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Abstract: The study explored six ESL university students’ behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement with e-rater feedback on local issues and examined any changes in students’ engagement over two weeks. We explored behavioral engagement through the analysis of screencasts of students’ e-rater usage and writing assignments. We measured cognitive and affective engagement by analyzing students’ comments during the think-aloud protocol and reflection surveys. The findings indicated that the students had varying levels of engagement with the feedback. Behaviorally, all students used a range of revision operations to address errors based on the provided feedback. Cognitively, some students were more engaged than others. Affectively, students experienced both positive and negative reactions toward e-rater feedback. While some students’ engagement with feedback did not change over two weeks, others’ engagement grew more negative. We conclude that e-rater feedback could positively impact students’ accuracy in local aspects of writing if students are actively engaged with the feedback.

Keywords: learner engagement, second language (L2) writing, e-rater, automated writing evaluation (AWE)
Written corrective feedback (WCF) has been defined as commentary meant to increase the grammatical accuracy of student writing (Ferris, 2010). Earlier studies on the efficacy of WCF compared experimental and control groups to determine whether specific types of WCF caused higher accuracy gains among second language (L2) learners (Bitchener et al., 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sheen, 2007). However, with an increasing focus on learners as feedback users, recent research has conceptualized and operationalized what learners do after receiving WCF, or what Ellis (2010) calls engagement with feedback. Studies (e.g., Han & Hyland, 2015; Saeli & Cheng, 2021; Zhang & Hyland, 2018) suggest that learner engagement mediates the effectiveness of feedback, including teacher-generated WCF (Han & Hyland, 2015), peer WCF (Saeli & Cheng, 2021), and automated feedback (Koltovskaia, 2020; Zhang, 2020). In the present study, we focus on the feedback an automated writing evaluation (AWE) system provides and learners’ engagement with this type of feedback.

As Stevenson and Phakiti (2019) note, AWE systems were first implemented into L2 assessment contexts to address potential fallibility in human scoring procedures. Such an implementation has, however, been replete with debates on the nature of L2 learning, L2 writing development, and the efficacy of automated feedback (Stevenson, 2016). Some scholars view AWE-generated WCF as a way of alleviating teachers’ workload, giving student writers the luxury of having limitless opportunities to receive and act upon WCF while advocating learner autonomy (Stevenson & Phakiti, 2019; Woodworth & Barkaoui, 2022). Other scholars, however, perceive AWE-generated WCF as dehumanizing the L2 writing process, promoting a product-oriented approach to teaching and learning L2 writing (Vojak et al., 2011).

Regardless of the above controversies, the use of AWE systems to provide WCF on L2 writing has witnessed significant growth within the last few decades as technology has advanced (Zhang, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of AWE-generated WCF is still a hotly debated topic, and one area of concern is inaccurate
WCF and, thus, the need for teachers’ verification of WCF accuracy (Dikli & Bleyle, 2014; Stevenson & Phakiti, 2019). To this end, several studies have explored AWE systems’ potential in providing WCF on student writing: Grammarly (Koltovskaia, 2020), Pigai (Zhang, 2020), Criterion (El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010), and MY Access! (Grimes & Warschauer, 2010). These systems are more computationally geared toward providing feedback on local aspects of writing (Ranalli et al., 2017).

The existing studies have primarily explored the validity and reliability of AWE systems’ scoring (Burstein & Chodorow, 1999; Elliot, 2002), learner perceptions of the usefulness of AWE feedback (e.g., Chen & Cheng, 2008; Dikli & Bleyle, 2014), and the effectiveness of AWE feedback on the quality of student writing (e.g., Attali, 2004; Chapelle et al., 2015; El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010). Nevertheless, several shortcomings in these studies merit further investigation regarding the effects of AWE-generated WCF on student writing. In their review of AWE-generated feedback in L2 writing studies, Fu et al. (2022) conclude that compared with feedback from teachers and peers, AWE-generated WCF has led to relatively low effect sizes on the quality of student writing. In this paper, we hypothesize that this relative ineffectiveness may be partially rooted in how L2 learners engage with AWE feedback.

**Learner Engagement With AWE Feedback**

Earlier research on e-rater, an AWE platform that provides feedback on local writing-related issues, focused on the validity and reliability of its scoring within the context of high-stakes tests (Burstein & Chodorow, 1999; Powers et al., 2002). More recent studies (e.g., El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010) have explored the instructional potential of the AWE platform Criterion, which uses the e-rater engine. Some classroom-based studies have examined learners’ perceptions of Criterion feedback. Dikli and Bleyle (2014) found that ESL
students perceived Criterion feedback as helpful despite missed and misidentified errors. Some other studies reported mixed results about the effects of Criterion feedback on the quality of student writing. El Ebyary and Windeatt (2010) found that Criterion feedback improved the quality of Egyptian students’ writing. However, some students achieved better scores using the avoidance strategy, where they became aware of their flagged errors and refrained from using them in future writing. Nevertheless, the authors reported that Criterion encouraged students to revise their essays (100% resubmission rate). Likewise, Li et al. (2015) found that Criterion feedback helped ESL students revise their writing and improve grammatical accuracy.

While the above studies point to the positive effects of Criterion, others have highlighted the shortcomings in the feedback Criterion provides to students. Chapelle et al. (2015) found that ESL students disregarded nearly 50% of Criterion feedback and made limited changes to their resubmissions. The authors suggested that inaccuracies in Criterion feedback likely undermined these students’ confidence in it. Ranalli et al. (2017) reported that Criterion was not accurate enough to provide valuable formative feedback, so its feedback did not lead to successful revisions. However, the authors claimed that Criterion could be useful because even inaccurate feedback may help students notice linguistic forms. Overall, these studies show that despite positive perceptions about AWE feedback, learners might not use this feedback to revise their writing. This leads us to the questions of what students do with AWE feedback after receiving it and why they do what they do, which is collectively what Ellis (2010) refers to as learner engagement with feedback.

Focusing on feedback in L2 studies, Zhang and Hyland (2018) define learners’ engagement with feedback as “the extent [to which] students are invested or committed to their learning, embracing a complex of factors which can be seen in students’ responses to texts and their attitudes to writing and responding” (p. 91). Learner engagement
with feedback comprises three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and affective (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng & Yu, 2018). We view learner engagement with AWE feedback as a multidimensional, dynamic, continuous construct, and we think that the above three dimensions can provide a richer understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of learners’ engagement with e-rater feedback.

The available literature offers valuable insights into learners’ engagement with AWE feedback. Zhang (2017) investigated how one university student engaged with holistic scores and written comments from the Chinese AWE system Pigai. Zhang concluded that positive engagement with AWE feedback will likely improve its effectiveness. Additionally, Zhang and Hyland (2018) explored two Chinese university students’ engagement with both teacher-generated WCF and Pigai feedback. The results showed that the highly engaged student preferred AWE feedback over teacher feedback because Pigai provided immediate feedback and allowed her to resubmit her essay. However, the other student had limited engagement with AWE feedback because he was overwhelmed by the amount of feedback and felt embarrassed by his low scores. Zhang and Hyland concluded that AWE feedback is a valuable source of formative assessment because it offers frequent and process-oriented diagnostic assessment throughout the revision process. They also suggested that AWE feedback should be used as a supplement to teacher WCF. These studies provide valuable insights into how learners engage with AWE feedback behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively. However, we still do not know about the potentially dynamic nature of learners’ engagement with this type of feedback; it is currently unclear whether, why, and how learners’ engagement with AWE feedback changes over time.
The Present Study

The existing literature suggests that L2 learners may not use AWE-generated feedback in future revisions, particularly because of their negative engagement with AWE feedback. We agree with Zhang (2017) and Zhang and Hyland (2018) that careful investigation of learners’ engagement with AWE-generated feedback can provide important insights into how effectively this feedback improves learners’ accuracy in local aspects of writing. In the present study, we address several gaps in the research on engagement with AWE feedback.

Few studies have investigated learner engagement with AWE-generated feedback, although this engagement is essential to maximizing the effects of feedback (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Of the few studies on learner engagement with AWE feedback (e.g., Zhang, 2017), no previous research has examined the potential changes in this engagement over two drafts spaced out over time. As Zhang and Hyland (2018) noted, very few studies have focused on the process of writing in response to AWE-generated WCF. We believe that investigating L2 learners’ engagement (i.e., affective, behavioral, and cognitive) with AWE-generated WCF can provide novel insights into the working of this WCF in the writing process. We also concur with Qi and Lapkin (2001) and Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) that learners’ engagement with AWE-generated WCF should be examined within the classroom context to paint a clearer picture of the effects of this feedback on L2 learners’ engagement and, eventually, their L2 writing development (e.g., accuracy gains). In addition, we are unaware of any prior study of learners’ engagement with feedback on local aspects of writing generated by the Educational Testing Service’s (ETS) e-rater. Therefore, our series of naturalistic case studies addressed these gaps, and we investigated the following questions:

1. How do university ESL students engage with e-rater WCF on local aspects of writing?
2. How does the engagement of university ESL students with this WCF change over a two-week period?

Methodology

Operationalization of Variables

Drawing on previous research (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Zhang & Hyland, 2018), we operationalized learner engagement with feedback:

- Behavioral engagement: learners’ revision operations in response to AWE WCF (e.g., accepting feedback and employing revision strategies)
- Cognitive engagement: learners’ use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies when using AWE WCF
- Affective engagement: learners’ emotional reactions upon receiving AWE WCF and their overall attitudinal responses

We also operationalized WCF as commentary to increase learners’ awareness of local errors and provide corrections to these errors.

Study Content

This study took place in an L2 writing course at a US university during the fall semester in 2020. The course focused on expository composition, emphasizing technique and style in writing research papers from a genre perspective. The 16-week course met three times per week for 50-minute sessions. It included three major writing assignments: two descriptive and evaluative summaries and one research proposal. For each assignment, teachers provided feedback on global aspects of writing (e.g., content development and organization) for students’ first drafts. Once students revised their drafts based on the teacher’s feedback, they were required to upload their writing to Canvas, a virtual learning environment used at the participating university, to receive e-rater feedback integrated into Turnitin.
Our rationale behind using e-rater was twofold. First, this platform was already built into the course’s Canvas page. This means that it was freely accessible to every student enrolled in the composition classes of the participating university. Second, because of the paradigmatic differences among the available AWE systems (Fu et al., 2022), we were interested in exploring whether working with e-rater would lead to any different engagement patterns compared with the existing studies which have utilized other AWE systems.

After receiving e-rater feedback on local aspects of writing and revising their errors accordingly, students were required to submit their second drafts to their teacher for summative feedback. This procedure aligns with the process approach, where students submit multiple drafts of essays, but only the final draft is graded. The multi-draft nature of the assignments allowed us to explore learners’ engagement with e-rater WCF along with any changes in this engagement across the two-week period.

Participants

Six of 12 enrolled students in an intact class consented to participate in the study. The course instructor was a then-doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics program of the participating university. In his doctoral program, he had received training in teaching composition courses and providing feedback. At the time of data collection, the instructor had three years of experience teaching composition classes. The student participants’ profiles can be seen in Table 1. All names are pseudonyms. The students’ language proficiencies were determined based on standardized test results.
Table 1

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Aviation Management</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WCF Provided by e-rater

The plagiarism detection service Turnitin has recently incorporated e-rater to expand itself beyond detecting plagiarism to facilitating feedback (Stevenson & Phakiti, 2019). In this study, Turnitin was integrated into Canvas, which the students had access to for all three major assignments. Specifically, e-rater directly indicated an error by highlighting it and providing a code (e.g., “S/V” for subject-verb agreement), and then provided WCF (e.g., “You may need an article before this noun.”). The error categories were grammar, mechanics, usage, spelling, and style; each category had several subcategories. For example, grammar contained nine error subcategories, including S/V, fragment, run-on sentences, and proofread. Figure 1 shows the text and feedback from e-rater highlighted in purple.
Figure 1  
*e-rater Interface*

If learners seek additional information on a grammatical structure, *e-rater* contains a handbook that is accessible by clicking “View Handbook.”

Data Collection

We triangulated our data collection by utilizing students’ writing with e-rater WCF, screencasts of their writing with think-aloud protocols, and reflection surveys. This enabled us to explore the learners’ engagement with WCF and any changes in their engagement. For the students’ writing, we chose the two summaries for two reasons. First, this genre is very common in the students’ writing program. Second, the students were asked to write two summaries over two weeks, allowing us to explore any changes in their engagement with feedback within the same genre. For these summaries, the students were required to find two scholarly articles within their academic disciplines and write a descriptive and evaluative summary for each article. The average length of each summary was between 450–500 words. For the six participating students, the combined length of two summaries was as follows: Alex, 978; Ali, 721; Kim, 834; Fahad, 987; Eman, 856; and Ram, 967 words. Teachers provided no WCF on local aspects of writing, so the only official source of feedback on such aspects was e-rater. Henceforth, we refer to e-rater WCF as WCF.

After receiving e-rater feedback, the students revised their summaries. While writing their second drafts using this WCF, the participating students (N = 6) were asked to record their revision process with Zoom and do a think-aloud protocol. Before this, all 12 students had been trained to use e-rater for revision and Zoom screencasting to record their revision process; the students were also instructed to do a think-aloud protocol per the course curriculum. The course instructor devoted two lessons to training students. The two sessions took place at the computer lab in the English Department of the participating university and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Two similar tutorial videos were uploaded to Canvas for students wanting to revisit the in-person training.

The students uploaded their second drafts to Canvas for summative teacher feedback. Then, the students were asked to upload their
Zoom screencasts showing their revision process with think-aloud protocols to another Canvas folder. Immediately after revising the summaries, the students completed a reflection survey. This survey was in the form of a quiz on Canvas and included eight open-ended questions. The submission and revision of the descriptive summary and the evaluative summary involved the same process.

**Data Analysis**

We explored behavioral engagement by analyzing students’ screencasts and their summaries in three phases. Since AWE feedback can be fallible (Chapelle et al., 2015; Fu et al., 2022), which can ultimately affect learners’ engagement with it, we first determined the accuracy of the provided WCF. We utilized the same categories as e-rater to classify the flagged errors and manually labeled the WCF as accurate or inaccurate. In the second phase, we analyzed the screencasts and identified the students’ revision operations. We defined these operations as any actions in response to the WCF and identified four revision operations used by the students: Correct revision, no change, incorrect change, and correct substitution. We operationalize these operations and provide some examples from the analyzed samples of student writing:

- **Correct revision** is when the student corrected an error per accurate WCF. For example, e-rater indicated that “then” may be a confused word in this sentence: “Parents and children participated in the reading aloud program benefited and showed greater cognitive development then those who didn’t.” The student (Eman) changed “then” to “than” per this suggestion.

- **No change** occurs when the student did not use (accurate or inaccurate) WCF and rejected it. For example, e-rater noted that the word “nomophobia” is misspelled in this sentence: “The authors used 3 types of
questionnaires with a general background, which were about addiction, anxiety, and nomophobia.” The student (Kim) checked the correct spelling on the internet and left the word unchanged, thus rejecting the WCF.

- **Incorrect change** is when the student addressed an error incorrectly due to (accurate or inaccurate) WCF. For example, e-rater suggested checking subject-verb agreement here: “As they note, the study was conducted where study were the participants.” The student (Fahad) changed the verb “were” to “are”: “As they note, the study was conducted where study are the participants,” thus making an incorrect change.

- **Correct substitution** is when the student, triggered by (accurate or inaccurate) WCF, substituted the flagged error with their own correct form. For example, e-rater indicated that a student may need an article before “sleep patient” in this sentence: “However, it is recommended that the best non-pharmacological treatment for sleep patient is through exercising regularly . . .”. Instead of responding to the WCF and adding an article before “sleep patient,” the student (Ram) rewrote the flagged phrase: “However, it is recommended that the best non-pharmacological treatment for a better sleep quality is through exercising regularly . . .”.

We considered correct revision, correct substitution, and no change to inaccurately flagged errors as tokens of improvement in our learners’ summaries. We considered incorrect change and no change to accurately flagged errors as a lack of improvement in our participants’ summaries.

In the third phase, we analyzed the screencasts and identified the students’ revision strategies. We focused on any strategies aimed at
enhancing the accuracy of the drafts in response to WCF (e.g., using an online dictionary or Google to verify the accuracy of WCF). The data from the think-aloud protocols were analyzed to reaffirm any identified revision operations and strategies. Overall, these data helped us explore the students’ behavioral and cognitive engagement with WCF.

We analyzed the think-aloud protocols by downloading the screencasts from Zoom as an audio file and transcribing them. The entries from the reflection surveys were extracted from Canvas and transferred onto a Google Document. The data from these two sources helped us analyze the students’ behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement with WCF. The analysis followed three steps: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). We first took individual notes of important ideas, compared these notes to create larger thematic categories, and corroborated these categories with the think-aloud protocols and reflection surveys. These analyses helped shed light on the students’ otherwise unobservable thoughts, rationales, and attitudes. Moreover, by comparing the data from the first and second summaries, we aimed to detect and explain any changes in the students’ engagement with WCF.

**Results**

**Learner Engagement with WCF**

Table 2 presents the number of WCF instances the students received on their first drafts, but we leave out the categories with no WCF. The frequencies are for 12 summaries written by the six students.

Table 2 shows that the WCF was most frequently provided on article errors, followed by subject-verb agreement and spelling issues. We counted 46 instances of WCF on the 12 summaries.
Table 2

The WCF on the First Drafts of Both Summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Ali</th>
<th>Kim</th>
<th>Fahad</th>
<th>Eman</th>
<th>Ram</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/V</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Run-on</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence capitalization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Usage</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faulty comparison</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong article</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article error</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To explore learner engagement with WCF, we focused on the learners’ revision operations and strategies; their use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies; and their thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions while revising their first drafts. We also examined any changes in the learners’ engagement with WCF during the two-week period.
Behavioral Engagement with WCF

To examine behavioral engagement with WCF, we explored whether the learners incorporated this feedback in the second drafts of their summaries. For a total of 46 flagged errors, the learners used the following revision operations in response to both accurate and inaccurate WCF: Correct revision (24/46), no change (15/46), incorrect change (1/46), and correct substitution (6/46). All 24 errors that the learners correctly revised had been flagged accurately by e-rater. Of the 15 errors that the learners did not change, five had been flagged accurately, but 10 had not. The one error that a learner incorrectly revised in his second draft had been flagged inaccurately. Finally, four of the six errors the learners correctly substituted had been flagged accurately, but two had not. Overall, we noticed that, out of the 46 flagged errors, 33 had been flagged accurately, but 13 had been flagged inaccurately by e-rater.

Figure 3 presents the results of the learners’ behavioral engagement. We have provided two bars for each student: one for accurately flagged errors and another for inaccurately flagged errors. The two color-coded bars also include the statistics for a given learner’s revision operations in response to accurately or inaccurately flagged errors.

Figure 3 presents important results about each learner. Though we present the learners’ improvements in terms of percentages, the underlying frequencies for these percentages can be found in Figure 3. In our data analyses, we considered correct revision, no changes after receiving inaccurate WCF, and correct substitution as tokens of improvement. In contrast, we thought of no change after receiving accurate WCF and incorrect change as tokens of lack of improvement.
Below, we provide a descriptive account of the students’ revision operations.

- The first learner, Alex, correctly revised three errors based on three accurate instances of WCF but did not change one error that was accurately flagged and two errors that were inaccurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second drafts by 83%.

- Ali correctly revised five errors based on five accurate instances of WCF but did not change one error that was accurately flagged and one error that was inaccurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second drafts by 86%.

- Kim correctly revised two errors based on two accurate instances of WCF and did not change four errors that were inaccurately flagged, but incorrectly changed one error that was accurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second drafts by 86%.

- Out of six accurate instances of WCF, Fahad correctly revised two, correctly substituted one, and did not change one, but incorrectly changed one inaccurate instance, thus improving the accuracy of his second drafts by 86%.
change two. He also did not change two inaccurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 63%.

- Eman correctly revised seven errors based on seven accurate instances of WCF and correctly substituted two inaccurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of her second drafts by 100%.

- Ram correctly revised five errors based on five accurate instances of WCF and correctly substituted three errors based on three accurate instances of WCF. He did not change one inaccurately flagged error, thus improving the accuracy of his second drafts by 100%. These results show that the learners exhibited varying levels of behavioral engagement with WCF.

**Cognitive and Affective Engagement with WCF**

We examined each learner’s cognitive and affective engagement with WCF by analyzing the screencasts, think-aloud protocols, and reflection surveys. Moreover, we compared the screencasts with think-aloud protocols and reflection surveys to see whether our learners’ engagement with WCF changed between the two summary assignments in the two-week interval.

