academic disciplines. I will explain these problems more fully later in this essay.

Second consideration: The issue of guidelines for course theme(s) and the relationship to teaching for transfer

One of the five aspects of writing expertise I identified in my research as necessary for successful writing is subject matter expertise. This states the obvious: if you don't have some depth of understanding of the subject you're writing about, your writing will be vague, unclear, insignificant. However, views in writing studies regarding subject matter for first-year composition courses are controversial (Bartholomae; Elbow "Being a Writer"; George and Trimbur; Smit). There is no consensus on what is appropriate subject matter in academic writing courses, nor is there any overarching heuristic to guide writing teachers in their choice of subject matter or course themes (i.e. readings and writing topics) for writing courses.

In Appendix A of *College Writing and Beyond*, I did not articulate general guidelines for choosing course themes for writing courses. I did discuss, briefly, in Chapter 2 (42-8) the drawbacks to a multi-themed course. Multi-subject readings and discussions in a writing course, as short as 10 weeks or even 15 weeks, do not enable students to gain much in-depth subject matter knowledge over the time-span of the course. So students have an unnecessary handicap: they are not as equipped to write with as much subject matter expertise as they would if a single theme were pursued, from different angles, over the span of the course. [\[1\] \[#note1\]](#)

In Appendix A, I proposed as a course theme "Writing as Social Practice." What I did not say as clearly as I would like to now is that this is only *one* possible course theme that would encourage in-depth intellectual exploration into subjects from any number of discourse communities. I stated that the theme "Writing as Social Practice" would enable writers to become more self-aware and I conflated that goal with the goal of teaching for transfer. Teaching for transfer can be accomplished, if appropriate strategies are used, no matter what the course's subject matter.

Others have built on the course theme (i.e. subject matter focus) proposed in my appendix: for example, the Writing-About-Writing (WAW) movement has gained considerable momentum in the past five years. WAW's readings are drawn from writing studies (research reports, theoretical pieces, etc.) and the subject matter/theme of the course is writing as a scholarly discipline, which can provide students with useful concepts about writing and break down misconceptions they have about writing. Students are asked to use readings from the writing studies discourse community to reflect on themselves as writers and to prompt ideas for researching contemporary issues associated with written texts. The primary goal of a WAW course, as stated most recently by Wardle and Downs, is "teaching students flexible and transferable declarative and procedural knowledge about writing." Accomplishing these ends entails, among other things, helping students:

broaden their conceptions of what writing is and how it is done, think explicitly about the affordances and constraints for the writing they face, see themselves as writers, understand the contributive and conversational nature of both reading and writing, and understand writing rhetorically. (Wardle and Downs)

I see the goal of WAW as intricately connected with principles for transfer of learning: by showing students ways of thinking about writing as an activity, rhetorically situated, supporters of WAW are hoping to give students analytic frameworks for understanding acts of writing in other writing contexts.

But because I did not articulate that my choice of a course theme (Writing as a Social Practice) was only one of many good choices, I am concerned that some WAW enthusiasts may have concluded that I was suggesting that writing-about-writing is a superior option for subject matter in a writing course. I believe that there are numerous appropriate areas of intellectual inquiry for writing courses. No course theme for an academic writing course deserves priority as “the best” or the only one that will facilitate transfer of learning.

As for criteria for selecting appropriate course themes in academic writing classes, first, a focused theme or subject is by far better than a multi-topic approach. Second, the theme needs to be broad enough to enable a broad range of related intellectual inquiries and needs to be developmentally appropriate. By the latter, I mean the subject should be relevant to the life experience and interests of a given age-range of students.