**Alex: Intuition Overriding WCF.** Alex was cognitively engaged with WCF and utilized cognitive strategies such as rereading his sentences and the WCF. The analysis of his screencasts showed that he addressed errors individually and sometimes returned to the errors he felt unsure about. However, the think-aloud protocols and reflection surveys suggested that Alex’s intuition sometimes overrode the WCF. Alex shared his uncertainties regarding using the WCF:

*Excerpt 1:* When I saw the feedback about subject/verb, I tried to think of why it could be wrong. The feedback said that the subject
and verb may not agree, but I was pretty sure it was correct. I re-
jected the feedback because I could not see any other way to say
it, and in my opinion it was correct. I think I did not really un-
derstand the feedback, because in my case I think it was wrong.
(Reflection Survey 1)

Excerpt 1 shows Alex’s uncertainty about the accuracy of WCF.
This potentially led him to use his knowledge when revising the high-
lighted errors instead of consulting other sources. According to Figure
3, Alex’s accuracy gains in his second drafts were more limited than
some of the other learners (e.g., Eman). His uncertainty about feed-
back accuracy may explain why he did not change one accurately
flagged error. Moreover, Alex’s affective engagement with WCF was
somewhat negative:

Excerpt 2: I was more confused about what could have been wrong,
which made me lose some times to think about it. However, since
it is a software, I am always careful to not correct everything it
tells me to change because sometimes it can be wrong. (Reflection
Survey 1)

Excerpt 2 includes two interesting points. First, Alex seemed con-
fused by the WCF because of the lack of explanation for his errors.
Second, Alex shared his doubts about the accuracy of the WCF be-
cause this feedback was generated by a fallible software system. These
points suggest that Alex’s affective engagement with WCF was mostly
negative and that this negative engagement might have overshadowed
his more positive cognitive and behavioral engagement with WCF.

Ali: Amenable to WCF. Ali understood most of the provided WCF
and reviewed his errors and the feedback. This suggests that his cog-
nitive engagement with WCF was quite extensive. Ali’s think-aloud
protocol shows his reasoning:
Excerpt 3: There is a title which does not need an article and e-rater makes it wrong as article error so in this part I think I will ignore that because I am right here. (Think-Aloud Protocol)

Additionally, Ali’s affective engagement was positive since he preferred to receive explicit WCF, highlighted and color-coded errors, and feedback that could improve his grammatical accuracy. Excerpt 4 shows Ali’s attitudinal response to the WCF:

Excerpt 4: I like the e-rater feedback in general because it’s like double checking your essay because all of us want to have a perfect essay and we would like to prevent mistakes as much as we can. (Reflection Survey 1)

Because of the explicit nature of the WCF and his intention to increase his accuracy in writing, Ali’s preferences and the WCF he received were well-aligned, thus making his affective engagement with WCF mostly positive.

Kim: Seeking Reassurance from Outside Sources. The screencasts showed that, cognitively, Kim was highly engaged with WCF. For instance, he verified the spelling of Morocco and nomophobia on Google. He also used a dictionary to check the highlighted errors and spelling issues. Excerpt 5 demonstrates Kim’s confusion with WCF during the think-aloud protocol:

Excerpt 5: What? This is weird! What’s wrong with “nomophobia.” I am typing it in Google (reads the definition out loud). It’s correct! (Think-Aloud Protocol)

Figure 4 provides a screenshot of the WCF Kim received.
Kim seemed to engage with WCF extensively because he felt confused about it. He also referred to the e-rater Handbook to learn about commas after accepting the feedback with some uncertainty:

**Excerpt 6:** Because my paragraph was a bit short, there were only three things mentioned from e-rater. However, two of them were weird. It said there was a wrong usage of capitalization for the sentence “the school for the students in Morocco.” Also, e-rater said I misspelled “nomophobia.” I ignored both of them since I think there were some kind of error on understanding words for e-rater. When I read feedback about the misspelled word, I did not why I need to change “medRxiv.” I think the word is not in the dictionary so it identified the misspelled word. I rejected the feedback. (Reflection Survey 1)

Our analysis of Kim’s reflection surveys showed that he shared some positive perceptions and positive affective engagement about the WCF:

**Excerpt 7:** I still wonder about the passive/active voice sometimes such as “I’m bored” or “It’s boring.” So if e-rater catches them,
including usage of comma, it would be really helpful. (Reflection Survey 1)

We should note that Kim correctly rejected four inaccurate instances of WCF that he received, probably because of his extensive cognitive engagement with WCF. Overall, Kim was satisfied with the WCF he had received and reported that he would use it again.

**Fahad: Confused About and Dismissive of WCF.** Fahad did not understand some of the WCF. For instance, he was uncertain about adding an article before his name and about removing the article before “plastic pollution.” His screencasts showed that he did not change the errors that e-rater accurately flagged, and he displayed somewhat negative cognitive engagement with the WCF. Also, Fahad drew upon his knowledge, rejected some accurate WCF, and he did not use external resources:

*Excerpt 8:* The feedback says I used an incorrect word, but I think I used the correct one based on what we learned in class. I rejected the feedback we were taught in the class about the difference between “affect” and “effect.” (Think-Aloud Protocol)

Excerpt 8 reveals that Fahad preferred his teacher’s feedback when he mentioned the accuracy of “what we learned in class.”

Fahad’s affective engagement with the WCF was negative. As shown in his reflection surveys, Fahad felt surprised about the low number of e-rater comments:

*Excerpt 9:* My overall impression of e-rater feedback is I did not like it a lot . . . I think I saw better websites on the internet that give better feedback for articles, so it will be like my second or third option if I want to get feedback. Computers and websites can not do everything perfectly. I prefer feedback from a teacher who reads and understands what I want to say or write. In addition to great feedback he/she can give you help, usually some tips and instructions to improve your weak points. (Reflection Survey 1)
Excerpt 9 includes two important points about Fahad’s negative affective engagement with the WCF. First, he did not seem to trust e-rater as a credible source of grammar-centered feedback. Secondly, Fahad was generally dismissive of “computers and websites” because the feedback generated by these sources was not helpful in his writing. Therefore, he preferred feedback from his teachers.

**Eman: Highly Motivated and Engaged with WCF.** After analyzing the screencast data, we found that Eman was cognitively engaged with WCF. She, for example, used Google to ensure the accuracy of her substitutions. Eman’s think-aloud protocol showed how she rejected the WCF and opted for a correct substitution instead:

*Excerpt 10:* It wants possessive here. I don’t think it understands me. I just need to delete an article here. (Think-Aloud Protocol)

Eman also carefully examined her sentence fragment errors and WCF. In Excerpt 11, she explained how she engaged with WCF cognitively:

*Excerpt 11:* When I saw the feedback, some error I did not understand so I search to get it. It is good, I like where to use articles. It is very helpful to see how I did at my essay and how I can correct all mistakes. (Reflection Survey 1)

Eman was also affectively engaged with WCF. In fact, she reported trusting e-rater because of the plagiarism checkers embedded in Turnitin:

*Excerpt 12:* I really like e-rater feedback because . . . it always tells you how to improve. As I said before it is really good to get feedback from professor or e-rater so then I know how to improve. I really like this feedback application/website. It helps me see if I used plagiarism (even if I did not want to) and then change my articles, or it helps me to correct small mistakes as misspelling or sentence correction. (Reflection Survey 1)
Excerpt 12 indicates that Eman preferred to receive WCF to notice her grammatical errors. Her reflection surveys also suggested that Eman positively evaluated the WCF from both her teachers and e-rater, as they helped her improve the accuracy of local aspects in her writing.

**Ram: Dependent on His Own Knowledge.** Ram was cognitively engaged with WCF, but he tended to rely on his knowledge and did not utilize any outside sources in his revision operations. His screencasts showed that Ram checked the errors and WCF several times to ensure the accuracy of his revisions. Whereas he preferred meta-feedback on his errors, e-rater only provided direct WCF, which Ram disliked. We also analyzed Ram’s reflection surveys and explored his affective engagement with WCF:

*Excerpt 13:* When I saw it [preposition error] I knew it was an easy mistake and I did not check carefully before I submit the assignment. I accepted the e-rater feedback and changed the word because it’s right. Sometimes we make mistakes in our writing without noticing and it really can help you correct them. (Reflection Survey 1)

Excerpt 13 shows that Ram was engaged with the WCF cognitively. He paid attention to his errors and the WCF, reviewed his errors, and double-checked his issues multiple times. Although his reflection surveys showed that Ram viewed WCF to draw his attention to errors, he preferred meta-feedback, which e-rater lacked. Therefore, his affective engagement with WCF was mixed.

**Changes in Learners’ Engagement with WCF**

With data collected over two summaries written two weeks apart, and the learners receiving two rounds of WCF on each of these summaries, we explored any developments in their engagement with the feedback. We first examined the changes in behavioral engagement by comparing the learners’ revision strategies in response to WCF on...
their two summaries. Table 3 presents the results for the first and second summaries:

**Table 3**  
*The WCF on the First Drafts of Both Summaries*

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*Note: S1 = Summary 1; S2 = Summary 2*

The analysis of the learners’ behavioral engagement with the WCF on the first drafts of their two summaries yielded important results. Figure 5 includes our learners’ revision operations in the first and second summaries:
We first elaborate on the learners’ engagement with WCF in their first summaries.

- As shown in Figure 5, Alex did not change one error that was accurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 0%.
- Ali correctly revised one error based on one accurate instance of WCF, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 100%.
- Kim did not change three inaccurately flagged errors.
- Fahad correctly revised one error based on one accurate instance of WCF but did not change two inaccurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 100%.
- Eman correctly revised five errors based on five accurate instances of WCF and correctly substituted two.
inaccurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of her second draft by 100%.

- Ram correctly revised two errors based on two accurate instances of WCF and correctly substituted one error based on one accurate instance of WCF. He did not change one error that was inaccurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 100%.

We now discuss our learners’ engagement with WCF provided on their second summaries. Figure 5 illustrates that Alex correctly revised three errors based on three accurate instances of WCF, but he did not change two inaccurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 100%. Ali correctly revised four errors based on four accurate instances of WCF but did not change one error that was accurately flagged and one error that was inaccurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 83%. Kim correctly revised two errors based on two accurate instances of WCF but did not change one error that was inaccurately flagged and incorrectly changed one error that was inaccurately flagged, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 75%. Fahad correctly revised one error based on one accurate instance of WCF and correctly substituted one error based on one accurate instance of WCF. However, he did not change three accurately flagged errors, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 40%. Eman correctly revised two errors based on two accurate instances of WCF, thus improving the accuracy of her second draft by 100%. Finally, Ram correctly revised three errors based on three accurate instances of WCF and correctly substituted two errors based on two accurate instances of WCF, thus improving the accuracy of his second draft by 100%.

We explored the differences in the learners’ behavioral engagement with WCF in the first and second summaries. We noticed that Kim’s engagement with WCF in the second summary showed more revision operations than in his first one. Fahad’s second draft showed
his use of more incorrect revision strategies; he seemed more confused in the second round of revisions. Although Eman received more WCF on her first draft, she used accurate revision operations in both summaries. Similarly, Ram used accurate revision operations in both summaries.

We categorized the learners based on the changes in their patterns of affective engagement with WCF in the following groups. The first group comprised the learners with positive engagement with WCF after both summaries: Ali, Kim, and Eman. For example, Ali liked feedback because it helped increase his accuracy to “make [his] writing more professional.” He also liked “different colors and underlines.” Kim was surprised because he received very few comments and sometimes felt confused; however, he later noted that he would use the system again in future writing assignments because of the plagiarism-checker feature. In addition, Eman liked the WCF on her grammatical and spelling errors. She mentioned her article errors because they were her “weak” points. Like Kim, Eman valued the plagiarism-checker feature:

**Excerpt 14:** I really like e-rater feedback because it shows me where my essay level is. If we talk about grammar or whole sentences it always tells you how to improve. (Reflection Survey 2)

The second group was composed of one learner with positive engagement with WCF after the first summary but negative after the second summary: Ram. Despite receiving only a few instances of WCF, Ram believed that the WCF drew his attention to his errors:

**Excerpt 15:** Sometimes we make mistakes in our writing without noticing and it really can help you correct them and receive a better grade. (Reflection Survey 1)

Ram, however, noted that sometimes the system did not provide good explanations for his grammatical errors. This, therefore, led him to prefer Grammarly:
Excerpt 16: I think Grammarly does a better job. Students should use [e-rater] if there are no other options to get feedback from. (Reflection Survey 2)

The third group included the learners with negative engagement with WCF after both the first and second summaries: Alex and Fahad. For example, Alex was surprised by a few flagged errors and found the WCF confusing, irrelevant, and unspecific. Although Alex thought feedback systems could be useful for improving writing, his overall opinion remained negative, thereby preferring teacher-generated WCF:

Excerpt 17: While it is useful to catch some grammatical errors that I might not have seen while proofreading, it can also lead to confusion. Many mistakes that the program points out are not relevant. Also, the feedback is too general. (Reflection Survey 2)

Like Alex, Fahad was also surprised by a few flagged errors and preferred to receive teacher WCF. To him, e-rater utilized many “unknown” words, which made it difficult for him to incorporate the WCF:

Excerpt 18: Computers and websites cannot do everything perfectly. I prefer feedback from a teacher who reads and understands what I want to say or what I want to write. In addition to great feedback he/she can give you help, usually some tips and instructions to improve your weak points. (Reflection Survey 2)

We identified some factors that shaped our participants’ affective engagement with WCF. First, the learners who maintained positive engagement throughout the study generally sought accuracy in writing, so they viewed e-rater as a platform to improve grammatical accuracy. Second, Ram’s turned-negative engagement with WCF after his second summary was partially because of the lack of meta-feedback, such as explanations about grammatical errors. In addition, the two learners who showed negative engagement with WCF felt confused and uncertain about the WCF, preferring teacher-generated WCF. Overall,
we noticed that dependence on teachers was an important factor that shaped the learners’ engagement with e-rater WCF. Another factor that influenced this negative engagement was the monologic nature of receiving WCF from e-rater. Ram, Alex, and Fahad reported feelings of confusion when working with this feedback and mentioned that they preferred having face-to-face interactions with a teacher. Therefore, we observed a strong preference for teacher-generated WCF among these learners since this source of feedback can be more dialogic than AWE-generated WCF. In other words, these learners valued verbal communication with a teacher regarding their errors.

Discussion

We investigated six ESL learners’ behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement with e-rater WCF. Our data were collected from these learners’ writing, reflection surveys, screencasts, and think-aloud protocols. Because our data were collected from two summaries written over a two-week period, we could examine whether and how the learners’ engagement with feedback changed. Here, we revisit our two research questions and discuss the results.

Question 1: Learners’ Engagement with e-rater WCF

The findings revealed that several factors played into the learners’ engagement patterns with WCF, suggesting that learner engagement is a complex construct (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Saeli & Cheng, 2021). Behaviorally, all learners engaged with WCF, used various revision operations in response to the feedback, and improved their second drafts. Specifically, the participants only behaviorally engaged with 31 of the 46 WCF instances. A closer analysis of this pattern, however, paints a different picture. Out of the 15 flagged errors not changed in the second drafts, 10 were flagged by e-rater inaccurately. This means that, although our learners’ behavioral engagement was negatively affected by the relatively high number of “no
change” instances, their cognitive engagement with WCF led them to identify the inaccurately flagged errors correctly. Our further analysis indicated that the learners exhibited several cognitive strategies when dealing with both accurate and inaccurate instances of WCF. First, we realized that the students who correctly revised their errors showed a good understanding of the WCF and their errors. At times, they utilized outside sources (e.g., Google) to verify the accuracy of the WCF. In addition, the learners who did not change the accurately flagged errors seemed to exhibit trust issues with e-rater. We discuss this in more depth when elaborating on the learners’ effective engagement with WCF. Nevertheless, the learners who did not change the inaccurately flagged errors showed clear patterns of cognitive engagement with WCF. These learners sought reassurance from outside sources (e.g., Kim) and utilized their knowledge (e.g., Alex) to verify the accuracy of the provided WCF and decide whether they needed to change the flagged errors.

The learners’ affective engagement also played into their behavioral engagement in that the learners (i.e., Fahad and Alex) who doubted the accuracy of the WCF did not extensively change the accurately flagged errors. The analysis of these learners’ reflection surveys revealed their strong preference for teacher-generated WCF. We can conclude that lower-than-expected behavioral engagement with WCF may not necessarily be a concern when working with AWE systems. On the contrary, at least in our study, somewhat limited behavioral engagement with WCF was a sign of cognitive engagement and negative affective engagement. Our results show that the learners’ engagement with automated feedback was dynamic and non-linear.

Our results partially contradict the results of previous research that points to low behavioral engagement with automated feedback (Attali, 2004; Chapelle et al., 2015; Koltovskaia, 2020). Specifically, two learners (Eman and Ram) exhibited extensive behavioral engagement, successfully improved their drafts per e-rater suggestions, and

substituted inaccurate e-rater WCF with correct revisions. However, two other learners (Alex and Fahad) doubted the accuracy of e-rater WCF. This preference for teacher feedback has been reported in the literature (e.g., Saeli & Cheng, 2021), and these teacher-dominant preferences contributed to some of our learners’ negative affective engagement with WCF. These patterns of negative affective engagement also fed into insufficient cognitive engagement with WCF. For example, Fahad’s negative affective engagement with e-rater WCF led him to dismiss several errors that had been flagged accurately, affecting his cognitive engagement with WCF.

The learners also had varying levels of cognitive engagement with WCF. While all learners noticed the highlighted errors and WCF, some did not understand the corrective intention of the WCF. Most of these learners were critical of e-rater WCF and referred to outside sources (e.g., Google) to verify its accuracy. Still, some others relied on their intuition to engage with the WCF, which did not always result in the successful use of revision operations. Affectively, the participants showed various emotional reactions to e-rater WCF. While some found this WCF useful as it helped them improve their drafts, others considered it confusing and irrelevant. An important factor that contributed to some learners’ negative affective engagement with WCF was their cognitive engagement with WCF. For instance, although Kim initially reported being confused about the WCF, he verified the WCF and used correct revision operations. This result has also been reported by Chapelle et al. (2015). The second factor was some learners’ preference for teacher-generated WCF, which led them to place less value on AWE-generated WCF.

**Question 2: Changes in Learners’ Engagement with e-rater WCF**

We noticed interesting patterns in the changes in our learners’ engagement with WCF during a two-week interval and over two summaries. For example, Eman and Ram showed positive engagement with
WCF in both summaries. We think positive perceptions about AWE systems possibly affected this positive engagement. Although Kim’s behavioral engagement with WCF was rather negative, his cognitive and affective engagement led him to reject inaccurately flagged errors. Ram was the learner whose affective engagement with WCF grew more negative after the second summary. Interestingly, he correctly substituted three accurately flagged errors, indicating his cognitive engagement with WCF, but distrusted e-rater’s confusing feedback, showing negative affective engagement with WCF.

Alex and Fahad were the learners whose affective engagement with e-rater WCF remained negative over the two summaries. Although Alex was more cognitively engaged with WCF than Fahad, Alex reported his doubts about the accuracy of e-rater WCF. Fahad, similarly, dismissed more than half of the flagged errors, which points to his strong cognitive disengagement with WCF. This lack of engagement was, at least partially, caused by his negative affective engagement with WCF. We conclude that affective engagement with e-rater WCF may have been the most critical factor in shaping our learners’ initial engagement with e-rater WCF and any changes in their engagement with WCF.

Although our data were collected during only two weeks for just two summaries, our results suggest that learners may benefit from teacher intervention and teacher-generated verification, at least when they begin using AWE feedback. This way, their negative affective engagement might turn positive over two drafts written over two weeks. This could be especially true for those students who report patterns of distrust in AWE systems as a method of receiving WCF. Overall, our results suggest that, without effective instruction on the benefits of AWE systems as beneficial providers of WCF, students with initial negative affective engagement with this type of feedback will likely remain disengaged with AWE WCF, primarily due to these trust issues. Again, our results point to the importance of teacher intervention in
such instances because, in our study, the students who showed negative affective engagement with AWE WCF were those who appeared to rely on their course instructor for “accurate” WCF. Therefore, our data point to the importance of timely intervention that is aimed at altering students’ negative (mis)perceptions about the use, effectiveness, and benefits of AWE WCF.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This study focused on ESL university students’ engagement with WCF generated by e-rater. Our results point to several factors mediating learners’ engagement with WCF. While behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement are interrelated and dynamic, we think affective engagement is the most important factor in shaping learners’ initial engagement with AWE feedback. To maximize learners’ engagement with automated feedback, teacher intervention may be necessary to change learners’ negative affective engagement. Teacher intervention can also help inform students of the inaccuracies in AWE feedback to avoid confusion about AWE feedback and to examine and respond to AWE feedback. We also noticed that not every instance of AWE feedback was accurate and should not be implemented without a critical eye. This means that teachers should emphasize the importance of critical evaluation of AWE feedback among their students. Teachers should, therefore, encourage students to use other sources to verify the accuracy of e-rater feedback. Overall, e-rater can be used as an additional source of feedback, as some students may prefer other sources of WCF. Ultimately, teacher feedback may be necessary as some students find it more authoritative (Ferris, 2006), more motivating (Woodworth & Barkaoui, 2022), and more helpful (Zhang & Hyland, 2018) than AWE feedback. We agree with Woodworth and Barkaoui (2022) that AWE-generated feedback should be combined with teacher feedback. Also, as Saeli and Cheng (2021) conclude, teacher WCF may be most effective when provided after AWE WCF,
mainly because some learners may still seek their teachers’ confirmation on the accuracy of AWE WCF.
References


Opportunities for student self-analysis and reflection are far less common in the classroom than they should be. Advances in the neuroscience of adult learning have demonstrated that reflection or similar metacognitive labor is crucial to long-term retention and integration of new material. The benefits of such reflection apply to writing instruction as well as most other areas of learning.