Two examples will illustrate the principles of breadth and developmental appropriateness of course themes. I once had to advise a new TA in the first year writing program I was supervising that a course theme of “refrigeration” was too narrow. The instructor’s enthusiasm for the topic was admirable, but he would surely have had a hard task getting his students enthusiastic about that topic. On the other hand, one of the course themes I’ve used lately for academic writing courses is *Locating Self in Landscape*. One student enrolled in the course thinking we would be reading and writing about gardening, and many other undergraduates have not given any serious attention to the impact of “place” on lifestyle, psychological and social development, cultural norms, etc. But the intellectual issues I present in the course readings, discussions, and writing tasks are wide-ranging and are ones that young adults can relate to. In the syllabus, I pose what Wiggins refers to as “essential questions” to frame the intellectual inquiry of the course (Wiggins): [{2} \[#note2\]](#)

- *Self in the Natural World*: What is the role of the natural world in people’s lives in post-industrial societies? Is contact with nature essential or optional for well-being?
- *Self in Man-made Environments*: What are the effects on my development, lifestyle, and personal values of my having grown up in a suburb? city? rural environment?
- *Self and Personal Space*: What or where is “home” for me? Why? What childhood spaces influence who I am today? What and how important is my sense of “home” to my well-being?

Through readings in environmental psychology, literary nonfiction, sociology, urban planning, place attachment research, etc., I introduce students to theories, research findings, and personal accounts related to self and place. They choose, then, an area within the general topic to pursue further in their own research.

But this is only one example of a subject matter that has breadth and is developmentally appropriate. As the welter of composition readers on the market demonstrate, there are many such appropriate subjects for sustained intellectual inquiry in a writing course. I repeat: writing skills can be developed through multiple possible course themes as long as the course is structured around sustained inquiry into a subject that has both breadth and relevance to the age range of students in the course.

Third consideration: applying principles of transfer of learning explicitly to the pedagogy associated with *any* writing tasks in *any* instructional setting

In *College Writing and Beyond* I laid out three principles for facilitating transfer of learning that consistently show up in the research on transfer. I summarize them briefly here:

1. Teach learners to frame specific tasks and learnings into more abstract principles (i.e. concepts of discourse community, genre, rhetorical situation, etc.) that can be applied to new situations (Cormier and Hagman; Foertsch; Gick and Holyak; Hatano and Oura; Sternberg and Frensch);
2. Give learners numerous opportunities to apply key concepts to different problems and situations (Foertsch; Hatano and Oura; Perkins and Salomon; Salomon and Globerson; Brooks and Dansereau; Wardle, “Understanding ‘Transfer’”);
3. Teach the practice of mindfulness, or meta-cognition, to facilitate awareness of learning and transferable knowledge and skills (Brooks and Dansereau; Wardle “Understanding ‘Transfer’”).

The first principle—help learners frame specific tasks into more abstract principles—translates in a writing course to explaining and giving examples of the key concepts related to writing expertise (discourse community, genre, rhetorical context, etc.) in the context of the writing tasks assigned. I assumed, once I’d pointed out the importance of giving students overarching, “big” concepts regarding knowledge domains writers need to use in analyzing or working within any writing situation, that explicit teaching of the “big concepts” would be a part of any teacher’s pedagogy, whether assignments were based on the model I proposed in Appendix A or not. But when I’ve looked at variations on the curriculum I proposed in various texts and writing program websites and, in particular, the accompanying teaching apparatus, I often see little explicit instruction to teachers—even in WAW texts and discussions—to teach students to understand and apply these concepts to writing tasks. Just doing a single assignment that calls for analyzing a discourse community or an analysis of several genres does not mean students will automatically see that these big concepts can be applied to any writing task. Tasks must be framed appropriately and repeatedly in order for writers to carry forward those big concepts to help them analyze and successfully accomplish writing tasks in other situations.

Here is an example of why instructing faculty to frame tasks using these concepts is important. I find in professional development workshops with faculty across disciplines that I need to help faculty bring to a conscious level the tacit knowledge they have about their disciplines’ discourse communities and the associated communicative practices of that discourse community. Once they understand the concept and start comparing norms of their different discourse communities among themselves, they begin to understand why students, unaware of these norms, may be having problems doing the writing tasks assigned.

Another example from Tim’s experience with discourse community issues in his four years of college will illustrate the importance of explicitly situating learning and writing tasks within discourse communities. Carla, Tim’s freshman composition teacher, used readings on the theme of nature and the environment to teach students writing skills. She did not name the multiple discourse communities represented in those readings—literary journalism, environmental ethics, and public policy, among them. So Tim equated the social context for the subject matter of his class as “freshman composition” or “Carla’s intellectual interests.” He did not realize the multiple discourse communities he was being exposed to in his writing course. And subsequently, he was not given any explicit instruction in other courses on the goals, norms for communications, and genres used by historians or by engineers—his

two fields of specialization. When he tried to apply both critical thinking and writing skills from freshman composition to history courses, he was told his writing was inappropriate but reasons were never given, and even in his senior year he could not articulate to me any of the norms for writing in history. When Tim moved into his engineering courses from history, one engineering professor did explain to Tim that he was not doing the types of analysis and writing acceptable in engineering. It wasn't until Tim's first professional job in an engineering firm, though, that he started to understand what writing and associated activities were or weren't appropriate in that discourse community.

Conveying to students discourse community issues within the context of the writing assignments in a writing course is not a part of the lore for “best practices” in composition pedagogy. Nor are students schooled in how to understand and participate in the discourse communities of other disciplines they will work within beyond writing courses. Helping students to understand and apply this concept, through the activities suggested in Appendix A or other activities, will, I hope, become a standard practice in composition pedagogy. And this should be the case no matter what the type of writing assignment. That I didn't make clear in Appendix A.

Understanding the concept of genres and how to identify features of genres is another key concept that should be emphasized. Fortunately, some rhetorics on the market now emphasize the concept of “genre” rather than the discourse modes.^{3} [\[#note3\]](#) But genres can still pose a particular dilemma in academic courses. If a student comes away from an academic writing course thinking that “academic essay” or “research paper” means the same thing no matter what discipline s/he is writing for, negative transfer of learning is likely to occur. These genres, often referred to as “school genres,” or “mutt genres” (Wardle “Mutt Genres”) are defined differently by individual instructors—and unfortunately, often tacitly. Students need to see these genres as particular to a given course—a temporary discourse community—or as “owned” by a particular disciplinary discourse community and not as universal genres used in all academic subjects.

Tim, for example, assumed that the “essay” genre his freshman composition teacher taught (a version of the literary essay) would be the same form his history teachers wanted, but that was not the case. A student who is aware of the various ways these genres vary within particular courses or particular disciplines, even if called by the same name, will have a greater likelihood of meeting the teacher's or the discourse community's expectations. And yet, I often hear my students complain that they do not get clued in on genre expectations their other teachers have. So again, teachers can facilitate writers having the ability to assess genre conventions of any writing task if they draw students' attention to the genre expectation for the tasks they are assigning, explain how to analyze the components of a genre, and how to assess the ways in which genres are situated in and fulfill purposes of particular discourse communities. Even though I included activities and a heuristic in Appendix A that would help students to understand the concept of genre, again, I did not make explicit enough the necessity of using the concept of genre, as well as the concepts of discourse community and rhetorical context, to frame every assignment so that students start to learn how to use these concepts as “mental grippers” for analyzing requirements for success in any writing situation. ^{4} [\[#note4\]](#)

Fourth consideration: the ideal types and number of genres in an academic writing classes with pragmatic aims.

I did not think through carefully enough whether the particular genres I suggested for writing assignments in Appendix A would be most efficacious for teaching core academic writing skills. Uppermost in my mind was getting students to learn the big concepts that inform all writing situations. But given my pragmatic goal of increasing students' analytic and writing skills in key academic genres as well, I see problems with the sequence of assignments I proposed in Appendix A.

The first assignment was an analysis of personal experience (the literacy autobiography). The second assignment was a genre analysis (comparing genre features of two texts that could have been from any subject area, any discourse community). And the third assignment, an ethnography of a discourse community, was again a different genre, requiring the use of a different analytic framework and addressing conventions of a different discourse community (anthropology) than either the literacy autobiography or genre analysis required.

The problem I see now with these assignments is that a) they are not used as widely in other academic disciplines as some other genres, and b) there are too many genres students need to grasp in a short period of time, so that the student has no time for repeated practice, an essential both in learning theory [{5}](#) [\[#note5\]](#) and in transfer of learning research.