Renowned neuroscientist James Zull (2006) described four pillars of adult learning: gathering data, reflecting, creating, and testing. He emphasized that “educators cannot give their ideas to adult learners like birthday presents” (p. 8). Instead, he continued, teachers can give their students new experiences. But the tricky part about offering new experiences is that students are sometimes so focused on the end reward (the grade) that they rush through the assignment without pausing to savor the lessons writing instructors have carefully crafted.

Imagine if writing instructors created a tool or method for the writing classroom that helps focus each student’s mind on the experience by inviting students to slow down so they can explain, critique, and analyze their work before it is reviewed by their instructors. When the instructors respond, they can have a more fully engaged conversation about the total production of the document instead of simply...
dictating edits and corrections. This method can also preserve a record of the student’s gradually changing perception of their own writing and research.

In this article, I will explain the instrument I designed to encourage students to focus their reflection on specific learning outcomes or writing and research skills. Next, I will review the theories that contributed to this instrument’s development, examine its compatibility with other pedagogical tools, and offer advice for creating and integrating your own version. I will conclude with a consideration of benefits, advanced options, and a parting reminder of the motivation with which the instrument is best used.

The Self-Diagnostic Instrument

Some years ago, at Illinois State University (ISU), I developed a tool that I call the Genre Understanding Sheet, or GUS. The name was chosen solely because it made a nice acronym, but you can name yours as you like. The GUS is a self-reflection and assessment tool that students fill out alongside their regular written assignments. They answer a series of interconnected questions to explain to me (and, just as importantly, to themselves) how they went about performing the work of the assignment. The questions are tied to our learning outcomes and the specific skills I’m asking them to practice or transfer from past classes to new purposes.

The response process also reinforces all four of the pillars Zull (2006) described: gathering data (research in many forms); reflecting on various aspects of their work process or products; creating (which we must remember includes bricolage, mashups, and all sorts of repurposing); and testing out their knowledge. I’ve recently learned from my colleague Joyce Walker that ISU’s Writing Program still maintains the GUS as a “best practice” example for instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in the program and that descendants of the original document are

currently in use. See Appendix A for a full, annotated sample copy of the GUS from a 2016 class.

Sites of Use

I have used the GUS in dozens of classes and with hundreds of students with great success. Students often provide thoughtful responses that demonstrate how they’re revising or integrating new and old knowledge; how they test or challenge what they’ve learned; where they ran into problems and how they solved them (or didn’t); and how they chose and vetted sources. Between semesters, I would typically review the overall quality of responses I had received and adjust the questions if student responses had too frequently been unclear or lackluster. Adjustments included rewording questions, reordering them, and sometimes replacing them with (hopefully) better questions.

At ISU, I used multiple generations of the GUS in Composition as Critical Inquiry, Writing for Business and Professional Organizations, and Technical and Professional Writing I and II. At Case Western Reserve University, I have used it in Professional Communication for Engineers (rebranded as the Assignment eXplainer or AX—see Appendix B). Each class had its own set of assigned genres for students to choose from, including a healthy cross-section of academic and workplace writing types. Some questions showed up across all classes, such as asking students to talk about genre, content, and audience. Other questions would be added or swapped in to address the course materials, learning goals, or themes.

Thus, the GUS is a living and adaptive document rather than a fixed or one-size-fits-all instrument. I don’t believe that there’s a singular, perfect set of questions waiting to be discovered, so I recommend that instructors treat the construction of their own GUS as a thoughtful but flexible (and maybe even deliberately messy) experiment.
Why the GUS Works

Particularly for essay-based composition classes, writing courses can seem very teacher-focused: Make the teacher happy, and do things that the teacher deems valuable. It is unfortunate but true that many students don’t enjoy writing and only do it because teachers make them (Clarke, Best, and Picton, 2021). Those who teach English need to keep in mind that what’s enjoyable for the teacher is often a duty or drudge for students. Recent study results by the UK’s National Literacy Trust on writing among children and young people show there are only a few specific genres that were considered enjoyable for writing in their free time (none of these were essays), and, importantly, one aspect of writing that did consistently give them pleasure was receiving feedback. The GUS provides a guided opportunity for students to generate their writing responses as a subset of the total feedback to be given (along with the teacher’s). In more practical terms, it also encourages students to think more deeply about the mechanics of their writing, research, and analysis. While this may not lead to a lifelong love of writing, it at least supports a worthwhile discussion about taking control of one’s writing.

The theories and work that underpin the GUS—and the ways I use it—are somewhat diverse. To streamline the remainder of this document, I will provide a brief overview of my primary sources of inspiration.

Rationale and Citation Stacks

The ideal neurological state for learning is known as neuroplasticity, or neural plasticity, where the brain is ready to create new pathways and connections effectively. A positive and alert mental state physically readies the brain to receive and integrate new information. Teachers can’t control all of the conditions that lead to neuroplasticity; however, they can create a supportive environment and engage learners in ways that break them out of the ruts they may find themselves in,
which is valuable for classes or material, such as writing and research, that don’t easily command the students’ attention. Of critical importance here is the fact that instructors want (and students need) the transfer of skills from one writing type to others, but that frequently does not happen without direct and sustained guidance. The GUS questions can be that guidance—or at least part of it—reinforcing the transfer of skills by asking students to think deliberately about their own habits and mental processes as they research, write, and revise. (See Ambrose et al., 2010; Caine & Caine, 2006; Clore & Palmer, 2009; Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006; Salomon & Perkins, 1989; Sheckley & Bell, 2006; Taylor, 2006; P. Wolfe, 2006; Zull, 2006.)

Reflection and analysis of one’s thinking and learning processes are key activities promoted by the GUS. Kathleen Blake Yancey (2016) has long championed the role and power of reflection in the writing classroom and other writing contexts. Two of her recent books gather a host of scholars to explore and explain the ways reflective work can serve instructors and their students (Yancey, 2016; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014). Among the currents flowing through these books are the paired roles of reflection and metacognition in skills transfer (from one writing type or situation to another). *Rhetoric of Reflection* is an edited collection of scholarship on reflection in a variety of contexts and genres, including the traditional essay, social media and other digital spaces, classrooms of other disciplines, and the teacher’s process of pedagogy construction. In *Writing Across Contexts*, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) presented their “inquiry into the transfer question, an inquiry focused on the role a curriculum integrating composition content, systematic reflection, and the theory/practice relationship could play in assisting students with the transfer of writing knowledge and practice” based on direct research in their writing classes (p. 4).

A deliberate and systematic review of a course’s theoretical underpinnings in a tool such as the GUS can help students slow down
and take in the details rather than rushing from one assignment to the next. This can be especially useful if one’s writing pedagogy asks them to work in new or unfamiliar ways. From 2010 on, I’ve used a nice schmear of genre theory, writing research, and activity theory in my approach to the writing classroom. Students learn how to learn about each genre of communication they encounter, as well as how to replicate or modify that genre themselves. Genre theory researchers have “revolutionized the way we think of genre, challenging the idea that genres are simple categorizations of text types and offering instead an understanding of genre that connects kinds of texts to kinds of social actions” (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 3). The result is that genre is no longer viewed just as a classification tool for types of writing, but as a way of describing “a powerful, ideologically active, and historically changing shaper of texts, meanings, and social actions” (p. 4). This modern approach to composition has been applied across a spectrum of disciplines, languages, and ages in schools around the world (pp. 126–131). It’s a departure from the traditional essay-based approach, so it can benefit considerably from a side-narrative (in the GUS, in classroom discussions, or by other means) about how this approach changes students’ understanding of what it is to write.

The activity theory component is particularly useful in business, professional, and technical writing courses, where I regularly reinforce the fact that the student’s job in their future workplace will be a major shift from school. Instead of everyone else (teachers, teaching assistants, staff) helping the student get things done, it will soon be the student’s job to help other people get things done within a complex set of activity systems.

Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) and numerous other scholars have generated a wealth of successful outcomes across a variety of use cases. A genre and writing research approach is rooted in fertile and productive ground. I’ve found it to be a powerful and flexible toolset for teaching lifelong writing skills; it also invites direct critique of the

genre(s) being used, which essay-based composition doesn’t always allow for. The GUS can support this pedagogical approach and augment its strengths of context analysis and practical application. Your questions can invite students to think forward in time, beyond school, to envision how writing will still play a critical role in their lives. (See also Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Kain & Wardle, 2005; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Rounsaville, Goldberg, & Bawarshi, 2008; Spinuzzi & Jakobs, 2013; Wolff, 2013; Yu, 2008.)

Pairing With Other Pedagogical Tools

Most of these pedagogical tools are meant to empower the student in some way. I hope teachers will use the GUS in the same spirit. In each case below, the GUS questions and structure can be modified to elicit specific responses and to help students make particular mental connections.

Learning or Grading Contract

The GUS gives students a place to describe how they achieved the requirements of the assignment beyond the evidence provided by the work itself. If the learning contract is designed to grant students the space to occasionally stumble and recover, the GUS can help students document their efforts—successful or not—for a given assignment. This can be immensely valuable for the student, and it is useful as a prompt for discussion afterward. Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) wrote the first article I read on contract grading. There’s a growing body of scholarship on benefits and implementation methods (not always in agreement with one another) for grading or learning contracts. Medina and Walker (2018) observed that grading contracts could be useful for critically interrogating the student-teacher relationship and any or all of its attendant expectations as matters of social justice, including the grading system that is usually read-only for students: “In practice what this means is that grading contracts can
potentially serve as a site to facilitate a [social justice oriented] conversation about the values students and teachers should be held to and how we might use the teacher/student dynamic to faithfully represent these values throughout the course of a semester” (p. 48). You can capture part of these robust conversations in the GUS.

**Flipped Classrooms, Active Learning, or Sticky Learning**

The GUS should be used as a place where students can discuss their work process, their peer collaboration process, and how they engaged with course material differently than they normally would have because of the flipped nature of the class. Students can also provide real-time feedback on instructional material as they use it. (See Bentley Davies, 2021; King, 1992; Opitz & Ford, 2014, and many others.)

**Genre and Writing Research/Activity System Pedagogy**

The questions in the GUS can guide students along as they perform new and different types of genre analysis or writing research. It acts as a soft set of handrails to support students as they cross boundaries between the types of writing they’ve done in the past and the writing they’re learning to do now. This also promotes skills transfer from one writing type to another more effectively than traditional essay-focused writing typically does.

**Team Charters**

In a group project, documenting or critiquing task handling and workflow in the GUS can provide both the students and the teacher with useful insight into what’s working and what’s not in a particular team’s practices. Joanna Wolfe’s (2010) book *Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups* is an excellent resource for any class or job site that does much group work, and it includes guidance on collaboratively drafting a workable charter for the team.
Specialized Pedagogical Components

As an example, in my Intro to Technical Communication course, we talked a great deal about the act of teaching as it relates to technical and professional communication. More specifically, I assert that technical communication is a form of teaching, so examining teaching techniques can be very productive. Our study of teaching included readings, surveys on students’ past experiences as both learners and teachers, and in-class discussions. The GUS for that course included a question connecting technical communication and teaching to help me and the students gauge how well the teaching component was working for them. In that same class, I also used a technique I picked up in a Future Professors workshop (hosted by ISU’s Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology), which was the creation of a “Big Question” that encapsulated the overall theme or arc of the course. In my case, the Big Question for technical communicators was, “How do we successfully explain complex things to others?”

Key Ingredients to Make the GUS Work Well

Specific, Focused Questions

“Tell me about your writing” is too open-ended, especially for students who haven’t had to analyze themselves in this way before. Questions should generally elicit responses of 1–5 sentences or so. See Appendices A and B for a small subset of possible questions, but don’t let them constrain you! Likewise, the survey questions in Appendix D of Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak’s (2014) Writing Across Contexts are worth reviewing as you construct your own GUS. To encourage students to deeply interrogate their document or writing process, the assignment, or any other components of the class, teachers could also invite students to pose and respond to their own thought-provoking question at the end of the document.
Interconnected Questions

The instructor’s questions should guide students around and through the assignment so that they will focus on important aspects of the work to answer the GUS questions well. Too many non-sequiturs, or changing the questions too often during the semester, will make it hard for students to see how the GUS and the assignment are working as a team.

Limit the Number of Questions

This was always challenging for me; there was so much I wanted my students to think about while they were writing. I experimented with GUSs of various lengths, and the longer ones tended to wear students out. Too many questions, even if they seem fascinating, will have diminishing returns. Too few questions, and the instructor won’t get much information. In my experience, the sweet spot seems to be six to twelve questions. Some assignments won’t need this tool: short assignments, in-class exercises, or work that’s already reflective (such as surveys or a research journal) may benefit less from a GUS.

Exceptions

This past semester (Spring 2023), I introduced an optional set of four questions at the end of the AX for my engineering students. The first of these was, “How are you doing?” That’s pretty open-ended, and often students would ignore it or write something like “Fine.” Occasionally, however, students responded with details about their busy lives or stresses, and a few times, I reached out to the student or mentioned to their advisor that they could use a check-in. If a teacher is comfortable inviting their students to open up a bit, and they’re willing to follow up with them if needed, showing a bit of care and concern can make a big difference for someone who may need it. Sometimes, an open-ended question can give a student room (or permission if they think of it that way) to vent or muse or ask for help.
Integrating the GUS Into Your Coursework

Introduce the GUS at the start of the semester and use it regularly. It will not work as a one-time exercise, just like one set of arm curls won’t give you amazing biceps. Repeated opportunities will lead to improved performance for most students. The GUS is mentioned throughout my course materials for the classes that use it, and it’s always included in our digital files on Canvas or Google Drive. I usually introduce the GUS briefly on the second or third day of class, and we examine it in more detail alongside the first assignment that’s eligible for it. For best results, teachers should help students see each assignment and its GUS as a team rather than “work” and “afterthought.”

Students need to be incentivized to take on this new and unfamiliar form of work. Most students have little to no experience writing reflectively or analytically about their writing process, so they may resist at first. Incorporate the GUS into the course grade in a meaningful but not punitive way. In my courses with a learning contract, a completed GUS was required for most assignments to receive credit. The trade-off or incentive was that a thoughtful set of responses on the GUS could offset weak performance on the main assignment document and allow them to earn a good grade even when the assignment didn’t go as planned.

Students’ Response Process

Ask students to fill out the GUS as they work on the main assignment instead of leaving it until the end but accept that some of them will do it this way and some won’t. In my view, it’s preferable but not critical to fill it out alongside the main work as long as their responses are reasonably thoughtful. There’s not much one can do to change this behavior except to ask. Some students may never fully warm to the GUS, and that’s okay, too.
Be Patient

It is important not to worry about grammar or mechanics here. This is thought work, and that’s the wavelength the teacher should respond on. Many students won’t do well on their first try. Their answers will be short, shallow, hesitant, or otherwise lackluster at first. This is normal. Writing about one’s writing process can be challenging, even for experienced writers. Because this is a new genre for most students, the “essay survival” techniques they’ve built up will usually not be in play, and their responses will be more unfiltered and honest—that’s what is wanted. As the teacher, give positive feedback whenever possible, and as ideas begin to bloom, invite students to expand on the idea in their next GUS, if applicable, or bring it up in class for discussion. Most students should show substantial improvement by the middle of the semester and a surprising depth of thought (at least from some of them) by the end. If the course design allows rewrites, instructors can ask the students to respond specifically to their notes so students feel like there’s something more they can contribute to the GUS in a revision.

Benefits of the GUS

Responding to student writing can seem like guesswork as instructors try to understand the choices the students made, whether they misread, misremembered, or misunderstood the assignment, or (on the flip side) whether they’re being smarter or more insightful than their teachers are giving them credit for. The GUS makes student writing more transparent by providing a side narrative or rationale for their choices in researching, writing, organizing, or any other attributes teachers care to have them focus on. This can be immensely helpful when trying to track down the source of a student’s omissions or misperceptions about the work they’re doing, and it can be used to audit the effectiveness of the course design or the delivery of the assignment.

The four pillars of adult learning previously described by Zull (2006) can each be touched upon with a well-designed GUS: gathering data, reflecting, creating, and testing. Instructors can design questions to dive more deeply into any of these areas. Students learn best in a supportive environment, and a document like the GUS allows students to do more than just perform for the teacher—it allows them to be seen. To share their struggles. To demonstrate their efforts off-screen (or off the main assignment page) in candid ways that may be surprising.

The GUS questions can be changed before each new semester as instructors start to build up a picture of how their students respond to them. As the semester progresses, teachers may develop a larger pool of questions, including some with increasing complexity that can be added strategically (one or two is plenty). If they are particularly ambitious, instructors might even set up a tracking database to record responses to each question for later analysis.

Two topics I’m interested in but haven’t yet tested are gamification and uses for (with or against) generative artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT. Gamification involves turning classroom activities into games or competitions as a means of encouraging creative solutions and collaboration. I believe the GUS or some variant could be compatible with a gamification approach to genre and writing research, but I haven’t experimented with this yet. Likewise, ChatGPT is a tool on a lot of teachers’ minds lately (and remember that it is only a tool, no matter how impressive or dystopian the various claims about its potential might sound). Rather than issuing a blanket prohibition on its use in the writing classroom, students could be allowed to experiment with ChatGPT and document their work in the GUS. This could include questions about their process, edits they made to the generated material, strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT for different types of writing, and so on.
I’ve added one such question to the AX for the upcoming semester (see Appendix B, Section III, Question 4), so I don’t have any results to report yet. Like the “web text” question in the 2016 GUS, this question is meant to give the students room to honestly discuss any borrowing they may have done without fear of punishment for plagiarism or cheating. I mention these two topics here as a nudge to the adventurous reader to try the GUS under novel conditions and report back.

Parting Thoughts

Years ago, while working on my doctoral dissertation, which also made use of student responses and other feedback, my director relayed a conversation he’d had with another of my committee members. The other member expressed some surprise at the depth and quality of responses I was getting from my students and wondered how I did it. My director replied, “He asks them.”

As I said in the intro, instructors don’t ask students what they think about their own work or progress nearly enough. The GUS can elicit honest and thoughtful feedback from students, but it mustn’t be treated as a gimmick or busywork. As long as the students trust their teacher, they’ll most likely trust that the GUS is a meaningful part of the work. However, the deployment of the GUS should be transparent, just like the transparency instructors ask of students. It’s a request that they set aside the pantomime of “student performing for the teacher” and reveal themselves more fully as people grappling with the challenging work of learning to communicate and using the imperfect tool of language to do it.

Respect the fact that they’re not obligated to reveal themselves in this way. Every student everywhere has at least some frustrating, or even trust-breaking, experiences with teachers in their past, so it must be made very clear that this new and unfamiliar tool will never be used as a “gotcha” document as long as it’s completed in good faith.
Maintaining this trust also reinforces the idea among students that the classroom is a safe and supportive place for learning to happen.

References


improve learning and teaching. *College Composition and Communication, 61*, 244–268.


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Appendix A
Genre Understanding Sheet (GUS)

The GUS is a tool to help you actively think about what you’re learning while you work on the assignment (not just at the end). Be specific and detailed in your explanations below, and describe how you arrived at each answer. In other words, answer the follow-up question, “How do you know this?” for each item. Avoid vague, overused terms such as “professional” or “formal.” Save your answers in a separate document with your name and the assignment name.

This version of the GUS was designed for an Intro to Technical Communication class.

1. **Genre Name or Description.** Remember that many genres are hybrids without a formal name.
   
   *Note.* This is a baseline calibration to make sure students can identify what they’re working on; it is more significant for classes where multiple genres are in play.

2. **Writing Purpose.** What is the business task you’re trying to accomplish with this document?
   
   *Note.* “Business task” could be swapped out with “communication task” or something similar.

3. **Audience Needs.** Who are your primary audiences? What do your audiences want or need from this document? How will this document be used by your audiences? What kind(s) of persuasion are you using with each audience to encourage them to accept your message or to trust you as a reliable source of information?
   
   *Note.* If the sole intended audience is the teacher, as with an essay, this question could be modified to query what...
the student thinks the teacher needs in order to effectively assess the work.

4. **Content.** What is your content (the facts, figures, images, and details)? Is this genre suitable for the task you’re working on? Is it a good fit for the content you’re trying to deliver and the audience you’re trying to reach? If you’re deliberately breaking a genre’s conventions or expectations, explain why and describe the results you want to achieve.

*Note.* Even in an essay-based course, this can help reveal how students perceive the subject matter they’re working with.