Although there is a long tradition in first-year writing courses of starting with a personal essay (such as the literacy autobiography), I now realize that including this genre in an academic writing course takes away from the limited time available in a 10 or 15 week course to emphasize academic writing skills and genres. Those whose goals for freshman writing are expressivist would disagree with me (Elbow “Reflections”). I understand. But my goals for academic writing courses are different from the goals expressivists have. Personal narrative is seldom encouraged outside of freshman writing and creative nonfiction classes. Its genre conventions, purposes, and critical thinking requirements are much different than academic writing. So I no longer include any personal narrative assignment in an academic writing course. [{6}](#) [\[#note6\]](#)

The same problem of lack of applicability across a wide number of academic contexts for writing applies to the genre analysis assignment and the ethnography assignment. Literary scholars analyze genres. Anthropologists write ethnographies. These genres have their own specialized conventions and require knowledge of different analytic frameworks to understand and write about the subject matter in these fields. Both are fine genres for their particular discourse communities, but outside of studies in literature or anthropology, the likelihood of students needing to write in these genres would be rare.

What I would replace these three assignments in Appendix A with, then, would be two major assignments: a rhetorical analysis of a nonfiction text and a literature review of a body of research that seeks to address an important question as yet without a definitive answer.

Why these two genres? The rhetorical/textual analysis is a genre used most often in humanities courses. I give the assignment not because students will encounter the genre in other courses, but because the genre trains one in how to analyze any text from a rhetorical perspective. [{7}](#) [\[#note7\]](#) This genre teaches critical reading skills needed in school, personal, and public life.

The literature review, on the other hand, is used in most academic disciplines—either as a stand-alone piece or as a part of a research report or theoretical argument. A simplified version (fewer sources, but same rhetorical purpose and genre features) can be assigned even in a first-year writing course. Students can be asked to compare two sources, then add a third, etc. until they understand how to use an appropriate framework for synthesizing a number of texts and also understand the rhetorical moves that a literature review makes.

As for grounding these two writing tasks within the context of a discourse community, in part, I view the mega-community of academe as the discourse community for a writing course and convey to students some of the values that pervade academic writing of all sorts. But, as time permits, I ask students to explore how these types of critical thinking and writing tasks are appropriated in the various disciplines they are studying. I also represent to students the disciplinary discourse communities we are exploring through the readings in my course, and I guide them to think of the

course itself as a temporary discourse community of classmates and instructor exploring subject matter related to the course theme. They do have a real audience with real needs in the immediate course.

One other change I have made to curricula for writing course warrants mention. I assign fewer readings, give one fewer writing assignment, require revision on only one paper (usually at the end of the course, because of the necessity to go in depth with each new skill—reading or writing), and allow multiple opportunities for practice of these skills. In my teaching these past five years, I have learned that, in a 10-week course, or even a 15-week course, teaching even two genres barely allows enough time for repeated practice to instill sufficient genre knowledge to be useful in future contexts for writing. And both from the perspective of learning theory and transfer of learning principles, repeated practice is essential for learning to occur—and stick. Composition readers and rhetorics, though, give a sense that whatever we cover, there is so much more that could be covered (a flaw in the cookbook approach to writing texts). This is a marketing ploy and is yet one more reason applying learning theories and transfer of learning principles to writing curriculum design is essential.

In conclusion

These, then, are the additions, deletions, and corrections to Appendix A I would make, and new emphases I would now put into an academic writing curriculum to build students' critical thinking skills, rhetorical skills, and academic writing skills and to foster as much positive transfer of learning to other contexts for writing as possible. The genres I assign and the appropriate activities to scaffold those assignments are certainly not the only assignments that can foster increased academic writing skills. Others may have discovered alternative assignments that build on each other and that develop skills in analytic thinking and argument that also help students build skills they can transfer to other contexts for academic writing. What genres to assign in academic writing courses and how to frame those assignments for students in order to facilitate transfer is an important issue that warrants further discussion.

Coda

Here is a list of the steps I take in designing writing curricula. This summary may be helpful to those who want to achieve the goals I've laid out here.

Plan for development of subject matter knowledge that is focused and contextualized.

1. Choose a theme. Consider themes that can allow a diverse number of tangents students might pursue and are developmentally appropriate.
2. Consider what discourse community or discourse communities the course will be exposing students to and how to teach the features of these discourse communities.
3. Develop three or four "essential questions" to guide the intellectual exploration for the course and to eliminate the vast amount of subject matter that can't be adequately addressed within the time constraints of the length of the course.