5. **Research.** Describe and document (i.e., list sources) the research and other knowledge work you performed for the assignment. “I Googled it” is not sufficient—be more thorough.

   a. List and describe your **genre** research below. Copy headings and repeat for each source.
      
      i. Author(s)
      ii. Title or description
      iii. Useful because
      iv. Reliable source because
      v. Link

   b. List and describe your **content** research below (including images).

      i. Author(s)
      ii. Title or description
      iii. Useful because
      iv. Reliable source because
      v. Link
c. List and describe your **audience** research below.
   i. Author(s)
   ii. Title or description
   iii. Useful because
   iv. Reliable source because
   v. Link

*Note.* Earlier versions of the GUS didn’t include sections i–v (above), but students’ responses to their research were sometimes vague, so I decided to be more explicit. The distinctions between genre, content, and audience research may or may not be useful for your purposes. As an alternative, you could have students use the CRAAP test on their sources and summarize the results here.

6. **Trajectories.** When producing this type of document, what tools, knowledge, and other genres are usually involved? Where will it go (and how will it travel) once it leaves your hands? How does this trajectory analysis affect your design of the document?

*Note.* This is partly a question about rhetorical velocity and partly about tools used; it could be broken into multiple, separate questions.

7. **Ethics.** What ethical, legal, or cultural considerations did you take into account when working on this assignment? “None” is the wrong answer. Ethical issues are often subtle and easy to overlook (our assumptions can blind us here), but that doesn’t make the issues less important.

*Note.* This can be a challenging question for students, especially at first. It’s best to use this if your class includes a discussion about how ethics might affect both the writing process and the target audiences’ use of the
document (or any of the other infinite ways of discussing ethics).

8. **Web Text.** If you copied text from another source into your document (web text), explain what the copied text means and why it's a better choice than something you could say yourself.

   *Note.* This is a plagiarism release valve; for my classes, students would sometimes mimic material they had found on the web, so this is a way of checking that they understood their material.

9. **Teaching.** What teaching skills or activities did you use while working in this genre? Does thinking about it from a teacher’s perspective help you produce better work? Why or why not?

   *Note.* This question is specific to my Intro to Technical Communication class.

10. **The Big Question.** How did you successfully explain complex things to others? Break this question down as it relates to this particular assignment and address it as best as you can.

    *Note.* This question is specific to my Intro to Technical Communication class.

11. **Self-Analysis.** What made this genre easy or challenging for you to work with? What would you do differently next time? What discoveries did you make? How could you connect this work to writing or other activities you’ve done before, in school or elsewhere?

    *Note.* This is often a site of deep and thoughtful reflection. It could be split into multiple questions.
12. **Group Contributions.** If this was a group assignment, describe the content and research provided by each group member.

*Note.* If your groups set up robust team charters at the start of the semester, this can be used as a way for them to document the expected vs. actual performance of each member.
Appendix B

2023 Assignment eXplainer (AX) Questions Only, Professional Communication for Engineers

Part I: Basics

1. Tell me your name (first & last) and the assignment name.

Part II: Genre, Content, and Audience

1. Name or describe the genre(s) you created for this assignment.
2. What parts of the genre(s) are rigid, and what parts are more flexible? How so?
   a. Rigid: consistent and specific formatting, info, or something else is expected or required
   b. Flexible: a wider variety of formatting, info, or something else is allowed or encouraged
3. Where did your content (information) come from? Be thorough here.
4. How do you think the document(s) you created here would help someone get things done?

Part III: Writing and Research Processes

1. How did you decide to group or organize your information the way you did?
2. What information (if any) did you deliberately choose to leave out and why?
3. Describe one or two potential sources that you found, analyzed, and rejected (if you had sources for the assignment).
4. Did you use any generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to help you? If so, describe what the tool(s) produced
and how you modified it to meet the needs of the assignment.

Part IV: Skills Transfer and Integration of Learning

1. How are you making sense of our material so far, in this assignment or in general?
2. What was challenging, frustrating, or difficult about this assignment, the related readings, or class discussions? What, if anything, would you do differently next time?
3. How can you connect this assignment (any part of it) to other things you’ve learned or done?
4. How did you collaborate on this assignment? Remember that collaboration can happen on individual assignments, too, and it could include helping someone else with their assignment.

Part V: Optional Questions

1. How are you doing?
2. Is there anything you need from me that would help you understand our material better?
3. Create a question you wish I had asked here, and then write your response to that question.
4. Are you willing to let me share your anonymized responses to this AX with other students? Note: I will assume “No” unless you specifically say “Yes.”
Responding to High-Stakes Writing:
When Six Colleagues Read One Cover Letter

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Abstract: As preparation for the rhetoric and composition job market becomes more readily available through multiple sources, some cover letter writers may need clarification on the well-meaning but perhaps conflicting responses to writing given to them by mentors from differing backgrounds, statuses, and epistemes. This article seeks to illuminate the rhetorical situation behind the cover letter with simulated writing responses to a genuine cover letter by five reader archetypes: a supportive reader, a critical reader, an outside reader, a teaching-centric reader, and a research-centric reader. Through this exercise, cover letter writers are shown how to weigh writing advice through the juxtaposition of each reader’s response. Cover letter readers as a secondary audience are also considered for preparing future job market participants.

Contriving the Reading Situation
Sarah Elizabeth Snyder

The importance of the cover letter in obtaining a career cannot be understated as it is essentially a textual stand-in for the applicant’s physical presence. It is an institution’s first glimpse at a potential colleague and is often the document that can make or break an application. Because it is such a high-stakes piece of writing and is considered an occluded genre of academia (Swales, 1996), the cover letter genre is often passed down from advisor to advisee explicitly, but there are opportunities for cover letter advice in many places now due to high demand for this type of professionalization (e.g., Elder et al., 2014; Pemberton, 1993) and the high-stakes nature of the genre. For example, in 2019 the Conference on College Composition and Communication leadership opened a “mentorship initiative for graduate students” where volunteers would help with many aspects of career planning, including giving feedback on the cover letter. This initiative was wildly successful, and although it was initially capped at 20, it quickly became full and overenrolled (S. Perryman-Clark, personal communication, May 1, 2020).

In the field of rhetoric and composition, having more opportunities for cover letter feedback is undoubtedly a good thing for people in the job market; however, with more advice comes more potential for confusion.
Whose feedback should the candidate take if it conflicts with other mentors’ feedback? This is the humble beginning of this study: Joseph Janangelo (Joe), a kind, advanced scholar in rhetoric and composition, offered to help me revise my cover letter as I was finishing graduate school. When I told him that some of his advice contradicted that of my other mentors, Joe suggested that search committee members sometimes ask different things of a text. Joe then suggested that we build a conference panel around that idea, with the intent of shaping the panel content into this collaborative article for JRW.

Purpose and Method

This novel look at the genre of the academic cover letter illuminates six cover letter reader archetypes (a supportive reader, a critical reader, an outside reader, a teaching-centric reader, and a research-centric reader) and their responses to a genuine cover letter. Each archetype was chosen to represent the positionality of the typical reader on a mock academic job search committee (e.g., supportive, critical, or outside) or at a particular institution (e.g., teaching-centric at community colleges or research-centric at R-1 institutions).

Each reader was also chosen for their extensive experience on archetype-specific search committees. For example, Mark Blaauw-Hara, with his teaching and community college expertise, was asked to represent the archetype valuing teaching experience, and Staci Perryman-Clark, with her expertise in research-intensive situations and institutions, was asked to represent the archetype valuing research ability. The “outside” reader, Cris Elder, was recruited based on specialty and familiarity with another field. For the supportive (Irwin Weiser) and critical (Michael Pemberton) readers, each person was

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1 This study was first presented at the Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference in 2018, with the original readers Shirley K. Rose, Susan Miller-Cochran, Michael Pemberton, Irwin Weiser, Cristyn Elder, and Mark Blauuw-Hara.
asked to play the extreme version of the archetype from their experience (whether they identified strongly with the archetype or not). Although the authors acknowledge that this contrived nature of reading and identifying is not the most authentic representation of what happens on committees, for the sake of genre analysis, the cover letter reader archetypes serve as a mnemonic device for future writers of cover letters to use when imagining their target audiences as they draft. In our experience, this mnemonic device is also replicated commonly in mock interviews.

In this article, each reader’s response to the cover letter is paired with specific advice for cover letter writers—especially in cases where reader responses diverge. To develop these responses, we met online to clarify roles based on our experiences in mock interviews. We did not give authors instructions per se; instead, authors interpreted the roles based on their experience with the roles in actual committees. The cover letter that was read and analyzed in this study (see the Appendix) is not a final draft but rather an early version to give the readers the most opportunities for feedback. It also lacks institutional context, as the audience “University of Hope” and “Professor Jane Smith” are imaginary.

**Audience**

This study addresses a dual readership. As we explicitly address cover letter writers, we also address a parallel audience of departmental and program committee members who read cover letters to find the best candidates. The latter group may benefit from thinking even more attentively about their work, their reading practices, and how and why they make the decisions they do, choosing candidates either by selecting or screening based on evidence and explanation. We hope this essay offers ideas for better understanding the dynamics of authoring and interpreting cover letters in committee. We hope that cover letter writers will see the potential conflicts between readers and
their expectations for this occluded genre to know how to optimize the genre for the best results. We hope that committee members will use these insights to create a more humane and kind job market experience for those vying for positions worldwide. We hope faculty mentors can use these insights to help cover letter writers understand how their prose may be read and interpreted as “evidence” that they can contribute something unique and valuable to a prospective department or program. The conclusion offers ideas for further investigation into responding to such high-stakes writing.

At any point in time, many of us will be on the job market, and others might be on search committees. As our field professionalizes, metadiscoursal conversations become necessary and helpful for those who wish to enter the profession, and the job market lies before the beginning of many new chapters in life. The ones who have run the gauntlet understand the harrowing experience that this can be, and we owe it to those still in the maze to help writing instructors find work and gainful employment. Through this rhetorical and genre-based cover letter analysis, we want to make the job process more transparent, comprehensible, and, if possible, humane.

**Targeting Cover Letters by Carnegie Classification: Why WPAs on the Job Market Must Consider Institutional Classification**

Staci M. Perryman-Clark

After reading the cover letter, my initial response was to identify the Carnegie classification type for which the letter might best suit. Because earlier paragraphs in the letter describe dissertation research in relation to the applicant’s training by faculty at Arizona State University (ASU), I initially thought the letter might be targeting Carnegie institutions with high, or perhaps very high, research activity. For example, the applicant is sure to mention that she is a doctoral candidate at ASU, an institution with a very high research activity classification. The applicant also names two professors

with field recognition, thus establishing the relationship between her work, her training, and key scholars in second-language writing and writing program administration (WPA). Furthermore, the author spends quite a bit of time describing her dissertation, its methodology (both quantitative and qualitative), and how this research contributes to the subfield of second-language writing. In doing so, she seeks to demonstrate her commitment to research and her potential to continue researching second-language writing on the tenure track. In essence, leading a cover letter with a discussion of one’s research and scholarship aims to establish research potential as a scholar.

In addition to research, the letter clarifies the applicant’s interests in WPA work and directing writing programs, as mentioned in the first and second paragraphs. After summarizing her dissertation research, the applicant discusses the relationship between her research and her work as an apprentice WPA in the second-language writing program. Such a move is strategic, particularly since some institutions do not see WPA work as intellectual work or work connected to research. The move is also smart because it seeks to show readers that the candidate has tenure potential in her ability to be a productive scholar as a junior WPA by aligning her research interest with WPA work.

While strategic, I am not sure the move is sufficient to convince readers of research productivity. For instance, the applicant aims to show how she might continue her dissertation research at the prospective university; however, in doing so, she does not account for methodological differences and indicators in terms of institutional types. Because the applicant states that she is using quantitative and qualitative research methods, she must justify using two different institutions and populations of students. Are the institutions similar? If not, will she do a comparative study? If comparative, why select these two different institutions to compare? If not comparative, how else might she justify her samples from both institutions? Without these details, readers are left to wonder if there are other justifications
Besides convenience. This also raises the possibility of a missed opportunity to show that she has done her homework on the University of Hope, the prospective institution, to tell readers how she sees the connections between Hope and ASU.

As I read the letter further, I began to question whether the letter actually targets institutions with high and very high research activity. Besides the applicant’s dissertation, there is no additional discussion of other areas of research or publications. While readers will undoubtedly examine dissertation research for potential productivity, some will look to additional forms of evidence of potential. From my experience on search committees, it is increasingly common for doctoral students to have additional peer-reviewed publications in addition to dissertation work. Moreover, given that the applicant does name a couple of key scholars in the field, readers may wonder whether she has had the opportunity to publish with them.

While publications could be listed on the applicant’s CV, it would still be a good idea to mention other venues where one might find the applicant’s work (if they exist). In a competitive market, institutions with high or very high research activity will certainly be drawn to doctoral candidates with peer-reviewed publications. Without additional publications, the candidate’s interest in WPA work may not appeal to readers from institutions with high or very high research activity. Some of these institutions might only assign faculty to become WPAs after tenure so the applicant can first focus on scholarship and productivity. Other institutions might be open to junior faculty serving as WPAs; however, they might also want to see further evidence of productivity beyond the dissertation. As a result, I am not sure what to make of the candidate’s case for doing both research and WPA work as a tenure-track faculty member nor which types of institutions the candidate is targeting.

After finishing the letter, the strongest arguments the candidate makes are those related to her discussions of teaching. In fact, her

strongest arguments for doing WPA work also relate to her teaching experience. The latter paragraphs of her cover letter discuss the relationship between WPA work more strongly than those for research. This discussion shows a much stronger connection to curriculum development and programmatic building. The candidate is also sure to provide evidence of excellence in teaching through teaching evaluations and awards, therefore showing strong potential as a teacher in higher education. In contrast to the discussion of research (where the candidate spends the bulk of her time) and WPA work, the discussion of teaching identified here more clearly demonstrates the concepts and ideas transferable from the work done at ASU to the prospective institution, University of Hope.

In sum, my final reading of the cover letter suggests the candidate is best positioned for comprehensive master’s colleges/universities or bachelor’s colleges/universities where excellence in teaching might be more strongly emphasized. While these institutional types might also be interested in research potential, this potential need not demonstrate high or very high research activity. That said, the cover letter could more strongly target a teaching institution if the applicant expands and moves the discussion of teaching in relationship to WPA work toward the beginning of the letter and ends by discussing dissertation research and its potential for contributions. Of course, the applicant might still apply to high and very high activity research institutions. Still, she should also create a different cover letter template strategically designed for doing WPA work at teaching institutions, therefore casting her job prospects much wider than this particular cover letter might suggest.
Sure, but Can They Teach? Reading from a Teaching Perspective

Mark Blauuw-Hara

Most search committees seek a well-rounded candidate who can contribute to the department in many ways. However, in real life, most committee members will have certain areas that they focus on particularly hard, whether that is because they see a need in their department—a niche to be filled—or because it is what they value highly. As Michael notes in his section (see The Critical Reader), the committee’s job is to narrow down a field of dozens to three to five candidates to interview. This is when the priorities of each committee member come into focus.

In this case, my job was to value the candidate’s teaching and service experience above their scholarship. This was a relatively easy perspective for me to take since it aligns closely with my actual approach in my position as the Writing Program Coordinator at a community college. I need to be careful to note that community colleges do not disregard scholarship; however, as the TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English at the Two-Year College state, “Scholarship that directly enhances the institution’s ability to serve its students tends to be most valued” (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al., 2016, n. p.). Additionally, I am receptive to the recent calls by Jensen and Toth (2017), Griffiths (2017), Andelora (2008), and others that two-year college writing faculty should craft professional identities as teacher-scholar-activists, employing current writing studies scholarship to advocate for best practices and improved conditions for two-year college students, faculty, and institutions. For this cover letter exercise, I interpreted my teaching-focused orientation to mean that I was looking for someone with a strong teaching background and a history of scholarship and administration who would advocate for their students both within and beyond the institution. I further decided to operate from my stance as a two-year writing faculty member, since I thought that perspective

would be valuable to adopt on this team. Two-year schools serve high percentages of students, especially first-generation, working-class, and military-associated students; it is an important employment option that sometimes gets overlooked when graduate students survey the job market.

One common “red flag” for me as a real-life committee member is when an applicant leads their cover letter with a discussion of their research. When candidates spend the first page of a cover letter discussing their research agenda, I tend to set those candidates aside because I worry that their priorities will not be a good fit with a teaching-focused college. Accordingly, I was a bit put off by the positioning of the candidate’s discussion of her dissertation and her citing of specific sources, which came off as a bit “research-y.” However, this feeling was tempered by the focus of the candidate’s research, which seemed to be firmly grounded in praxis and curriculum. Two-year schools tend to have high percentages of developmental writers, so her research into the Stretch curriculum was quite applicable.

Additionally, the population of second-language (L2) writers has been consistently increasing at two-year schools (Raufman, 2019), so her research in that area also worked well. I loved the pragmatic goals she announced: “to collaborate with teachers and administrators to implement curricular and institutional initiatives that recognize and offer sustained support of the needs of diverse student populations” and to “put [her] research agenda at the service of the writing program.” I felt that these statements showed an orientation consistent with the teacher-scholar-activist stance. I also thought that one of her research findings—that writing programs need to be continually assessed and refined—showed an admirable blend of scholarship and practice. This understanding would help a writing program and mesh well with many accrediting agencies’ focus on assessment and programmatic revision.
Overall, I liked the candidate’s discussion of her administrative philosophy, experience, and goals. In particular, I appreciated her section about mentoring other teachers. I, too, believe that good teachers must continually grow, and I have found that much of that growth can (and should) occur in the context of collaborations between faculty in a program. However, I did find myself agreeing with Michael’s critiques (see The Critical Reader) at several points—notably, when he questioned her focus on graduate education and noted that she would be expected to work with a larger slice of teachers (lecturers, adjuncts, NTT faculty, etc.). Shirley K. Rose (in a presentation on this cover letter experiment at CWPA 2018) also agreed with this critique. She suggested asking the candidate how she would apply her experience to working with other faculty. As is often the case in actual search committees, the comments of some of the other committee members drew my attention to something I had glossed over in my reading, and I thought they made good points.

I thought the candidate’s teaching section was particularly strong. Specifically, I liked that she had “a nine-year record of strong teaching at universities, community colleges, literacy centers, prisons, and in English as a foreign language settings.” I loved the diversity of experience that the candidate brought to the position. Her teaching record suggested that she was committed to working with underserved populations and would not try to “flee” difficult teaching loads after she achieved tenure or seniority. I also appreciated her discussion of cultural and linguistic diversity, which was consistent with current scholarship and best practices in writing studies. (Believe it or not, many candidates still have outdated—or harmful—notions about linguistic diversity.) The candidate’s discussion of students’ rhetorical choices and cultural power suggested that she would help her students gain more conscious control over their language in liberatory ways rather than advocating for “standard” grammar. I also thought the inclusion

of her teaching award was appropriate and showed that her peers recognized her excellence.

I liked the final sections of the cover letter because they portrayed the candidate as connected with a larger society of scholars. The specific connections—the Symposium on Second Language Writing and the Council of Writing Program Administrators—were also consistent with an orientation toward teaching and working with other teachers. The candidate came off as a real leader in these sections.

In all, this cover letter was quite strong. The candidate presented strong teaching experience, and her scholarship seemed to support pedagogy. Her commitment to mentoring and leadership suggested that she held the potential to help other faculty in the department grow in productive ways. My only substantive critique would be to lead with her discussion of teaching rather than her research, but as I said above, she did a great job showing how her research supported her teaching. Were this an actual hiring committee, I would advocate strongly for the candidate to have an interview.

On the Outside Lookin’ In

Cristyn Elder

I read the attached cover letter as an outside reader, specifically a literature colleague, reading for a rhetoric and composition (rhet/comp) hire. Regarding job search committees (and tenure and promotion decisions), I have been both the outside reader for my department and a candidate whose application was read by outside readers. In the following paragraphs, I outline the general purpose for an outside reader, my response to the cover letter as an outside reader, and things to consider when writing for an audience beyond one’s field.

The Role of an Outside Reader

The role of the outside reader on a search committee is primarily influenced by the positionality within the department of the
advertised job. In other words, is this a rhet/comp hire within a department where literature folk traditionally hold most of the power (as in my department)? Or is this a rhet/comp hire within an independent rhet/comp department, and the outside reader is not just from outside the field but from outside the department? In the former instance, the outside reader is often chosen to represent the department as a whole, considering the department’s needs and not just the specific rhetoric and composition program. In the latter scenario, the outside reader may represent the college and other divisions on campus that will later determine whether the candidate will be promoted (and tenured, if applicable). The same is true in the first scenario, but the department’s needs are also considered more immediately in the first example. Of course, it is also possible that the person being hired for the advertised position will be the only faculty in the program or department with a background in rhetoric and composition. In all scenarios, the location of the job position within the department can influence how much influence the outside reader has.

The outside reader can serve as a referee when there are divisions among the rest of the committee about what the program needs, helping resolve divisions more promptly. Search committees often choose an outside reader based on their ability to give a helpful perspective and the likelihood that they will collaborate in finding the best hire for the program (as well as the department).

An Outside Reader’s Response

As an outside reader, there were several aspects I appreciated about the applicant. First, I am glad to see her interest and experience in WPA work, as I am not interested in that work and would never want to have to rotate into that position. I would hope that this hire

2 In this hypothetical role, much of what is expressed here is not an accurate reflection of how I, a rhetoric and composition scholar, feel about WPA work, nor how I would personally respond to this candidate’s strong cover letter.

ensures that. Second, I am glad to see the strength of her experience working with diverse student populations, including multilingual writers, because, as a literature scholar without this background, I find this to be difficult, challenging work. I am hoping she can help us address this student population. I also appreciate the various service work she has described, as this makes me hopeful that she will be a good departmental citizen and help with department responsibilities, including teaching the graduate student practicum.

However, there are some aspects of the cover letter that make her a weaker candidate for me, perhaps due to my need for more understanding of parts of the cover letter. To begin with, the applicant spends a lot of time discussing Stretch and developmental writing. However, I am not sure what Stretch is nor how it would relate to the job we are hiring for. (While I think I know what TESOL is, I am unsure what CWPA is.) Also, in describing her research, she writes that her methods “reveal larger phenomena with over one million institutional data points.” This seems vague and very different from the archival research and textual analysis that I do in my scholarship. It leaves me wondering whether she will be able to publish on this data or publish beyond a single article. Or is this data for a monograph (which is preferred by my field)? As she does not describe a research agenda beyond this single project or reference any publications (in print or in progress), it leaves me wondering whether she will be able to get tenure (assuming this is a research, teaching, and service position). Also, I wonder if this institution-specific research has prepared her for the job we are hiring for.

Finally, perhaps because I feel less like an authority on this candidate’s research, I may pay more attention to those things on which (I think) I am more of an expert (e.g., grammar). Therefore, I am very aware of and turned off by the number of typos in this cover letter, including extra spaces throughout the letter (i.e., some sentences are separated by one space, others by two), missing articles (e.g., in the
first paragraph “the study of . . .” and “the University of Hope”) and incorrect punctuation (e.g., a missing comma before which in the third paragraph). After all, writing is about grammar, and if this person is going to run our writing program, I am concerned about her use of correct syntax and mechanics.

A Note to Rhet/Comp Job-Seekers: Considerations when Writing for Outside Readers

It is usually unclear until you get to the interview stage who will be reading your materials, including the cover letter. But it is safe to assume that you will have at least one outside reader (if not more, based on the positionality within the department of the described job). As the above reader response reflects, an outside reader may have a different understanding of what it means to teach and respond to student (or peers’) writing. No matter the case, the following recommendations should serve one well when writing a cover letter:

- Define field-specific language (e.g., TESOL, CWPA, L2, Stretch).
- Describe your research and teaching in terms people outside your field will understand. (You will need to be able to do this at all stages of your professional career, particularly when it comes to annual reviews, promotions, etc.).
- Make explicit connections between your qualifications and the needs of the position to which you are applying (especially for a WPA position; how does your research/teaching/administrative experience transfer to the institutional context of the job position advertised?).
- Avoid parenthetical citations; they often do not mean anything to outside readers, and one runs the risk of alienating colleagues within your field if you do not cite the “right” sources.
• Stay true to yourself and your research, teaching, and administrative interests. For example, if you do not want to teach professional writing, do not market yourself as such. Remember that the search committee is not just looking for the right fit for them; you are looking for the right fit for you.

• Avoid typos.

• And know that outside readers will often defer to their rhet/comp colleagues when it comes to ultimately evaluating the fit of a candidate for a position and who ultimately makes the interview list.

Author Note: The final two readers illustrate how the “same” text can receive very different receptions.

The Critical Reader
Michael Pemberton

There’s one in every family. Two in mine, actually.

— “Zazu,” Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers, The Lion King

Most people will say that search committees are, by and large, composed of humane and supportive people who are, through no fault of their own, charged with a challenging task. They must read through dozens, sometimes hundreds, of application letters from promising scholars, all of whom are trying to convince a group of people they have never met that not only will they be great teachers, scholars, and colleagues but that they will be better teachers, scholars, and colleagues than anyone else who might be applying for the same job. The committee members must determine which applicants will likely be the best “fit” in their department, weighing each applicant’s strengths and weaknesses and winnowing the applicant pool to a small
group of likely prospects. In principle, I think that is a fair characterization. Everyone on a search committee has been a job applicant at one time or another, and they are very aware of—and sympathetic to—the stresses of the job search and the awkward rhetorical position of having to guess what might be appealing to a group of strangers in a relatively unknown departmental context.

That said, committee members are also keenly aware that they cannot hire everyone, so critical reading is the name of the game. Supportive or not, their job is to pare the pool from dozens to three or four, which means looking for something—anything—that will elevate one candidate over another. Ideally, this means reading letters generously, focusing on the positives, and looking for candidates whose application portfolios really stand out. Less ideally, one or more people will choose instead to focus on the negatives, looking for flaws, misrepresentations, questionable claims, or weaknesses that can be used to dismiss an applicant from the pool. Those weaknesses might be legitimate, or they might be grounded in personal preferences and prejudices.

My role was to be one of the skeptical readers in our search committee “family”: someone who read the letter harshly to identify places where the applicant was, for instance, overstating qualifications or presenting their qualifications in a way that was misleading to reviewers. As a part of my role, I also made it clear that I was nursing a grudge; I was annoyed that the position was open to newly minted PhDs when I felt it would be more responsible to limit the pool to candidates already eligible for tenure. It is not unheard of for search committee members to subconsciously (or consciously!) apply criteria that are not part of the formal job description, so I thought that taking

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3 Pemberton’s role was “the critical reader” in the first presentation of this project at the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Conference 2018, interplaying with Susan Miller-Cochran, “the supportive reader.”

this stance would be authentic even if the degree to which I tried to present my points might have been a bit over the top.

I started immediately with some snark about the candidate’s statement that she was “uniquely” qualified for the position, and unsurprisingly, given her role as a “supportive” reader in this conversation, Presenter 1 quickly leaped to the candidate’s defense. (Presenter 1 and I were sometimes each other’s foils in this discussion, though there were some points in the conversation when we agreed.) For the most part, my critical comments fell into one of three categories:

- pointing out places where I felt the candidate’s claims appeared inflated or misleading,
- lamenting that she did not adequately connect her scholarship or her teaching interests to University of Hope, and
- critiquing statements about her research that seemed vague and lacked important details.

Examples of criticisms in the first category were her claim that she was a WPA at the “Assistant and Associate level”—which sounded suspiciously like she was claiming faculty rank—and her statement that she had organized a professional conference. The rank issue was quickly addressed by other people on the committee. However, it is still worth remembering that faculty are not likely to be familiar with the job titles or job descriptions used at different institutions. A little explanation can go a long way toward clearing up any potential misunderstandings. Regarding conference organizing, it is also important to know that search committees might do some outside research to verify what an applicant says. For the candidate’s letter, I got on the web, looked up the conference, and found that she was one of many conference organizers, not the sole person responsible. The imprecision in language gave a misleading impression, which could work against her when deciding who remains in the pool and who gets dropped.
The second category of comments I made, which focused on the candidate’s failure to talk about the contributions she could make to University of Hope, highlights the most crucial component of an application letter. To a certain extent, these letters are expected to be somewhat generic when talking about research or teaching or service; no one has the time to write twenty or more letters that are totally different and completely individualized. Nevertheless, it is still important for candidates to tailor each section so that the letter does not read like a collection of boilerplate prose that differs only in the address it is being sent to.

If you are talking about your research, it would be prudent to discuss how your work can contribute to the department or the major. If you are talking about your teaching, it would be beneficial to link your research and experience to new courses you would like to offer or existing courses in the department that you are qualified to teach. If you are talking about service, familiarize yourself with the department’s publications, workshops, conferences, and other service opportunities, and point out places of connection.

Most importantly, if you are applying for a WPA position, learn about the first-year composition courses, the students who take those courses, and the people who teach them. The candidate claims that her research will transfer to University of Hope, but she does not do a good job of explaining how. Her statement that “graduate education would be [her] first priority” could be interpreted as a limited interest in teaching undergraduate courses or, possibly, a lack of awareness that many first-year composition (FYC) courses are taught by lecturers and adjuncts, not just graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Again, that is a possible red flag for a committee looking for a good “fit.”

Lastly, I felt the need to say something about the candidate’s discussion of her research. Admittedly, the brief space of a cover letter does not allow for much explanation or detail about what is likely to be a very complex and nuanced dissertation but being too vague or
sounding too self-promotional will not work in an applicant’s favor either. I was prompted to react to the claims, for example, that she “nourished interactions between [her] diverse colleagues” (how so?) and that her methods “reveal larger phenomena with over one million institutional data points” (such as?). It is important to remember that there is a delicate balance between saying too much and saying too little, just as there is a fine rhetorical line between adding a bit of sheen to one’s accomplishments and putting on so much polish that it distorts perception.

**Reading Enthusiastically: Reactions to a Strong Cover Letter**

Irwin Weiser

Over the years, I have read hundreds—perhaps thousands—of application letters for faculty positions. I have been on search committees for beginning, mid-career, and senior faculty and for department headships and deanships. I have read from the perspective of a future colleague; the head of a “full-service” English department with programs in rhetoric and composition, literature, creative writing, linguistics, and second language studies; and the dean of a college of liberal arts. From that last perspective, I have read letters from people applying to be department heads and from finalists for faculty positions prior to my conversations with them during their campus visits. Paraphrasing J. K. Simmons in the Farmers Insurance television commercials, “I know a thing or two (about letters of application) because I have seen a thing or two.”

I assume my reading strategy is similar to all search committee members: I am looking for “fit.” Fit, for me, begins with how well the applicant meets both the required and the preferred qualifications that most job advertisements list; it also includes other kinds of experiences and accomplishments that the candidate describes. I am looking for specifics, though I am unimpressed with letters that seem to claim too much. I want to have a sense that the applicant has tailored the

letter to our job, not that I am reading a generic letter by a person applying for every advertised position they think they may have a chance to get or they think would be a desirable job. This is not to say that I expect applicants to write entirely new letters for every position they apply for, but that I want some evidence that the applicant has read the ad, is familiar with our program, and appears genuinely interested in joining our faculty.

I have read this letter assuming that the writer does understand the University of Hope and is including details we would find relevant (though other contributors to this article may find excessive boilerplate where I find “fit.”). I will also acknowledge that I pay attention to the letterhead and professional references. Am I at all familiar with the program that the applicant is coming from? Does the applicant work with people who are known and respected in the profession? So, when I read this letter from the candidate for our position at the University of Hope, why would I be interested in bringing this person to campus as a finalist?

First, the candidate recognizes that our position is for a writing program administrator, and she provides evidence of administrative experience as an assistant and associate director of several writing programs while a graduate student. More importantly, the applicant appears to understand the intellectual work of writing program administration, having chosen a dissertation that involves program analysis and assessment. The description of the dissertation, with references to its theoretical and methodological underpinnings, gives me confidence that the applicant understands research practices, in part through judicious citations of relevant scholarship. (I will note that “judicious” and “relevant” are significant terms for me; I am wary of applicants who fill their letters with citations as if they are writing a literature review—or worse yet, trying to show readers that they know which names to drop.)

Second, I am impressed with the range of teaching experiences in diverse contexts. We learn that the applicant has taught not only in universities but also in community colleges, literacy centers, and prisons; we learn that teaching includes not only composition but also English as a foreign language (EFL), grammar and linguistics, and perhaps most importantly for a WPA, practicum courses. Because the University of Hope, like most institutions in the United States, has an increasing population of multilingual undergraduate students, I am particularly impressed with the applicant’s experience and research interests in second-language writing. I note, too, that the applicant does not simply provide a list of courses taught (we will have a CV for that) but discusses her teaching goals (“to become a teacher of teachers”) and her teaching philosophy in the sentences beginning with “As a teacher, I frame my pedagogy . . .”.

Third, the applicant provides evidence of professional engagement, both through conference presentations at TESOL and CWPA (and perhaps more that we will see on the CV) and conference organization work and participation in WPA-GO (particularly as the “innovator” of the Breakfast Buddies program and as Chair of the Digital Presence Committee for WPA-GO). This suggests that the applicant understands the importance of being professionally active and is interested in leadership. That bodes well for our program, which wants more than people who simply do their jobs, however well. We want to be recognized beyond our campus.

Despite my enthusiasm for this candidate, there are two things that concern me. First, in a letter dated October 20th, the applicant provides a specific defense date, April 3rd. If the letter included some reference to the status of the dissertation, I would be more confident that the writer would defend by that time. After the candidate’s campus visit, this, of course, could be verified by a message to the dissertation director if we were considering making an offer to the applicant. Second, while I was pleased to see that the applicant has presented at
conferences, I saw no references to published scholarship or publications in process. That would not disqualify the applicant from further consideration but might be a disadvantage if other finalists demonstrate their ability to publish their work.

Looking for Leadership

Joseph Janangelo

Rhetorician Richard Lanham (1993) argues that, in contemporary communication, attention is the scarcest commodity. Lanham characterizes attention as a limited resource that writers covet, and readers reallocate at will (Lanham, 1993). The rhetorical situation of writers trying to recruit and retain readers’ attention seems especially pertinent to cover letters, where writers strive to make compelling arguments for their candidacy. That situation has a working parallel because search committee members are reading those letters to find candidates who will strengthen their writing programs by adding diversity and value to their existing collection of colleagues.

With readers working to increase programmatic health and job candidates auditioning for roles, the job search takes on a theatrical dimension involving talent scouting and selection. In this job search, my directions are to be “a WPA reader who may scrutinize and mine the letter for writing program leadership interest, experience, disposition, philosophy, and potential.” Lacking time to discuss each of these traits, I will focus on disposition and discuss passages that catch and keep my attention.

A word about allegiances: As a reader, I try to protect the program and the people who study and work there. That also means protecting job candidates and helping them prepare for success at our program and school. It also means being on the lookout for both demonstrated and nascent leadership—evidence and intimations of the candidate’s professional development and desire to work creatively and collegially to mentor others.
On a practical note, I look for potential colleagues who could contribute to our work and (be)come happy enough to succeed and stay with us, at least for a while. For authors, this means creating cover letter content that shows themselves to be an engaged and contributory leader-in-process whom committee members would like to interview. To catch my attention, authors can also make rhetorical moves that show the transfer of experience. That involves candidates drawing links between their past work and potential contributions to our school. It also entails offering insight into the larger project of working creatively and compassionately with people to challenge and support them as they do their best work. It can also mean showing a capacity to understand why “best work” is not always possible.

**Discerning Disposition**

Disposition reveals itself in one’s perspective and attitude toward students, colleagues, and experience. Disposition is a central leadership trait involving generosity and reflection in mind and character. In *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, Kouzes and Posner (2017) advise that “leadership is a relationship” (p. 23). That makes sense. It is a relationship with current and potential colleagues, and it is a relationship with one’s past and future work.

Achievements like degree completion, publications, and grants can make candidates appear competitive. With these things in a prominent place, disposition may be seen as supplemental but desirable. Quite candidly, disposition matters most when I explain why our committee should consider interviewing candidate B when candidates A and C appear more qualified or impressive regarding WPA coursework, experience, and publications. More than compensatory, disposition can “round out” a person’s candidacy. That is where strategic and sensitive writing comes into play. Composing an effective cover letter can mean being intelligent enough to “read the room” to respond to what a

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search committee is looking for and self-aware enough to discuss one’s accomplishments without appearing selfish or narcissistic.

Here is an example of a job candidate being both intelligent and strategic. By listing her defense date, she shows when she will be untethered to her graduate work. That is a wise move because, with a tenure clock running, the dissertation is one less thing to detract from her potential work on our campus. When the candidate writes that she is “specializing in rhetoric and composition, writing program administration and assessment, and second language writing,” she lists valuable and harmonic foci to a potential program leader. That inspires me to read on.

The candidate’s description of her dissertation, which “examines the experiences of L2 writers in the Stretch Program,” shows that she has reflected on the broader relevance of her research. By defining her work as “a form of program analysis” and discussing the “need to continually assess programs as they age and their constituents change, completing one of many possible feedback loops,” she transfers her research from the program where she studied to writing programs writ large. This shows leadership and programmatic utility because her research will not be useful to her alone. Moreover, the words “continually assess” and “feedback loops” show awareness that programmatic work is in perpetual motion.

A purposeful disposition becomes apparent when the candidate shares her leadership intentions: “As WPA . . . my pragmatic goal would be to collaborate with teachers and administrators to implement curricular and institutional initiatives that recognize and offer sustained support of the needs of diverse student populations.” Turns of phrase such as “can be applied” and “collaborate” show the candidate planning to work on behalf of her colleagues while sharing the spotlight. The way the candidate discusses her contributions adds value to her leadership profile—notice how she recounts her experience: “Through three years of writing program administration (WPA)
experience at the Assistant and Associate level . . . I have contributed to the revision of the ASU Writing Programs through my research, teaching, and service.” The words “have contributed to” show the candidate working purposefully within the traditional triad. Then there is a slightly puzzling phrase, perhaps drawn from the language of the job advertisement: “I feel that I have nourished interactions between my diverse colleagues at ASU, and I look forward to doing so at University of Hope.” I applaud the candidate moving beyond her flashback to state what she wants to do at our school. However, I wonder what it means to “have nourished interactions.” Perhaps that is a topic for an online interview.

Job candidates, as asked, narrate their accomplishments. But could they do that in ways that show a taste and talent for building community and recognizing their peers’ contributions? Here is a central tension of the cover letter genre. Understandably, writers wish to project achievement and ambition, even eagerness and hunger for difficult and career-advancing work. It is also rhetorically challenging to discuss one’s contributions and achievements without over-using “I + verb” sentence constructions, which can seem narcissistic and dismissive of other peoples’ contributions. In other words, how can job candidates cultivate readers’ attention without appearing to covet it? Appreciative of the relatively high-stakes rhetorical situation of advancing one’s candidacy, the genre’s complications make sense. Yet, including multiple “I + verb” sentence constructions can yield a rather fast-paced reading experience. Consider these examples:

- “I was awarded the competitive and peer-reviewed graduate Teaching Excellence Award for my work with L2 writing students.”
- “I also created and piloted a ‘walkalong’ course . . .”
- “I have taught at local community colleges, where I work with students . . .”
“. . . I designed curricula for multilingual sections of FYC, served as an L2 resource for teachers of all writing classes, and planned and executed over ten professional development workshops, breakout sessions . . .”

“. . . I have organized one local and three international conferences . . .”

“Every year since, I have organized and assessed this event with my teams.”

Such sentences can portray a job candidate as more of a solo artist than a team leader. The last example features a telling syntactical move: It is apparent who gets first billing. In terms of creating a more generous leadership persona, my advice would be to revise the sentence to say something like, “Our team organized and assessed this event on a yearly basis.”

Still, when in the job market, it may be read as advantageous for aspiring program leaders to show some hunger for attention and enterprise. That can mean expressing one’s ambition in ways that make one appear energetic and contributory. Consider these passages where the candidate uses “I + verb” structures to show how she would add value to the workplace. Notice how the story arcs show an entrepreneurial leader who understands the difference between appearing hungry and appearing ravenous:

“I am eager to innovate new, engaging curricula.”

“I welcome the prospect of contributing to faculty and professional development and facilitating other types of service in the writing program.”

“I am also ready to teach many of these populations online.”

In these sentences, the candidate shows the rhetorical acumen of an articulate program advocate. Furthermore, presenting a link to her portfolio constitutes an effective conclusion and an evocative starting point because she makes it easy for readers to find valuable

information they could use to advocate for her candidacy. Sometimes, leaders expedite essential processes, and this potential WPA shows that she could do that for our graduate students. When the candidate writes, “From these service and leadership experiences, you will find me poised to begin mentoring graduate and undergraduate students in my first year,” she seems credible. She appears poised to explain, build, and reflect on her experience, showing the disposition of a potential program and even a campus leader.

A quick reflection: Reading cover letters can be a learning experience. It can remind me to resist the temptation of imposing my preferences and aversions about wording and exposition on a text. Many questions remain; for example, can reading cover letters be considered a micro-aggressive activity? When looking for leadership, I should also remember to look inward to recollect how daunting and dispiriting it can be to look for work, reminding myself to check my ideals and biases about perceived “leadership disposition.” If writers can be quick with their discourse, readers can be fussy and critical with their judgment.

**Conclusion: What and How We Might Learn**

Joseph Janangelo

In this article, we examine how six cover letter readers (CLRs) respond to a given text. We ask what compels CLRs’ notice, what content they amplify or minimize, and what they construe as supporting or complicating candidacy. In this conclusion, I will discuss three things: observations about the CLRs’ responses to the letter, ideas for making CLR reading more inclusive, and thoughts about how future researchers might take this experiment beyond our sample size to help our field move forward in understanding how CLRs may respond to such high-stakes writing.

I begin by noting that, in concept, the rhetorical situation can initially appear clear. Candidates are often advised to respond attentively...
to the job description and advance their candidacy by showing how they could contribute to programmatic and institutional needs. Complimentarily, CLRs are asked to read closely, carefully, and without bias. However, what seems direct in plan becomes complicated in practice: Readers appraise the same text differently by amplifying and minimizing content based on their own appreciations and aversions.

A theory called “reader response” accounts for this phenomenon. Drawn from literary analysis, this approach finds a perceptive voice in Rosenblatt’s (1938) book, *Literature as Exploration*. Explaining why readers connect (or not) with given texts, Rosenblatt states that “there is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are in reality only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works” (p. 5). Rosenblatt contends that “the novel or poem or play exists, after all, only in interactions with specific minds” (p. 5). Rosenblatt’s point is that because reading is an interpretive activity performed by individuals with multiple—and potentially conflicting—affinities and aversions, writers can neither imagine nor control how readers will perceive and respond to their texts. That logic, applied to the rhetorical context of a group of CLRs reviewing cover letters to find potential colleagues, means at least five things. Based on our sample, here are the patterns I see:

1. Reading conscientiously for the common good (finding viable/stellar candidates) involves selecting, prioritizing, amplifying, and judging textual content.
2. Reading attentively and efficiently involves assigning value to textual content and exposition to give job candidates and their texts a fair and rigorous read.
3. Reading closely and critically can take the form of believing, questioning, doubting, and researching; I also see CLRs searching for and scrutinizing “evidence.”

4. Readers value textual content that suggests that the candidate’s experience could help the writing program or department move forward in healthy and constructive ways.

5. CLRs, to a degree, look out for candidates’ potential success and happiness. Within that assessment, there is a certain confidence in play—these CLRs deeply understand their work. As readers, they know what they are looking for and have a secure handle on the genre and its expected rhetorical moves and phraseology. They also know an in/effective passage when they defend or deride it.

In studying our CLRs’ responses, I see two intertwining threads. One is that CLRs read to assess truthfulness, which speaks to the importance of perceived integrity and involves detecting and identifying reasonable and unreasonable “puffing” when readers believe they see a candidate exaggerating their achievements or contributions. That suggests that readers may hold job candidates’ self-reported strengths especially suspect. If readers think they have detected debatable or sketchy evidence, they may do some internet research. If research confirms their suspicions, CLRs may wonder if a candidate is lying; if the candidate is lying in this instance, CLRs may begin to wonder about what else the candidate is prevaricating.

Readers may also look for awareness of institutional mission and fit. CLRs may value writers who address the job description closely by showing knowledge of student demographics and demonstrating links between their talents and what the institution does and needs. Conversely, readers may become vexed when candidates seem unaware of the institutional mission or unfamiliar with the department or writing program’s students and initiatives. They may wonder if a candidate is applying to their school because of its location (the candidate wishes to stay in the state) or if they have some understanding
of what it means to work at a teaching institution or two-year college. CLRs may ask, does the candidate know who we are and what we do, or are they “just looking” for full-time work? Would this candidate come here and stay if we hired them? Would they enjoy working here with our students? These questions reveal that the classic interview question, “Why do you want to work here?” is more than a query that occurs during campus visits.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Responding to Cover Letters**

Most of all, I hope reading and responding to cover letters will be informed by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). While it is my experience that institutions often require search committees to enroll in DEI training, it is not my experience that such training involves detailed, self-reflective inquiry into what drives readers’ responses to cover letters’ content and design.

My thought is that CLR’s perceptions of a cover letter’s strengths and weaknesses may reflect what I call *tutored perception* and *textual affinity bias*. In simpler terms, I suspect that, as CLR, we are likely over-valuing—and teaching in our graduate seminars—cover letters that resemble models we have been taught (socialized) to appreciate, perhaps in graduate school, as models and exemplars of the genre. Those exemplars, very likely written and extolled as strong and effective by white scholars, tacitly celebrate and perpetuate white supremacy by further vaunting inherited whitely models of evidence, presentation, and argumentation.

As human beings and researchers, I hope CLR will reflect on how their response to cover letters is influenced by default sense and memory of ideal texts and to consider how many of those texts were white authored. Responding fairly to cover letters involves exposing the tacit ideology of white supremacy discursive practices in the cover letter genre and the unexplored biases that can fuel and drive CLR’s responses. DEI-focused inquiry could help us build on Rosenblatt’s

(1938) insights to ask how and why CLRs might read as they do. For example, we might invite CLRs to consider the mentors, models, and histories of knowing that inform their tacit textual content preferences and aversions. CLRs might inquire if the passages they deem well-crafted correspond to white discursive expository practices endorsed and celebrated by generations of white and white-deferential scholars. I foresee some positive outcomes. DEI-focused conversations about CLR response and responsiveness could inspire more self-aware reading practices that resist a whitely inheritance so omnipresent it operates invisibly. If, as readers, we endeavor to observe ourselves at work, we might gain enhanced clarity on an important professional practice’s epistemological tributaries; we can begin to recognize our professional conditioning by asking ourselves why we dislike certain content. As attentive readers, we might inquire if phrasing that seems sonorous is historically sororal with a white discursive practice that can be weaponized against candidates who do not emulate the expected structure, diction, and tone. That could give CLRs deeper insight into streams of input and historical seepage, including under-explored ideals about what represents persuasive writing and open-minded, equitable response. Another outcome might be for CLRs to study themselves reading, noticing, noting, and notetaking. That could help search committee members (SCMs) understand more about what they are looking for and question the expectations and models they may have in mind as they approach and do their work.

Planning Future Research Studies

Our experiment suggests that our field needs methodologies to understand how CLRs respond to high-stakes texts. That inspires several methodological questions: How can we learn what readers deem worthy or wasteful of their time? How best to collect data-focus groups, read-aloud protocols, or something else? How do we make DEI (inclusive of gender identification, CLR experience, and age)
integral to data collection and mining? Inviting reader reflection, I offer thoughts for building on this study or devising and designing your own unique approach:

- Expand this study to include a larger participant group.
- “Cast” several readers in each role, instead of one, to explore and express the variability of each perspective.
- Create more roles to include graduate student and non-tenure track faculty readers.
- Have CLRs do a real-time read-aloud of selected passages to get their spontaneous and “live” reactions instead of the polished summations our CLRs present here.
- Have the group of CLRs respond together to a passage, phrase, or paragraph vs. responding to the text alone.

As researchers, we might inquire into the writing that CLRs do as part of their work. By that, I mean the annotations and notes CLRs may make on or about a cover letter. With IRB approval, future researchers might also collect and examine CLRs’ textual markings (e.g., highlighted passages) and annotations to learn what they mean. Doing that could provide insights into why CLRs highlight or underline passages, what kinds of phrasing or content most prompt on- or in-text commentary, and whether, in main, readers’ annotations tend to bode well or ill for writers’ candidacy.

We might also research the possible relationships between a CLR reading a candidate’s cover letter and the companion texts, including the CV and dossier. Researchers might ask how CLRs harmonize their readings of the letter with its supporting documents—including teaching portfolios, writing samples, diversity and teaching statements, student evaluations, teaching observations, and letters of recommendation—to learn which texts and textual passages CLRs tend to prioritize and why.

Researchers might also study the impact of the reading venues where a CLR encounters a text. For example, does reading on screen or
printed copy (and CLRs’ comfort with reading in those mediums) influence their response to letter content? Does it matter if CLRs review those texts at home, at work, or elsewhere? Consider how introductory framing texts such as departmental or programmatic letterhead may influence readers’ perceptions. Consistent with Rosenblatt’s (1938) theory of reader response, it would be beneficial to clarify if/when CLRs make assumptions or supplement content because of familiarity with the program or school. We might ask if readers make surmises about letter content and candidate viability based on their perceptions and knowledge of a program or past interactions with its faculty and alumni, particularly if they ever worked at, or applied to work at, that institution. It stands to underexplored reason that when CLRs peruse letters from several candidates from the same school or program, they might inadvertently or intentionally compare each candidate’s descriptions of their teaching scholarly activities. Moreover, we might ask if CLR interest wanes when they read multiple cover letters from students in the same department or institution.

As researchers, we might try to learn about CLRs’ responsiveness to surprise: This is where genre subscription and adherence (Derrida & Ronell, 1980) come into play as CLRs approach texts with internalized models of cover letters they admire and use them as standards of judgment. What happens when the letter CLRs currently peruse stimulates recall of letters past? Are CLRs buoyed more by seeing familiar approaches or new ones? When CLRs see unexpected structural or content moves, do they tend to react with admiration for writers taking a novel approach, or do they favor candidates who make more expected moves? I wonder about CLRs’ disposition toward creative deviations from traditional templates and structures and if it is efficacious for writers to evoke a critical quizzical response or to “blend in” with the other group of cover letters awaiting reading.

We might also research how CLRs work in community with other SCMs. For example, what is the likelihood that CLRs work with a
sense that their colleagues will review and judge their response? I call this “peer presence” because, while CLRs may respond alone, they may believe they must explain and even justify their reading in search committee meetings. Permit me to evoke Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938) description of reading’s embedded aspect:

It is a mistake to speak of the experience of a book or a play or a poem, without reference to the context of that experience in the mind of the reader. He comes to the book from life. He turns from a moment from his direct concern with the various problems and satisfactions of his own life. He will resume his concern with them when the book is closed. There is every reason to believe that even when he is reading the book, these things are present as probably the most important guiding factors in his experience of it. (pp. 42–43)

Given the endless permutations of reader responses, Rosenblatt argues that there is no one static text. Nevertheless, in search committee practice, there is a text (a particular cover letter) for all interested parties to read, rank, and debate. Given that reality, potential research questions include: Do CLRs fear being judged as readers? For example, there may be letters CLRs admire for which they would feel compromised to advocate. Do CLRs praise or critique a letter because they think other, more influential SCMs will?

Those dynamics speak to precarity and vulnerability, some of which include race (Martinez, 2020), LGBTQI+, gender, age, and job security. Other variables include CLR experience, whether it is one’s first time serving on a search committee with those SCMs, or if one holds seasoned status. I wonder about the differences between responses CLRs offer solo and in committee meetings. If there are appraisals, CLRs may feel the need to prove that they are fulfilling their commitment as SCMs and discerning readers. That relates to CLRs making decisions because they feel they have something to dis/prove.

about themselves as readers to their fellow SCMs. CLRs may fear appearing remiss if they do not find content to criticize, as if they are not doing their job. Thinking especially of DEI, I wonder if CLRs harbor regrets over texts they wish they dared to defend even after a particular search is over. Because search committees necessitate collegiality and teamwork, researching these questions could help us explore the task of cover letter response in some of its asymmetrical, relational complexity.

On a parallel note, we might try to understand CLRs’ work as fulfilling one’s *collegial commitments* by supporting the shared project of finding new colleagues. If we pursue that thought, we might try to learn how CLRs approach the task itself. That would involve gaining insight into sensibilities that inform how CLRs configure their task of responding for the common good. Such research could help us articulate notions of integrity, equity, discernment, and duty. By gaining clarity on the allegiances and aversions that fuel responding to such high-stakes writing, we might learn more about how colleagues endeavor to read critically and conscientiously for the “good” of all people, programs, and departments concerned.

That thought begs the question: How receptive to unfamiliar or resistant texts do CLRs wish to become? Currently, CL authors must meet, and even play to, readers’ expectations. I hope that dynamic does not remain so entirely in place. We need new endgames to understand the work of reading and responding to cover letters. Instead of offering tips for writers, per the usual focus when discussing and teaching the genre, we might learn how to do better as readers, perhaps by worrying less about enacting due diligence and more about gaining self-insight. By that, I mean it would be good to have more self-aware CLRs on the job, looking out for their own biases, asking questions about why they are impressed or bothered by certain features, and being sensitive to the idea that their sense of evidence and

eloquence likely emanates, at least in part, from tutored perception and white-privileging academic socialization.

Attending responsibly to the work’s DEI components, we could research how CLRs respond to cover letters beyond tenure-track job searches. We could consider CLRs’ response in adjunct, one-year, renewable, and permanent non-tenure-track searches. Researching CLRs’ responses in those arenas could bring insight into the tests to which cover letter writers—and their readers—are put. That research could also show that, when it comes to responding to cover letters, the stakes are high all around. That makes the evolving project of studying the response to cover letters valuable and worthy of our ongoing research.

Acknowledgements

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References


Appendix

Early Cover Letter Draft (Analyzed by Readers)

October 20, 2017
Professor Jane Smith
University of Hope
Department of Language and Literature
Hope, State 10000

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing this letter in application for the position of Assistant Professor of English and Writing Program Administrator at University of Hope. I will defend my PhD in English from Arizona State University (ASU) on April 3, 2018. I work under the direction of Professors Paul Kei Matsuda & Shirley K. Rose, specializing in rhetoric and composition, writing program administration and assessment, and second language writing.

There are many qualities that make me uniquely qualified for this position. Through three years of writing program administration (WPA) experience at the Assistant and Associate level at ASU, I have contributed to the revision of the ASU Writing Programs through my research, teaching, and service. I have presented on writing and writing program assessment at multiple national conferences (e.g., TESOL and CWPA). As my academic background includes study of creative, technical, academic, and professional writing, in addition to rhetoric and composition, I feel that I have nourished interactions between my diverse colleagues at ASU, and I look forward to doing so at University of Hope.

My dissertation, *The Stretch Model: Including L2 Student Voices*, examines the experiences of L2 writers in the Stretch Program, a developmental writing program. As a form of program analysis, my research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods which reveal larger phenomena with over one million institutional data points, and qualitatively investigates these phenomena through survey and interview techniques. With the assistance of generous grant funding, I have been able to examine L2 students’ perceptions of the Stretch Program and compare them to the theorized needs of L2 students through composition theory, complicating some intentions of the Stretch Program for L2 writers. My findings indicate a need to continually assess programs as they age and their constituents change, completing one of many possible feedback loops. This project provides a sense of the effects that assumptions about student language background (and other factors) can have on student experience and trajectory in first-year composition and developmental composition. It also emphasizes the need for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research in program assessment, (e.g., Haswell, 2005; Miller, 2014; White, Elliot & Peckham, 2015). The skills that I have cultivated through this dissertation can be applied to University of Hope’s Writing Program. As WPA and Professor of English, my research trajectory would complement my position, as my pragmatic goal would be to collaborate with teachers and administrators to implement curricular and institutional initiatives that recognize and offer sustained support of the needs of diverse student populations.

My research agenda would support this work. I will continue my program evaluation research by first finishing the update on the
Stretch Program. This includes analyzing basic writer data (which I have already collected), and publishing a full evaluation of the Stretch Program at its 20-year mark, including analysis and comparisons of multiple student groups. Multiple kernels of theoretical research concerning program design and assessment are growing from my dissertation, and it is likely that they will converge on the concept of writing and language support programs throughout students’ university careers. Continuing this research facilitates the important work teachers and administrators do, recognizing the ways they are materially situated and intertwined within their local contexts and the opportunities that exist to do meaningful work with each other, with the students in their classes, and for the larger institutional culture. I look forward to putting my research agenda at the service of the Writing Program.

My work as a program administrator and L2 writing specialist will be symbiotic to my engagement in the Writing Program through excellent and inclusive teaching. First and foremost, I pursued my PhD to become a teacher of teachers, and as Writing Program Administrator, graduate education would be my first priority. Having co-taught the practicum for second language writing and undergraduate/graduate writing, I am familiar with the struggles that tutors and teachers experience when in real-life situations with students—especially L2 and basic writers who presumably have the most to gain from the writing program. I have an excellent record of teaching, consistently earning the highest evaluation scores (a “1”) at ASU. I also have a nine-year record of strong teaching at universities, community colleges, literacy centers, prisons, and in English as a foreign language settings. My teaching repertoire has breadth and depth: from written communication and rhetoric/composition to writing about literature, reading

and English as a second language, and pedagogical grammar and linguistics. As a teacher, I frame my pedagogy around the diverse linguistic, educational, and cultural backgrounds of my students. I enjoy contributing to their academic success by creating learning environments where differences in cultures are valued and nurtured. I concentrate on inclusive pedagogical techniques that give students the confidence to take control of their learning. My students learn that the linguistic and rhetorical choices they make are applicable to everyday life—not only in communicating with classmates within their writing course, but also across disciplines and in their communities. At ASU, I was awarded the competitive and peer-reviewed graduate Teaching Excellence Award for my work with L2 writing students. I am eager to innovate new, engaging curricula. Such work included developing and teaching a graduate-level academic writing course for international students. This challenged students to work with classmates in interdepartmental and interdisciplinary contexts and engaged advanced language learning students with the concepts of genre and composition theory. I also created and piloted a “walkalong” course for multilingual freshmen that included study skills and language instruction to complement the Stretch first-year course that they were enrolled in. In addition to my teaching at ASU, I have taught at local community colleges, where I work with students (most of whom are first-generation, developmental, and/or multilingual writers) in pre-matriculation writing and first-year composition courses. I also am ready to teach many of these populations online. My teaching embraces the linguistic diversity of all learners, drawing upon their first language backgrounds, intercultural rhetorics, global/transnational literacies, and life experiences to create transformative educational experiences.
I welcome the prospect of contributing to faculty and professional development, and facilitating other types of service in the writing program. For example, as the Associate Director of Second Language Writing at ASU, I designed curricula for multilingual sections of FYC, served as an L2 resource for teachers of all writing classes, and planned and executed over ten professional development workshops, breakout sessions, and programmatic initiatives aimed at supporting writing teachers’ experiences with multilingual students. In service to national academic organizations, I have organized one local and three international conferences (the Symposium on Second Language Writing 2014, 2016; and the American Association of Applied Linguistics Conference 2015). In 2012, I innovated the Breakfast Buddies Mentoring Program for the Writing Program Administrators Graduate Organization (WPA-GO), a national organization that supports graduate student WPA preparation and strengthens connections between pre- and in-service WPAs, at the Conference of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). Every year since, I have organized and assessed this event with my teams. The Breakfast Buddies Program has enrolled over 300 mentors and mentees to date. In 2015, the program expanded to the Conference on College Communication and Composition and enrolled over 130 mentors and mentees from across the nation. I am currently serving as the Chair of the Digital Presence Committee on the WPA-GO, which is tasked with creating a new website for the organization. From these service and leadership experiences, you will find me poised to begin mentoring graduate and undergraduate students in my first year.

Thank you for considering my application. Please find the following documents in my interfolio dossier: *curriculum vitae*, unofficial transcripts, and contact information for my references. At your
request, I would be happy to send my full teaching portfolio, statements of teaching and administrative philosophies, research agenda, and additional documents. You are also welcome to peruse my Professional ePortfolio: http://tinyurl.com/SnyderPortfolio. I will be attending CCCC in 2018 and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you there, or elsewhere at your convenience. I can be reached at (555) 867-5309 or at sesnyder@asu.edu.

Sincerely,

Sarah Elizabeth Snyder, PhD Candidate
Serving the whole student is a goal of many writing programs and writing centers, an ethos that ideally works in tandem with inclusive pedagogies. As Sommers (1993) stated, “writing is a radical loss of certainty,” and writing teachers are positioned to help students develop certainty in their writing—not just in academia, but for life. However, it may be a challenge for instructors to offer additional strategies, such as responsive reflection, that could build that certainty for developing writers.

To reflect upon and shift pedagogy, writing instructors and writing centers often rely on external motivators such as administrative decisions or evaluative feedback. However, using in-class writerly identity reflections in tandem with inclusive pedagogies, such as Labor or Engagement-Based Grading Contracts (L/EBGC), may offer a pathway to responsive reflection opportunities that center students as writers for life (Carillo, 2021; Inoue, 2019). Responsive writerly identity reflection also assists in the transfer of students’ writing knowledge across personal and academic contexts (Rothschild, 2020; Williamson, 2019) and can shift students’ writerly identities in positive ways (Rothschild, 2020).

Writerly Identity Reflections offers students a pathway to responsively reflect on their writerly identity; likewise, it offers instructors a path to...
respond to student reflections with pedagogical shifts. When students have the opportunity to respond to their own writing without instructor feedback, it encourages honest reflection and emboldens students to identify as lifelong writers. This honesty can be just as valuable to instructors.

**Context**

Writerly Identity Reflections were designed for a first-year writing context but are transferable to other writing courses or writing center tutor training. They may also be used for personal reflection.

**Learning Goals**

- Students will reflect on the influences on their writerly identity.
- Students will acclimatize to low-stakes reflection.
- Students will reflect on writing across contexts.

**Course Format**

This assignment was tested online and in person. It is suitable for both.

**Teacher Preparation**

First, consider your student population to modify the assignment (Appendix A). This version is guided by a modification of Gee’s (2001) educational identity threads (p. 101) and discusses natural, dialogic, institutional, and self-sponsored writerly identities. If your population is primarily returning learners, you might add a workplace writerly identity question.

Second, plan two low-stakes reflections—one near the start of the course and one near the end of the course. Prepare daily reflective prompts (Appendix B) and set aside time to reflect and respond to content at the end of the course.

**Estimated Time**

This assignment will take students 2–4 hours outside of class and five minutes per class meeting.

Procedure

Two concepts guide these connected reflective prompts and daily writings. First, these activities are low stakes. Second, they are consistent. Cohn and Stewart (2016) argue for metacognitive work, such as their reflective letter, to be low stakes for the strongest student buy-in. As such, written reflections might be assessed with an LBGC or an EBGC (Carillo, 2021). As consistent reflection has been linked to constructive reflection (Yancey et al., 2014), making regular time to reflect may be integral to effectiveness.

A consideration of these reflections is time. To respect students’ time, scaffold daily low-stakes or no-stakes reflective writing. To respect teachers’ time, I suggest something radical: do not grade daily writing. Further, to create an environment of inclusive learning that serves students’ writerly identity, allow students to respond to their reflections without your feedback. At the end of the term once all work is turned in, assess the reflections using an EBGC and make notes on the impact of the course’s pedagogy.

The rationale for this approach is threefold:
1. It allows students to have autonomy over their writing.
2. It allows teachers to avoid overflowing their already packed response and grading schedules.
3. It allows instructors to respond to writerly identity growth over the whole term.

Procedural Steps

1. Create a full or modified LBGC or EBGC. If this is a new process for you, refer to O’Meara, 2022.
2. Introduce the concept of writerly identity and in-class daily low- or no-stakes writing (Appendix B includes daily prompts that can be modified).
3. Consistently engage the class in daily reflection. Using the start of class allows late students to enter with less
disruption. Playing study music during daily writing can bring consistency and a calm transition into coursework.

4. To introduce the Writerly Identity Reflections (Appendix A), take ten minutes of class for discussion. Emphasize that daily writings will be utilized to scaffold and that they are low- or no-stakes. If you do not plan to read reflections until the end of the term, emphasize autonomy.

5. Give credit for the first reflection, even if you choose to wait to read them.

6. At the end of the term, assign the second reflection, emphasizing the responsiveness of the reflection. While the first reflection asks about the students’ writerly identity upon entrance to the class, the second asks students to respond to their first reflection and to the class's impact on students’ writerly identity.

7. Post-course, review the submissions side by side. What did your course engender for students? Student reflections may reveal which course activities developed students’ writerly identities.

8. Respond to the reflections by noting assignments or activities that developed students’ writerly identities and what inspired less, or negative, writerly-identity development. Adjust pedagogies accordingly.

Caveats and Alternatives

The amount of time scheduled for daily writing and assignment discussion is highly flexible. There are options to limit time consumed: assigning reflections as homework, assigning short answers rather than long, omitting daily writings, or solely drawing attention to writerly identity as changeable (Rothschild, 2020).

It is also possible to engage with this reflective assignment without a L/EBGC. Two other options are to grade the writing as either complete or

incomplete, or to emphasize the self-responsive quality of the reflections and allow students to grade themselves.

Not every instructor has autonomy over their assignments and activities. However, even a short, in-class, ungraded version of this activity may assist students to responsively reflect on writerly identity.
References


Appendix A
Writerly Identity Reflections

Writer Identity Reflection

In this reflection, you will explore your writing identity. Think about the various places in your life that have shaped your language and writing—home, school, your community, your friends from sports or from the arts. How have these areas of your life helped you create a writerly identity? Or how have you dis-identified with writing, possibly because of these areas of your life?

As you write, reflect on your past writing experiences and your current writing experiences. Please answer in paragraph form, but do not worry about perfection. Per the engagement-based contract, this reflection will count toward your class participation.

1. Do you see yourself as a natural writer?
   a. Do you consider yourself to be a “born” writer or not? Why?

2. How have institutions, such as schools, influenced your consideration of yourself as a writer?
   b. For example, have you been given the position of “staff writer” for a newspaper or yearbook? Have you been placed in specific classes?

3. Through discourse with others, have you been recognized as having specific traits that help you identify as a writer?
   c. Which recognized characteristics support your writing capabilities, and which ones explain your writing challenges?

4. Do you write for yourself, such as through journaling or a friend group? Do you write creatively, perhaps through poetry or short stories or graphic novels, or otherwise?
   d. What writing knowledge assists your personal writing?
Responsive Writerly Identity Reflection

In this reflection, you will explore your writing identity as it has developed (or not) over the semester. Begin by re-reading your first Writerly Identity Reflection. Then, think about the various writing exercises we have done in class and about the term-long research project you completed. How have those assisted you to create a writerly identity or dis-identity? As you write, please respond to your first reflective writing in the class and reflect on the writing experiences of this class as well as concurrent writing experiences. Please answer in paragraph form, but do not worry about perfection. Per the engagement-based contract, this reflection will count toward your class participation.

As you write, respond to your first writerly identity reflection, and consider the following questions:

1. Do you see yourself as a natural writer?
   a. How has this class challenged those ideas?

2. How have institutions, such as schools, influenced your consideration of yourself as a writer?
   b. What have you learned that has assisted you to think of yourself as a writer, if anything?

3. Through discourse with others, have you been recognized as having specific traits that help you identify as a writer?
   c. How has this class supported or interfered with those skills and traits, if it has?

4. Do you write for yourself, such as through journaling or a friend group? Do you write creatively, perhaps through poetry or short stories or graphic novels, or otherwise?
   d. What abilities make someone “a writer”?

Appendix B

Daily Writing Prompts

Week 1
- What type of writing do you most enjoy?
- What is your discipline (your area of study) at school? Why did you choose it?

Week 2
- If you had to say you either hated or loved writing, which would it be and why?
- What is one issue from your discipline you want to tell people about?

Week 3
- Do you remember the first time you wrote for or about your discipline?
- What types of writing does your discipline use? (You can look it up.)

Week 4
- What is the most successful writing experience you have had so far?
- What types of strategies do you plan to use to write the next assignment?

Week 5
- Reflect on your writing over the weekend. What factors contributed to successful writing, and what was problematic?
- When was a time that you did not feel like a writer?

Week 6
- Do you identify as a writer in your discipline? Why or why not?
- What is the single most important part of your revision process?
Week 7

- In thinking about the next writing project, what feels most difficult about it?
- What is something you are looking forward to about the next writing project?

Week 8

- Are there famous books from your discipline? How did they impact you?
- What research habits have worked best for you in the past?

Week 9

- What is one thing you have learned about researching that you plan to try? What are two things that have worked that you want to try again? Why?
- What writing habits have worked for you in the past to successfully write longer papers?

Week 10

- What three supports most help you write research papers?
- What writing goals do you have for working on the research paper this weekend? What are you struggling with?

Week 11

- In thinking about your work on the research paper this weekend, what assisted you to meet your goals?
- What type of environment do you need to write successfully? Why do you think that is?

Week 12

- What do you think people in your discipline will most want to learn from your paper?
- Write about your strategy for your paper this weekend.
Week 13

- What is going well for you in your writing process? What strategies are working, and what is holding you back? List one thing you could use support on.
- As you go to finish your paper this weekend, what important reminders about writing will be written on a sticky note beside your computer?

Week 14

- If you had to give one piece of writing advice to writing students, what would it be?
- What qualities make someone a writer?
This exercise guides students in first- and second-year college writing classes through the process of developing their zero draft into a completed essay. The zero draft is a brief, low-stakes brainstorm in response to an essay prompt and is designed to be accessible and non-intimidating for the student writer. In this activity, students use writing to respond to a prompt and explore their burgeoning ideas in order to develop their initial thoughts into a completed paper. The students learn the value of responding to their own writing as a generative tool to locate the central elements of an essay. Through the zero draft, students learn the process of harvesting promising insights from their initial ideas and evolving those ideas into the thesis, analysis, interpretation of texts, and conclusion that comprise their essay. By engaging in this metacognitive activity, students learn how to mine their freeform brainstormstorms for their strongest ideas and use their responses to expand their thinking into a finished paper.

Various scholars have implemented exercises similar to the zero draft activity as a form of instructional scaffolding to guide students from ideas to essays. Huff (1983) wrote about teaching what he calls “Problem-Solving Drafting” to students and described the benefits of assigning a zero-draft kind of exercise thusly: “It is at this point in the drafting process that the
writer can begin to take charge of the text—adding, deleting, substituting, and reordering major components in accordance with an increasingly realized and interconnected set of rhetorical goals” (p. 811).

Instructional scaffolding is a well-established method for helping students become better writers. Susanna Benko (2012/2013) wrote about scaffolding as an ongoing process to support adolescent writing development, asserting that “with scaffolding, students’ potential is far beyond what it would be without” (p. 292). She quoted Applebee and Langer’s 1987 article, which stated that “effective writing instruction provides carefully structured support or scaffolding as students undertake new and more difficult tasks” (p. 139, italics in original). Benko referenced Applebee and Langer again in describing the “transfer of responsibility in the scaffolding process . . . Instructional scaffolding includes internalization by the students, wherein students take control of their learning and no longer need the supports they previously received” (Benko, 2012/2013, p. 293). The zero draft exercise functions as a form of instructional scaffolding that clarifies the steps of the writing process and provides support to student writers as they move from the conceptual stage to the composing stage.

Writing Activity Context

The zero-draft exercise can be used in a first- or second-year undergraduate class whenever students are given an essay assignment. Students can be prompted with directed self-reflection to consider how they can transfer the skills they have learned in this activity to future coursework as part of a practical, portable writing process. To help students use zero drafting as a model for generating writing in other contexts and for other courses, instructors can remind students of the value of setting interim deadlines for drafting to implement a metacognitive self-reflection and focused expansion of ideas.
Learning Outcomes or Goals

After completing this activity, students will have experience participating in essay writing as a process and in developing their original ideas from brainstorming to drafting. This exercise is designed to demystify the writing process and provide helpful guidelines for moving from concept to explication.

Course Format

This activity can be used in class or as a homework assignment. It is also effective as an asynchronous or online assignment.

Teacher Preparation

This exercise works within the context of a college composition course where students are reading and discussing texts in preparation for writing an essay. Before participating in this exercise, the instructor needs to have assigned the essay and explained the essay prompts to the students. The instructor must also have already assigned the zero draft before this exercise. The zero draft, also known as a free write, can be completed as a timed writing exercise in class or as homework. Students need to have access to the course texts, the essay prompt, and their completed zero draft before beginning this activity. After the exercise, students can discuss their plans for expanding their ideas into their papers either in small groups or in individual conferences with their instructor. The instructor can also respond to students’ essay expansion ideas with written commentary to facilitate the students’ transition into composing their final drafts.

Zero Draft Activity

Estimated Time

At least 20 minutes.

Procedure

Ask each student to respond to these five questions in writing, either on the zero draft itself or in a separate document.

1. First, reread your zero draft, and come up with a thesis in response to the prompt in the original writing assignment. Do this by returning to the central questions in the prompt you are responding to and reading over your zero draft, answering these questions in **one or two sentences that can serve as your working thesis**.

2. Next, think about what evidence you have to support this working thesis. Using the texts we have read and discussed that correspond to this writing assignment, come up with several useful quotations that relate to your zero draft and would help develop your ideas about this topic. **Please find some relevant quotations in these texts that you could use in response to this prompt.**

3. Now, think about how you can deepen the analysis in this paper. To do this, return to your zero draft and brainstorm several different expansions on the ideas you already wrote down. Think about extending your ideas into 3–4 sentences at the end of each paragraph. **Please write down a few ways you can deepen your paper’s analysis.**

4. Now, build an outline of your essay’s paragraphs based on the work you have been doing in this exercise. Make a plan for the paper based on your working thesis, the quotations you chose, and the central ideas you just expanded upon. Think about how you will move from one idea to the next—how you will transition smoothly and effectively for the audience. This may mean rearranging your paragraphs to create a sequence of thoughts that flow. **Write down several of your essay’s main ideas in an order that progresses logically from one idea to the next.**

5. Finally, write about the implications of your ideas. This is a useful way to prepare to write a conclusion for your essay as well as a helpful way to deepen your analysis at the end.
of each paragraph. What are some big-picture implications of your points that you can anticipate discussing in answer to questions like the following: “So what?” “Why does this matter for you, your generation, or your community?” “Why should the reader care?” Write down a few responses to these questions to develop your treatment of your main ideas.

You now have a blueprint for your analytical essay. Follow this plan as you are expanding your zero draft into your paper. Pay special attention to ideas that seem powerful or intellectually invigorating—make sure to develop these original moments of insight in greater detail as you compose your essay.

Caveats and Alternatives

As an alternative, students can respond to these five questions verbally in small groups (or breakout rooms, if the course is online) and take notes instead of writing out their responses individually. This option is also useful for accommodating a diverse range of learning styles and can be adapted for use with secondary school students.
References


Every semester I notice students struggling to imagine real audiences for their writing. Students favor an abstract audience, and supporting them in developing audience awareness is often a challenge in my teaching of first-year writing. This challenge is often amplified when students consider their actual audience—me—and the feedback loop presented by my response to their writing. Not unreasonably, a student rhetorically gestures to their respondent, who is an audience of one: their writing teacher. Ironically, the near-ubiquity of virtual, digital, and multimodal text creation (especially in the continued response to COVID-19 and remote learning) creates an opportunity to imagine a more tactile, rhetorical audience for students to address. Students “learning to see an audience as situated . . . may be able to more effectively participate in disciplinary communities of practice” (Sweeney, 2018, p. 60). This assignment first draws from Meghan Sweeney’s study on interdisciplinary transfer of writing. Additionally, the assignment aims to support students in expanding their view of an audience as having different, situated, and rhetorical needs, and engages with metacognitive approaches to multimodal text creation, based on Sweeney’s reading of Tacza and Robertson (2017).

Following Tacza and Robertson (2017), this assignment defines metacognition as “the ability to mindfully monitor and consider why
specific choices were made in a particular writing moment, including, but not limited to the different types of knowledge(s) learned before and acquired during that particular writing moment” (pp. 215–216). The metacognitive task for students is oriented toward the audience—not just according to Sweeney’s sense of interdisciplinarity, but to readers beyond academic settings—and the rhetorical moves that might specifically appeal to those audiences using multimodal texts. To that point, this assignment defines multimodal as “how we combine multiple different ways of communicating in everyday life” (Ball et al., 2021, p. 12).

In short, the assignment asks students to consider a subject, issue, or matter that is discussed within a discourse community of their choosing. Then, they target an audience beyond the academy who might benefit from that knowledge and repackage (or “translate” as the assignment calls this task) the information in a multimodal text that makes specific rhetorical appeals and accessibility gestures to that audience. Getting students to think in this way, in turn, challenges teachers to respond similarly. Instructors also have a preconceived audience with their own rhetorical needs for response: our students.

Instructor response to this kind of work requires careful attention. The assignment sequence discussed below is from a first-year writing course. While issues of design, user-interface experience, and similar concepts more commonly found in upper-level technical and professional writing courses are part of the learning outcomes, the instructor’s response should guide the student toward critically analyzing rhetorical appeals and audience awareness.

I propose a project sequence that provides a thoughtful collaboration between student and instructor, one that invites audience awareness in a manner that is more readily accessible than the abstract audiences students often are writing to.
Context

This project sequence could be implemented in any first-year writing course but could be augmented for upper-level professional/technical writing courses or, with the right changes, for secondary school English and writing courses. Regardless of level, this assignment works best in the second half of a term, when students have had the chance to engage with some of the more complex concepts of the assignment.

Learning Outcomes/Goals

- Students will engage in close reading of a journal article from a peer-reviewed scholarly publication.
- Students will engage in thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts like discourse community, rhetorical analysis, and audience awareness.
- Students will devise and develop a multimodal text.
- Students will compose, review, and revise a thoughtful, first-person process narrative.
- Students will engage in thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts such as the rhetorical appeals, the rhetorical triangle, and the rhetorical situation.
- Students will engage in thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts of visual rhetoric.

Format

This teaching practice is suitable for online, hybrid, and face-to-face instruction, though it has only been tested in a face-to-face writing course.

Teacher Preparation

Teachers should have an awareness of the following questions before implementing this assignment:

- What is your level of experience with digital composing tools? How can you support students in using them?

• What technology resources are available in your classroom? in the campus library? Do your students have access to the tools necessary to undertake this project?
• What will your responses to and engagement with brainstorming look like?
• What will your responses to and engagement with digital texts look like? How will you assess creative work within your courses’ grading paradigm?
• What are your students’ expectations for your responses to their drafts and texts-in-progress? Is this project compatible with those expectations?

Advanced digital technologies are not necessary when addressing issues of audience awareness; however, instructors should augment the multimedia/multimodal aspects of the assignment accordingly based on students’ and their own access to and proficiencies with digital composition tools (e.g., my institution has classroom laptops for all students as well as tablets students can check out from the library).

Estimated Time

From start to finish, this activity will last approximately 2 weeks, including in-class workshopping sessions and presentation dates (in my case, three 50-minute class sessions per week). Time spent introducing multimodal composition techniques and elements of visual design as supported by readings and scaffolded activities may vary.

Procedure

The metacognitive response element of this project sequence is for students to respond to academic writing by conveying its meaning by augmenting, not altering, the argument; students are also responding to their intended audiences in the content of their “translation” as well as the design methods and communication strategies they select for their text.

Finally, they are responding to themselves in the final rhetorical analysis of the “translated” text they create.

Instructor response to this writing and intellectual activity can be challenging; first-year writing courses are less concerned with design, user interface, and similar topics that might otherwise be found in a technical and professional writing course. When developing classroom norms and expectations, it is important to consider how instructors will respond and how it will affect the overall process. In my implementation of this project sequence, students do a check-in during the drafting process so that the instructor and the student can evaluate requirements, respond to feedback, and discuss support.

See Appendix A for the full assignment text. A suggested outline for the project sequence is as follows:
1. Using texts familiar to the instructor, introduce concepts of audience awareness, rhetorical analysis, and multimodality as well as elements of visual design (see Appendix B for recommended readings to assign students).
2. Determine if students will be working independently or in groups.
3. Facilitate brainstorming sessions with individuals and groups to select academic texts to translate.
4. Solicit a written check-in from project groups.
5. Schedule presentations.
6. Workshop or peer review process summaries and rhetorical analyses.
7. Provide written and oral feedback on drafts, both generative and summative.

Caveats and Alternatives

As this project sequence is heavily reliant on technology and access to digital composition tools, the classroom/institution/learning environment will need to be properly equipped for students to access necessary tools. An
alternative would be to de-emphasize the digital components of multimodal composing in favor of collaboration with visual arts instructors/students.

Similarly, instructors who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with digital composing tools or visual design in first-year writing courses might seek additional support and resources in how these activities are scaffolded.

As this project sequence is a final project for a course, some of the core concepts are built on a semester’s worth of context. Adopting the project early in the semester with a lower stakes grading scheme could be a playful way to introduce the concepts that this draft is meant to assess in summation.

References


Appendix A

Assignment Text: Audience Translation, Analysis, and Reflection

We’ve discussed writing for the World, for School, and for You this semester. We’ve read, reviewed, and written a variety of genres, including summaries, op-ed pieces, academic journal articles, rhetorical analyses, and a variety of pop culture artifacts. We’ve talked about multimodality and considered how our audience and intended outcomes dictate the way we approach, compose, and present whatever it is we are trying to communicate.

In short, the concepts of rhetoric are everywhere, and their applications to writing and communication are endless. Since we’ll be doing a lot of writing as we continue our journeys in college, and out in the world, let’s try to bring it all together for a final project in two parts.

Part One: Project 4A—Audience Translation

Think of some of the topics you’ve encountered in the academic journal articles you read while writing Literature Reviews or Summaries. I’d bet my extra copy of Twister that you read about a topic or issue that is important; I’d bet you read something that would be useful to a reader, or an entire audience, who could hugely benefit from the information that is difficult to read and even more difficult to access. In this sense, Writing for School can lack the kind of openness and empathy that is one of many core tenants of the liberal arts education. So, what do we do?

For your Audience Translation, think of an issue that is important to you. It can be something you’ve written about previously, or something different.

1. First, select a scholarly peer-reviewed article from an academic journal using the school library resources that discuss the issue you have chosen. The article must have been published within the last seven years.
2. Next, think of a specific audience that might benefit from the conclusions drawn in that article. Think about what
that audience needs to better understand or receive that information.

3. Then, translate the text of the scholarly peer-reviewed academic journal article into a usable text that is **multimodal** in order to better appeal to that audience. For example, if we imagine an academic journal article from health sciences discussing insulin for elderly diabetic patients, we might think of a large-print pamphlet, or an infomercial with captions that better convey less-jargony language in a more usable format for the intended audience.

Your first job is to read a difficult text at an advanced level. Use your own rhetorical analysis strategies to determine the author's purpose and intended audience (going beyond the audience of academic peers). You’ll have to recall what Melzer (2020) says about *discourse community* to further penetrate the barriers of access, and you’ll need to perform your own audience analysis and think of what methods of rhetorical appeal (Carroll, 2010; Faigley, 2017) and what modes of communication (Gaigach, 2017) are most effective. Then you’ll have to get creative and actually make something.

To be even more direct: you are taking writing for School and translating it for the World.

*Project 4A Requirements*

- Selection of an appropriate peer-reviewed article from an academic journal that is no more than seven years old
- Thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts including discourse community, rhetorical analysis, and audience awareness
- The development of a multimodal text that has *at least* two modes of communicating (visual, aural, gestural, spatial)
- A well-planned and rehearsed presentation of your multimodal text to the class
As each group or individual will take on different projects, length requirements will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Part Two: Project 4B—Process and Rhetorical Analysis Summaries

However noble our aims to address the World from our vantage point at School may be, we must also synthesize our abilities to write for ourselves. In the second part of Project Two, you’ll write two distinct summaries for closure: a process summary or narrative explaining what you did and why you did it in Project 4A and a rhetorical analysis that summarizes the deep thinking that motivated your response to the exigence of the selected topic or issue.