Plan the genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge aspects of the course.

4. Based on a knowledge of the general skill level of the students who will be taking the class and their zone of proximal development, [\[8\] \[#note8\]](#) choose a set of writing projects that carefully build on each other. Consider a set of genres that are “nested” together: for example, rhetorical analyses of multiple texts for core arguments and evidence, annotated bibliography of texts that encapsulates the rhetorical analysis of each source, and a literature review building off of the annotated bibliography.

Apply sound learning theory principles.

5. Factor in repetition. Get a schedule worked out. Figure out what needs to be cut from the course to allow room for repetition and thorough learning of an appropriate number of skills, genres, etc., given students’ abilities and length of the course.
6. Provide assisted learning activities. Develop in-class activities and small homework assignments that scaffold (i.e. assist) students in learning the tasks required to complete writing projects.

Teach for Transfer

7. Build in lessons that teach the big concepts essential for transfer of writing skills: discourse community, genre, rhetorical situation, writing process knowledge.
8. Build in meta-cognitive thinking throughout the course on what is being learned and how. For example, if students’ analytic reading skills need development, I might give a journal prompt at the end of a discussion of the second text we read after I’ve now taught an analytical framework for considering how the text works: “How did you approach this text differently than you approached understanding the first text we read?”
9. Towards the end of the course, bring up the issue of transfer of learning and explicitly get students thinking about what from this course they can apply in other writing contexts.
10. Keep a teaching journal or some other method of note-taking to record what worked and didn’t work (teacher reflection for transfer of learning)
11. For the next iteration of the course, based on #10, revise #1-9 as needed!

Appendices

1. [Appendix 1: "From Research to Practice: Some Ideas for Writing Instruction" \[college-writing-beyond-appendix1.pdf\]](#) (Appendix A from *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, reprinted with permission) (PDF)

Notes

1. Unfortunately, composition textbook publishers are of the mindset that multi-subject readers are a good thing. Yes, if profit is the motive: the more topics a reader covers, the greater the opportunities for sales. But these multi-themed readers send an erroneous signal to writing

- teachers about making appropriate choices of subject matter for writing courses. ([Return to text. \[#note1-ref\]](#))
2. Wiggins offers a method for getting out of the coverage dilemma (i.e. how to adequately represent the depth and breadth of a subject in a single course). He advises teachers to focus the intellectual content of any course around a few “essential” questions that have no right answer, that are important to the field of inquiry, and will allow ongoing exploration. ([Return to text. \[#note2-ref\]](#))
 3. See, for example, Bullock and Devitt et al. ([Return to text. \[#note3-ref\]](#))
 4. Perkins and Solomon coined the term “mental grippers” for those abstracted principles which experts use from their knowledge bases to analyze and solve problems in new situations ([Return to text. \[#note4-ref\]](#))
 5. Skinner coined the term “reinforcement” to explain the need for repeated stimuli to perform a certain behavior, and reinforcement of the behavior through intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development also entails repeated practice in order for the skill to be fully learned. ([Return to text. \[#note5-ref\]](#))
 6. I do give brief, ungraded, in-class freewriting prompts that lead students to think about the connections between their life experiences and whatever topics we are pursuing. ([Return to text. \[#note6-ref\]](#))
 7. I would offer one caution, though, about this assignment. Consider carefully what type of texts to assign for rhetorical analysis. Asking students to analyze a photograph or an advertisement is not the same as analyzing a text that is only written. While a rhetorical analysis of visuals certainly increases visual literacy, it does not contribute as much to developing skills in analyzing written arguments. ([Return to text. \[#note7-ref\]](#))
 8. Zone of proximal development, a concept Vygotsky put forward, is the growing edge for students. Students are given new knowledge and skills that they are capable of handling with assistance. ([Return to text. \[#note8-ref\]](#))

Works Cited

- Bartholomae, David. “Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow.” *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 62-71. Print.
- Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.
- . “Transferring Writing Knowledge to the Workplace: Are We on Track?” *Expanding Literacies: English Teaching and the New Workplace*. Ed. Mary Sue Garay and Stephen A. Bernhardt. Albany: SUNY, 1998. 179-99. Print.
- . *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*. New York: Teachers College P, 1999. Print.
- Berlin, James A. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Print.