These summaries are due two weeks after your presentations, so be sure to take extensive notes throughout the duration of the project!

**Project 4B—Process Summary Requirements**

A first-person narrative of how you/your group:

- Selected the topic and article
- Engaged with the intended audience
- Brainstormed and developed the multimodal text
- Planned the presentation
- Thoughtfully revised and free of careless errors
- Typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with regular margins
- 2–3 full double-spaced pages

**Project 4B—Rhetorical Analysis Summary Requirements**

- Thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts including rhetorical appeals, the rhetorical triangle, and the rhetorical situation (Boyd, 2011; Carroll, 2010; Faigley, 2017)
• Discussion of audience awareness and exigence specifically (going beyond the obvious assignment)

• Thoughtful reflection on and application of concepts of visual rhetoric, including a specific discussion of the visual elements of design/style from Cohn (2020)

• Typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with regular margins

• 2–4 double-spaced pages

This assignment is described as two separate parts, but as long as you fulfill the minimum requirements of each, you may choose to compose this as a single four- to seven-page document.
Appendix B
Recommended Texts for Supporting Instruction of Concepts

These articles all come from open-source textbooks I have used in first-year writing courses, both in support of students’ learning toward the broader goals of FYW courses and in the specific scaffolding of this project. There are many similar resources available that engage with the core concepts of this project—audience awareness, rhetorical analysis, multimodality, visual analysis and design, and discourse community—and instructors are encouraged to consider these readings as suggestions for their own use, as opposed to the definitive student-facing writing on these subjects.

- **Rhetorical analysis:** Caroll (2010). This article presents a basic overview of rhetorical analysis, the rhetorical situation, and rhetorical appeals in an approachable fashion. It could anchor a more substantial discussion on rhetoric and its applications for analysis, reading, and writing, or provide a foundation for engaging with the later concepts in this project sequence.

- **Elements of visual design:** Cohn (2020). This article introduces basic concepts of visual analysis and provides several excellent in-class activities to aid the instruction of the elements of visual design, including line, color, shape, size, space, value, and texture, all of which students at least need to be aware of in their compositions for this project.

- **Multimodality:** Gagich (2017). This brief reference entry comes from an open-source textbook and defines multimodality and serves as an accessible foundation students can build upon to understand texts in multimodal ways.

- **Discourse communities:** Melzer (2020). Similarly definitional, this article offers a detailed but approachable understanding of discourse communities, including John Swales’s linguistic aspects of discourse communities, and provides a
map for how students can understand their academic lives as organized into various discourse communities. For this project sequence, Melzer expands the ideas of specific rhetorical needs for specific audiences.

- Audience awareness: Moxley (n.d.). This brief reference entry defines *audience* and *audience awareness*, providing a foundation for students to begin engaging with the abstract issues of addressing audiences’ needs in their multimodal text creation.
CLA-Informed Self-Disclosure of Language Learning in the Writing Center

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Language scholars have long recognized the potential of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) as a transformative pedagogical tool, especially in the context of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction. According to Norman Fairclough, CLA is a critical perspective that cultivates an awareness of “how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 7). Proponents of CLA argue that it exposes the pervasive harms of linguicism, “the ideologies, structures, and practices that are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2023, p. 10).

CLA pedagogy calls on both teachers and students to understand the larger historical, political, and socioeconomic forces impacting language education and their position relative to those forces. CLA-informed methods celebrate and develop the diverse linguistic competencies of EAL and EAP students, allowing them to claim and maintain their authorial agency in the process. Despite its prevalence in scholarship, comprehensive guides to applying CLA in the university classroom have only recently begun to appear (Shapiro, 2022; Taylor et al., 2018), and little has emerged on applying CLA to writing center instruction (Lape, 2019; Shapiro, 2022,
The hegemony of EAP can make receiving feedback an intimidating or even detrimental experience for writing center students of all linguistic backgrounds, let alone EAL users and first language (L1) users of non-standard English(es). Applying CLA principles in writing center consultations can help tutors reassure and engage students while giving them constructive and substantive feedback.

In this teaching tip, I will explain how writing tutors can use CLA-informed self-disclosures of their own language learning to welcome and encourage EAL and EAP students into the writing center. Most teachers use self-disclosure unconsciously and intuitively, not realizing that it is a well-researched teaching tool associated with significant findings both in person and online (Cayanus, 2004; Song et al., 2016). According to CLA pedagogy, however, self-disclosure should be used with care, especially in the more personal setting of the writing center, and tutors must continually reflect on and recognize their linguistic privilege (Godley et al., 2015; Wilkes, 2018). Writing centers are implicitly coded as spaces for White users of standard English(es) such as myself (Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Valles et al., 2017). By modeling ourselves as struggling language learners, and especially as learners of EAL students’ most common home languages, tutors can instead present the writing center as a more welcoming, plurilingual space.

This approach resulted from reflecting on my own linguistic positionality as a White L1 English user, writing tutor, writing instructor, and scholar with an academic background in Medieval Studies. Early on in my one-on-one teaching practice, I often found myself referencing my experiences as a learner of European languages to encourage and commiserate with my students. While these examples were certainly effective, they were even more effective when I disclosed that I was a learner of non-hegemonic languages, especially when the students themselves could demonstrate their own linguistic expertise and assist me as a novice learner of their home language. This relatively minor adjustment to my teaching practice has helped me better recognize and celebrate my
students’ diverse linguistic competencies and promote their agency as authors.

Context

This tip was developed at a university writing center serving a sizeable EAL student population. It could also be adapted for use during class time in a secondary- or university-level composition course, especially when introducing students to EAP.

Learning Outcomes or Goals

- Students will perceive their writing center or classroom as more plurilingual and feel more welcome.
- Students will be encouraged to learn EAL/EAP as their tutors model their own language-learning struggles and achievements.

Course Format

Although I originally used this tip during face-to-face writing center appointments, it can also be adapted for online use, either synchronously or asynchronously. Instructors can also implement this method during office hours or in the classroom, including in-person, remote, or hybrid modalities.

Teacher Preparation

- Research the student population of your university community. How many of these students speak a home language other than English? What are the home languages of the students who use your writing center or attend your classes?
- Take a few hours and learn some fundamentals about your EAL students’ most common home language(s). You don’t have to become an expert user; just learn a few things about the most common home language(s) of the EAL students.

you work with. Gain a sense of the pronunciation rules, writing conventions, and major grammatical features. In what fundamental ways is the language like and unlike English? What advantages do speakers of this language enjoy when learning English, and what are the most common challenges they encounter? If your writing center has a director or works with a writing center consultant, these are questions that they can likely help you answer.

**Estimated Time**

The time required for this approach varies depending on how much language learning is desired and how much self-disclosure is needed to make students feel valued and encouraged.

**Procedure**

This tip does not lend itself to a step-by-step procedural breakdown but works best to address language learning issues during one-on-one conversations or class time. When these opportunities present themselves, share your experiences with language learning, especially your newly acquired knowledge of your students’ home language(s), to welcome, commiserate with, and encourage EAL/EAP students. See the Appendix for specific examples, but here are some general points to keep in mind:

- During one-on-one interactions, such as a writing center appointment or during office hours, tailor your disclosure to that student’s needs.
- However, remember that due to the demographics of your writing center or classroom, some disclosures might work for a significant percentage of your students and across assignments.
- While each writing center’s linguistic and institutional context is unique, you may find yourself developing disclosures that you can use in different institutional contexts.
Even small personal anecdotes will make your students feel their plurilingual experience is valued and supported by a fellow language learner. In cases of instructors with a positionality like mine, they will also appreciate that a White L1 English speaker is trying to learn a less hegemonic language despite their position of linguistic privilege.

Caveats and Alternatives

This tip will work better for users of the home languages most seen at your writing center. While tutors cannot be expected to learn all home languages or become fully proficient in the most prevalent ones, students with less common home languages will still be reassured by their tutors’ shared struggles and achievements with language learning—especially if the relationship between the tutor’s L1 and the language studied disrupts the typical educational dynamic of the North American writing center (e.g., an English speaker learning Punjabi).

Be mindful that this tip represents a small step toward making North American university writing centers more plurilingual. As you strive to value non-hegemonic languages and dialects in your teaching practice, do not forget the central tenets of CLA pedagogy: In their lived experiences, your students will continue to experience linguicism. Your actions or beliefs will not change this. To ignore this reality will undermine your work together and risk reproducing a linguicist version of the “color blind” fallacy so problematic to current anti-racist pedagogies. You must remain aware that linguicism is alive and well both inside and outside your institution and work to make writing students and tutors aware of this truth (Shapiro, 2022).

References


Appendix

Examples of CLA-Informed Self-Disclosures Applied to a Specific Institutional Context

1. Whenever you have time, take a few minutes before an appointment with an EAL student to learn how to pronounce their name correctly. Your linguistic research will likely come in handy here since it will have focused on a substantial portion of your EAL student body. For example, about 70% of the EAL student population served by my writing center used Mandarin as an L1 (first language) or a very familiar L2 (second language), so learning more about pronunciation, transliteration, and naming conventions in Mandarin proved extremely helpful. You may or may not succeed at pronouncing the student’s name well when you first greet them, but your effort will be noticed and much appreciated. You could then ask the student to give you pronunciation tips since you are trying to learn more about their language. You will find that students are happy to support your language learning efforts before you, in turn, support theirs (see also Pennesi, 2017).

2. When an EAL student is struggling with a grammatical concept present in English but not in their home language, you could often say something like: “Well, don’t be too down on yourself. It makes sense that you’re having difficulty with when to use ‘a’ and ‘the’ since something like that doesn’t exist in your home language. I’m learning Mandarin right now and am struggling to learn the four tones since English is not a tonal language. So, it’s not surprising that it’s tough for us, but we’ll keep working at it, and eventually, we’ll get it.” This kind of encouragement will help the student feel that their plurilingual writing is valued and supported by a fellow language learner instead of being judged.

and corrected by an “all-knowing,” White, middle-class L1 English speaker.

3. When students seem particularly frustrated, ask them how long they have been learning English. Some of their answers will impress you, as EAL students may have moved from beginner to university-level proficiency in a surprisingly short timeframe. However, no matter the answer, congratulate the student on their language-learning achievements. Note that they can now write university-level assignments in English while you are still working on foundational skills in whatever home language you are learning.

4. Remember that EAP students are not necessarily EAL students. As mentioned above, CLA-informed self-disclosure can also make your writing center or classroom more inclusive for students who are L1 users of diverse English(es) or L1 users of more standard English(es) who are simply new to EAP. You can model difficulties from your time as an undergraduate familiarizing yourself with academic conventions, which is challenging for many students regardless of linguistic background. For example, you can recount to your students how much you disliked writing conclusions as a first-year student: “I didn’t see the point of them and was so tired by the end of the paper that I just wrote whatever popped into my head so that I could get it done. But then I started to see how great they were at giving your reader a nice summary of your paper as they ‘walk out the door.’” Whatever their experience with EAP, all students can benefit from knowing that their teacher also had to get accustomed to the academic conventions and terms they are still working to grasp.
Writing in schools can be a challenging task for multilingual students. Too often, this student population is seen through deficit lenses as unmotivated or incapable (Davis & Museus, 2019). Educators who are not specifically trained to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students may struggle to get CLD students to begin or complete teacher-assigned writing tasks in class. One successful strategy we have found is collaborative writing, which offers learning opportunities that are both low stakes and peer mediated. Group work, however, often presents challenges for teachers, such as effectively scaffolding students to elicit rich writing, responding to individual ideas, and assessing students’ writing progress, with one member often working more than others (Greiner & Collet, 2021).

In this teaching tip, we propose interactive group portfolios as a response strategy to address these challenges and to support the writing of CLD students in group work. Prior research has demonstrated the potential of portfolios for documenting students’ writing progress over time and in multiple ways (Song & August, 2002). Burner (2014)
emphasized that portfolios not only make writing an ongoing learning process but also provide a space for written and oral interactions, which is important for language and content learning. Therefore, teachers can use these interactive group portfolios for themselves to track individual students’ progress, identify the support students need, and make formative assessments. We model how teachers can respond to both the individual student and the group through the process below. In Appendix A, we provide a sample group writing assignment for teachers interested in implementing our portfolio system.

**Context**

The portfolio system is best suited for K–12 or a first-year writing context, as it supports writing development through formative assessment. It can be applied across grade levels, but educators should use their discretion to adjust appropriately for specific assignments.

**Learning Outcomes/Goals**

Students will receive responsive, individualized feedback through interactive group portfolios that attend to:

- English fluency
- Collaborative team skills
- General progress of writing skills

Students will be able to:

- Collaboratively work with peers
- Respond to and engage with individualized writing feedback
- Further develop their English fluency and writing skills

**Course Format**

The portfolio system is best suited for face-to-face instruction but can be modified for online and hybrid learning environments at the educators’ discretion, as discussed in the Caveats and Alternatives section of this paper.

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Teacher Preparation

Teachers should purposefully group students for the writing assignment with careful attention paid to cross-cultural communication. Groups should have a range of English proficiency and a variety of multilingual students, if possible. When providing students with choices, we suggest that students are allowed to choose a topic rather than partners, as English learners may be likely to select groups with other English learners, thus limiting cross-cultural communication.

Teachers should pre-teach collaborative skills. We suggest co-constructing, as a class, expectations and procedures for collaboration. This will set students up for successful group work and avoid the pitfall of one student carrying the team. A sample expectations chart is provided in Appendix B.

Teachers should prepare a folder, notebook, or binder as a portfolio for each student group. There should be plenty of blank pages (one per student at a minimum). There should also be pages for teachers’ observational notes. We suggest dividing the portfolio into three sections: (a) space for students to share their writing artifacts (brainstorms, outlines, drafts, etc.); (b) space for teacher feedback; and (c) space for student responses to teacher feedback. You may also save room for worksheets and additional artifacts to be included in the portfolio.

Estimated Time

Portfolio maintenance will take the entire class period of every writing session, and around 15–30 minutes outside of class as well. Teachers may also want to build in time to conduct 15-minute conferences with groups based on portfolio feedback.

Procedure

Firstly, print copies of the assessment rubric (which can align with the expectation chart as shown in Appendix B), and put the rubrics in the portfolios for later use.

Secondly, take notes daily in the group portfolio. In individual students’ sections of the portfolio, teachers can jot down observations of individual students and their specific needs (such as a certain writing skill they can work on or grammar support they can benefit from) in each writing session. Based on the notes in the portfolios, teachers can prepare individualized materials for students the next day. Assign and collect individual students’ exit tickets after each writing session, and respond to these reflections by adjusting the coming sessions. A model exit ticket is in Appendix C.

Additionally, teachers need to engage students in giving peer feedback before the final presentation of their writing. The following procedure maps out this feedback assignment.

- Exchange drafts among different groups. Students will read other groups’ collaborative writing projects and leave comments about strengths and questions. Keep peer feedback and each group’s revision in their portfolios.
- End this activity by inviting students to finish two tasks:
  1. Complete the self-assessment rubric created in the first session of class and attach the rubric to their own sections of the portfolio. Each student in the group will do a self-assessment when the project ends. Students will rate themselves from 1–5 points for their performance (5 being best performance) in brainstorming, drafting, revising, and finalizing stages. Students need to specify how they will improve if they do not give themselves 5 points. If they do give themselves 5 points, they are expected to explain in writing why they deserve that grade.
  2. Leave final feedback about this writing experience on sticky notes, and attach them to the last two pages of the portfolio.
- Collect portfolios for teacher’s review and self-reflection.
  Ask yourself descriptive questions about students: What

do I notice from students’ writing? How do these writing artifacts reveal students’ creative ideas, improvement in writing, and strong collaborative spirit? What are students’ needs, and what support can I provide in the future?

Once complete, provide students with authentic opportunities to present their collaborative work in their school and communities through activities such as a gallery walk.

Caveats and Alternatives

If modifying this lesson to be digital, we suggest using cloud drives and creating a general folder for each group with internal folders labeled for each student in the group. Tools like Padlet (see Appendix D for an example) and Google sites can also be used to organize and present students’ digital portfolios.

Teachers will play the role of facilitators by using group portfolios to observe and respond to students’ collaborative behaviors and writing processes. Give students affirmation of their work in a constructive way, focusing not only on language but also on ideas, coherence, and audience awareness.

Students will have access to the portfolio, so feedback and observation notes should be considered student-facing and modified appropriately.

Organize role-driven collaboration if there are students whose English proficiency is emergent. Inviting students to discuss and determine their roles in the project based on English language proficiency and other competencies (such as searching and selecting images, organizing ideas, writing drafts, and editing) helps all students to participate confidently in the project. Write down students’ roles in their portfolios and encourage them to try different roles in different sessions.
References


Appendix A
Sample Collaborative Writing Project Lesson Plan: Comic Strip

As discussed in the above teaching tip, teachers will use group portfolios in each writing session to document students’ progress in both writing and collaborative skills, adjusting follow-up scaffolding for students as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Time and Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>5 minutes: Introduce comic strip activity.</td>
<td>Other resources for collaborative comics activity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 minutes: Discuss possible topics for comic strips and narrow it down to three</td>
<td>• Tools: Book Creator, StoryboardThat, NCTE Comics Creator, Pixton,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>choices as a class. Allow students to rank individual choices.</td>
<td>StoryJumper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 minutes: Independent (or partnered!) time to review a copy of the Sunday Comics.</td>
<td>• More mentor texts: <a href="https://popculture-classroom.org/">https://popculture-classroom.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide a guided worksheet for students to note what they notice about the comics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Session 2
Analyze mentor texts; work with partners to brainstorm; draft an outline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td><strong>30 minutes</strong>: Lead a discussion about the comic activity from the first day. Read a comic and analyze it as a group. Establish key genre traits of comics, or elements students should include in their final product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>10 minutes</strong>: Go over the expectations chart as a class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td><strong>20 minutes</strong>: Allow students to meet their assigned partners and begin brainstorming based on their choice of the three topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Purposefully group students based on their similar choices of writing topics.
- Provide note-taking materials or work-sheets for students to record their writing outlines.
- Give needed support when students are brainstorming.

### Session 3
Draft and give feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55 minutes</td>
<td><strong>55 minutes</strong>: Provide a storyboard for each group to start drafting. Check in with each group to ensure they’re working together appropriately and making progress. Note the skills of each student to monitor progress throughout the semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td><strong>5 minutes</strong>: Exit ticket</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Arrange a 10-minute group conference for each writing group to check for their collaboration behaviors, writing progress, and needed support.
- Give constructive feedback to each group.

### Session 4
**Draft; revise.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>55 minutes: Provide materials for students to make their final product. Check in with groups to provide scaffolded support based on the previous day’s conferences. Give students time to revise based on teachers’ feedback.</th>
<th>5 minutes: Exit ticket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Session 5**
**Present.** | 55 minutes: Allow students to present their work and celebrate their completed projects! Display work and invite community members to presentations. | 5 minutes: Exit ticket or other brief activity feedback |

- Provide opportunities for peer revision (exchange writing products among different groups), if time allows.
- Wrap up activity with students’ feedback about all these writing experiences.

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Appendix B
Sample Expectations Chart and Rubric

The expectation chart can be easily aligned to the end-of-project self-assessment rubric. Each student in the group will take one copy of this rubric and rate themselves for their performance in each writing stage. Students need to specify what they think they can improve in for future collaborative writing activities if they do not give themselves full points. If they do give themselves full points, they are expected to elaborate on their successes and why they deserve full points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brainstorming</th>
<th>Dos</th>
<th>Don’ts</th>
<th>How well do I meet the expectations? (1–5 points; 5 is meeting all expectations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use respectful language in discussion (disagree, agree, clarify, rephrase, suggest).</td>
<td>• Copy other people's ideas (plagiarism).</td>
<td>If I’m not at 5 points now, how will I improve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be a good listener (listen to everyone).</td>
<td>• Talk about irrelevant topics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take note of ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use books and computers to search for information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Drafting          | • Think and discuss before writing.  
|                  | • Use dictionaries and ask for language support if needed.  
|                  | • Be supportive of and helpful to each other.  
|                  | • Be brave and confident in writing.  
|                  | • Be unafraid to make mistakes.  
|                  | • Simply split tasks without any discussion.  |
| Revising         | • Provide constructive feedback (both positive points and sincere suggestions for improvement).  
|                  | • Remember language accuracy, ideas, and overall coherence are all important.  
|                  | • Ignore the overall coherence of the writing.  
|                  | • Only focus on checking grammar.  |
| Finalizing        | • Read aloud within the group to make sure everything sounds good.  
|                  | • Carefully proofread to check grammar, writing convention, appropriateness for targeted audiences, neatness of format, creativeness of ideas, and coherence of the overall writing.  
|                  | • Submit without the agreement of all group members.  
|                  | (It should be everyone’s best work!)  |

Appendix C
Sample Exit Ticket

Name & Date: ________________

What are two things you learned from your peers today? Share who.

1)

2)

What did you do well or struggle with today?

What do you expect from your group tomorrow?

Appendix D
Sample Digital Padlet Portfolio