- Brooks, Larry W., and Donald F. Dansereau. "Transfer of Information: An Instructional Perspective." *Transfer of Learning: Contemporary Research and Applications*. Ed. Stephen M. Cormier and Joseph D. Hagman. San Diego: Academic P, 1987. 121-50. Print.
- Bullock, Richard. *Norton Field Guide to Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. Print.
- Connors, Robert J. "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse." *College Composition and Communication* 32.4 (1981): 444-55. Print.
- Cormier, Stephen M, and Joseph D. Hagman, eds. *Transfer of Learning: Contemporary Research and Applications*. San Diego: Academic Press, Inc., 1987. Print.
- Devitt, Amy, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi. *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004. Print.
- Elbow, Peter. "Being a Writer Vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 72-83. Print.
- . "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues." *College English* 53.2 (1991): 135-55. Print.
- Foertsch, Julie. "Where Cognitive Psychology Applies: How Theories About Memory and Transfer Can Influence Composition Pedagogy." *Written Communication* 12.3 (1995): 360-83. Print.
- Fulkerson, Richard. "Four Philosophies of Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 30 (1979): 343-48. Print.
- George, Diana, and John Trimbur. "Cultural Studies and Composition." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Ed. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 71-91. Print.
- Gick, Mary L., and Keith J. Holyak. "The Cognitive Basis of Knowledge Transfer." *Transfer of Learning: Contemporary Research and Applications*. Ed. Stephen M. Cormier and Joseph D. Hagman. San Diego: Academic P, 1987. 9-46. Print.
- Hatano, Giyoo, and Yoko Oura. "Commentary: Reconceptualizing School Learning: Using Insight from Expertise Research." *Educational Researcher* 32.8 (2003): 26-9. Print.
- Lovitt, Carol R., and Art Young. "Rethinking Genre in the First-Year Composition Course: Helping Student Writers Get Things Done." *Profession 1997* (1997): 113-25. Print.
- Mikulecky, Larry, Peggy Albers, and Michele Peers. *Literacy Transfer: A Review of the Literature: National Center on Adult Literacy*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1994. Print.
- Perkins, D.N. , and Gavriel Salomon. "Teaching for Transfer." *Educational Leadership* 46.1 (1989): 22-32. Print.
- Salomon, Gavriel, and Tamar Globerson. "Skill May Not Be Enough: The Role of Mindfulness in Learning and Transfer." *International Journal of Educational Research* 11 (1987): 623-37. Print.
- Skinner, B.F. *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Free Press, 1953. Print.

Smit, David W. *The End of Composition Studies*. Urbana, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004. Print.

Sternberg, Robert J., and Peter A. Frensch. "Mechanism of Transfer." *Transfer on Trial: Intelligence, Cognition, and Instruction*. Ed. Douglas K. Detterman and Robert J. Sternberg. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993. 25-38. Print.

Tate, Gary. "Empty Pedagogical Space and Silent Students." *Left Margins: Cultural Studies and Composition Pedagogy*. Ed. Karen Fitts and Alan W. France. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995. 269-73. Print.

Vygotsky, Lev S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 1978. Print.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC." *College Composition and Communication* 60.4 (2009): 2009. Print.

———. "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *Writing Program Administration Journal* 31.1-2 (2007): 67-85. Print.

Wardle, Elizabeth, and Doug Downs. "Looking into Writing-About-Writing Classrooms." *First Year Composition: Putting Theory into Practice*. Ed. Deborah Coxwell Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford. Anderson, SC: Parlor P, forthcoming. Print.

Wiggins, Grant. "Creating a Thought-Provoking Curriculum." *American Educator* 11.4 (1987): 10-17. Print.

Retrospective: COLLEGE WRITING AND BEYOND from *Composition Forum* 26 (Fall 2012)

Online at: <http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/college-writing-beyond.php>

© Copyright 2012 Anne Beaufort.

Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License](#). [</editorial-policy.php#license>]

 [\[http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum\]](http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum)