Final MA Portfolio

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the field of English with a specialization in Teaching and a Certificate in College Composition

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Prof. Lee Nickoson, First Reader
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Asking the Right Questions
I began pursuing my master’s in English five years ago. At that time I was fifty-three and had taught high school English for eighteen years in independent schools. Because I had entered teaching as a career switcher (from paralegal to English teacher) without completing a teacher education program and didn’t go on to pursue a graduate degree right after college, I always felt as if there were some body of knowledge I was missing. I continued to stumble over the same questions year after year in the classroom: How do I actually help students become better writers? What texts should I teach? What should grammar instruction look like (or should it be there at all)? How can student writers help each other best? Which activities that “feel like school,” are worthwhile and which are not? The list of questions seemed endless, evolving into a chronic uneasiness about “doing it right.” I began my masters hoping to find answers to some of those questions.

Ultimately, what I found through this program was that those puzzles were ones that others were attempting to solve, too. I found that scholarly conversations and research have been asking and continue to ask similar questions and pose some tentative conclusions. My struggles weren’t mine alone. I valued having the time to think and talk about not just what we do in the classroom, but why we do it.

I’d like to say that over the course of my studies, I arrived at easily implemented strategies which will fit every future teaching situation I will encounter. While that isn’t true, I do leave this program with some priorities to keep in mind. The first one is that time spent questioning the assumptions that I (and others) are basing our teaching choices on is not wasted time. It’s also important that the strategies I implement reflect theories and models I ascribe to. For example, on a continuum of student versus teacher centered classroom, I believe in creating a classroom shifted toward the student and focused on student ownership of their learning, and I
think that thread runs through many of the choices I’ve made in the following projects. In the writing classroom, I have learned that creating the right assignment, one in which the student has choice and ultimate buy in, is critical. I also now believe that using portfolios connected to clear standards is another powerful way to maintain student ownership of their writing. A critical piece of those portfolios is the writer’s memo in which the student can reflect on the process and chart a course for future writing (much as I am doing right now). In responding to writing, I want my efforts to be focused on formative feedback and want students to receive feedback from the teacher, peers, technology (when appropriate), and the student writer. The process of peers learning to respond to each other’s writing is challenging, and each step of the process must be modeled and taught. In fact, modeling will be a critical ingredient in each activity in my English classroom. Students need to hear and see teacher, professional writer, and peer models of each step of the writing process, and I think this singular element may be the most transformative for my teaching as I move forward.

Now that I have become aware of the scholarly conversations that are occurring in our field, I want to stay abreast of them. For me that means continuing to read English journals and texts and articles of authors whose work I discovered in this program: Elbow, Murray, Urbanski, Gallagher, Killgallon, Weaver, Romano, Wiggins, and others.

As I considered which projects to revise for the portfolio, I tried to choose topics that I think will be useful to me when/if I teach in a traditional classroom again or possibly online. Interestingly, all of the pieces I chose revolve around teaching writing. In my twenty years of teaching English, I have found teaching writing to be the most difficult (and rewarding) part of the job. Still, I ended every year not feeling as if I had done it right. Each of these projects was an attempt to take the readings and theory and discussions and distill them into practice.
ESSAY 1: “Effective and Efficient Feedback in Assessing Student Writing” (Research and analysis)

The first project I wanted to revise is the one I have chosen for my evidence of “substantive research.” It is a paper I wrote in my first semester of classes in my Graduate Writing class. The title of my original paper was “Effective and Efficient Feedback in Assessing Student Writing.” What I attempted to do in this revision was revisit the research and theory from my first graduate paper and assimilate the research and theory I have learned since. The topic was teacher feedback on writing and particularly how to provide timely feedback.

Revisiting the topic after four years, I know now more about how rich the field of responding/feedback/assessment is. I wanted to review the research I had found then and add to it other studies and articles I have found since. The subject continues to interest me because I know that in my continuing career as an English teacher, responding to student writing will be the most demanding and rewarding part of my job.

In my revision, I envisioned my audience as fellow English teacher colleagues still working at schools where I taught. I attempted to frame the paper as a response to their question, "So, what did you learn in graduate school about teaching writing that you intend to use in future teaching situations?" I began by revisiting many of the readings I have encountered during my BGSU classwork. Ultimately I did include nineteen to twenty new sources (and added about ten pages) to my original, and I'm happy that my paper now presents a fuller view of the challenge of commenting (for example, in this revision I tried to at least unpack a little of what the word "feedback" actually means).

I think the main flaw in this current draft is that in attempting to be comprehensive, I am trying to touch on topics in a paragraph or two that are entire fields of study. I also contemplated
(but didn't) deleting some sections on ETS and electronic grading. I felt like by including these sections I was meandering from my focus on timely commenting, but I also wanted to share some of that research and educate teachers about the possibilities. (In most of the schools in which I have taught, I think electronic feedback would be firmly rejected out of hand as mechanical and formulaic, but the research convinced me it might have possibilities in the right context.)

PROJECT 2: “Major Assignment Design” for Teaching Writing

The second project I chose to revise was a project I completed for Teaching Writing, the Major Assignment Design project. In this assignment, Professor Riley-Mukavetz asked us to create a six week lesson plan for teaching writing. Additionally, she asked us to include annotations as rationale behind the elements of the lesson plans we constructed. As with Essay 1, I found this assignment interesting and wanted to revisit it because I see it as easily transferable to a future teaching situation. I especially appreciated the requirement that we think through and provide scholarly support for our choices and activities. Again, continually asking why I am doing what I am doing will, hopefully, guide my future lesson plans.

In my revision, the instructor suggested I review and edit some of the handouts I created, and I did find many ways to make the handouts more student friendly. She had suggested I make Handout 1 less wordy (“students don’t read instructions”!), and I agreed that this overview needed fewer words. I also included a Handout 2 which contained mentor texts, examples of the different kinds of writing I am asking students to compose. Handout 3 and 4 were blurry, so I recreated them in more usable form and made sure they appropriately cited Gallagher as the source. I also revised some of the questions I asked on Handout 6, the Writer’s Memo, to better
reflect my objectives for this unit. I simplified the questions and asked student to explain their answers.

I particularly wanted to go back and rethink the peer review activities I included. I have still felt unclear about how to manage peer review, so I wanted the opportunity to read other articles and think more about what the effectiveness of using peer feedback and ways to meet its challenges. Based on my readings, I inserted a more robust workshop on how to give peers feedback and added the sources to footnotes and works cited. (In my next classroom, I would like to devote more time, several weeks, to a peer responding workshop because I think it could be a powerful catalyst in creating a classroom writing community.) I also substantially revised Handout 5 which is the worksheet students will use in Peer Review with each other. In it I ask for students to look for suggestions about content, ideas, and organization and avoid copy editing comments. This is now in line with the mini-workshop on peer feedback from Week 3, Day 3.

PROJECT 3: “Eight Week Writing Unit” for Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing

The third piece I chose to revise is a project I completed for Grammar in Writing in which I created a six week lesson plan synthesizing writing instruction, style instruction, and editing. In this project I attempted to meld what I have learned about teaching writing and teaching grammar. The project was important to me because over the years I have struggled with how and where to teach grammar and conventions in conjunction with writing--or whether to include them at all. While I had read the research on the ineffectiveness of teaching stand alone grammar, I found that I either still taught sequentially from a grammar book or freed my students and me from the workbooks and then struggled to include even fundamental editing skills (to the students’ detriment, I now think). This project gave me a chance to think about what
it would look like to focus on style rather than grammar, yet still include some deliberative practice in editing skills and conventions.

The original version of this project had felt incomplete to me, and in my revision I added lesson plans for two more weeks to address all the types of writing I wanted students to encounter during this unit. I added a Week 7 assignment to have students write to inquire and explore and a Week 8 assignment to have students write to take a stand so by the end of the unit, students had practiced all the different discourses we initially reviewed in Week 1. I also added a reflection piece to the end, asking questions about writing and how students’ views have changed over the unit. Additionally, at my instructor’s suggestion, I added an assignment in which I asked students to write a claim and counterclaim about writing as a transition into our next unit on analysis and thesis driven writing. I also included a lesson on parallel structure which used professional models and no grammar vocabulary.

I also added a lesson on commas because my students struggle with these and often ask me to explain them. Creating this lesson reminded me of the importance of using explanations that are not encumbered with grammar terminology. In looking for worksheets to use as reinforcements, I typically use Google to search for pdfs I can use. This time in my search, I was aware that the first seven or eight worksheets I found overly relied on complex grammar terminology (phrases, clauses, dependent, independent) in explaining comma use. I eventually found some from Purdue OWL that were relatively grammar lingo free, but I realized that in the future I will need to search more carefully or create my own resources. I also revised many of the handouts and added exercises so students could practice skills and included a summative quiz. I cleaned up some links which now did not work and add source information to handouts to make sure I was modeling correct attribution.
PROJECT 4: Canvas “Revised Dream Writing Class” EDTL 6180: E-Learning

The fourth project I chose to revise was a project I completed for a Technology class in which I created an online writing class in Canvas. I feel as if I have learned so much from the ten exclusively online classes I have taken completing this MA, and I wanted to experiment with creating at least some elements of my own course based on all I have learned. I also envision teaching online as a possibility in the future, so I knew this course would be practical. I learned to use several digital tools and created several digital learning objects for the first time in this project (Google forms, creating a screencast, using EdPuzzle to embed questions in a video). I am not a technically gifted person by any means, so the skills I learned in this class were very helpful and allowed me to wrestle with these processes outside the context of a real class while I had the luxury of time.

In my revision, I wanted to go back and revise the class with the end goal of possibly using it as an example of my work in applying for a job as an online instructor. When I created the class, my energy was mainly focused on meeting the technology requirements. In my revision, one goal I had was to try to incorporate more of my philosophy and priorities. I have found that for me as an online student, making a personal connection with the teacher helped me to invest more deeply into the class. I found those connections more difficult to make when our communication was confined to writing, as many online courses are. I enjoyed having video chats with instructors and particularly appreciated an instructor who tasked us with calling her once early in the semester so we could connect voice to voice and those who encouraged us to post our own introductory videos. In my course, I had already included an introductory video, but in my revision I also asked students to post their own introduction on a discussion board and encouraged their use of videos, as well. I also added an assignment that we arrange a mutually
agreeable time for a phone call. Another revision I made for philosophical reasons was substituting a video I had found online with one I made myself. The video I originally used showed students how to do peer editing in Google. It had student reviewers making editing changes to student writer documents and even suggesting changes. I realized that I did not want this video and instruction to be the model I used for students. I wanted a video that talked about responding to global versus local changes at different points in revising, urged student reviewers to ignore editing and focus on the substance, and modeled asking good questions. Ultimately, because I couldn't find a video that included the elements important to me, I made my own screencast and substituted it. A third revision involved asking students to respond on a discussion board about their experiences with peer commenting because I think the process of peers responding to other peers writing can be intimidating, and I wanted to address those concerns at the beginning of the module. Similarly, I added a discussion post about students’ perceptions of revision because I wanted them to think through and share positive and negative experiences they have had.

Other changes I inserted to make the class more accessible and professional. For example, I edited the ending of a video I had made which had extra blank time at the end. I also added citations to quotes I used on the homepage. I also added few documents to help students navigate assignments more easily. For example, in the module asking students to find examples of different kinds of writing, I included a document briefly summarizing the different kinds of writing. I have realized that presenting information step by step is critical when the student is navigating purely with words and links. Even more that in the traditional classroom, instructors have to foresee problems and troubleshoot them ahead of time. I also deleted several tabs that were visible but not operable and substituted another source for a link that was not working.
Revisiting each of these projects and my coursework as a whole has reminded me of the
the many moments of thoughtful joy and satisfaction I’ve found in completing countless readings
and discussion posts. For these five years I have been asked to analyze, listen, consider and then
implement, create, forge. Am I graduating with a definitive playbook of the best teaching
strategies for every situation and answers to all of those questions that often troubled me? No,
but I now feel more confident now that I can ask the right questions and distinguish between
strategies that will truly help students learn and those that are merely familiar. I leave this
program excited to pass on these same gifts of questioning, exploration, and discovery to my
students.
Effective and Efficient Feedback in Assessing Student Writing

“How did it get late so soon?” (“Dr. Seuss Quotes”). Writing teachers in high schools from coast to coast are asking this same question as they realize they have spent one more evening or sunny Sunday afternoon cozied up to yet another stack of essays. In her article “Get It Off My Stack,” Nicki Baker reminds us of the many times we English teachers have “received sympathetic responses, as if we’ve reported the death of a pet, from those who ask what we teach” (36). Teachers and non-teachers alike understand that responding to student writing plainly takes time, and in his text The Joy of Teaching, college professor Peter Filene confesses that “evaluating and grading form the most burdensome part of teaching. By the time I’ve finished fifty essays, my stamina and morale have been stretched thin” (102). Still, the question remains: Time is passing, and is the time invested in responding to writing really helping students become more effective writers? In “Student Writing: Strategies to Reverse Ongoing Decline,” Michael Carter asserts that writing skills have been poor since 1970 and they are getting worse (286). This is the writing teachers’ worst fear. What if all those days and nights of responding to student writing ultimately makes no difference? Many teachers would nod empathetically at one teacher’s experience: “After spending hours correcting, editing, and constructing feedback in order to help them refine their work, the students would glance at their papers, scan for their grade, and then jam the paper into their binder. Even my best students
barely glanced at my comments. All of my time crafting feedback was wasted, and my students continued to repeat the same errors” (Lucas 139).

This research project explores the question of what is helpful and unhelpful in helping students become better writers, especially at the high school level. This paper will examine current research on feedback in general and what is considered effective and ineffective feedback. It will more specifically examine the usefulness of teacher responses to student writing (both commenting and rubrics), using peers, and several technologies that appear promising. In examining these strategies, the focus is on how these resources can help provide both effective and timely feedback.

**Definitions of Feedback**

What exactly is feedback in the writing classroom? Is it grades, evaluation, commenting, advice, emails, personal conversations? This broad term is complex and encompasses all these educational activities and some, but not all, have proven to be helpful in helping writers learn to write. Researcher and educator Brookhart cites Hattie and Timperley (2007) in defining four levels of feedback: feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the student as a person. She proposes that “the level at which the feedback is focused influences its effectiveness” and “feedback about the qualities of the work and about the process or strategies used to do the work are most helpful” (30). Grant Wiggins summed it up succinctly: “Basically, feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal” (1). While feedback can be categorized in many ways, most educators differentiate between summative feedback and formative feedback. Much of the research on helping student writers improve underscores how important formative feedback (as opposed to summative feedback is). “What makes any assessment in education *formative* is not
merely that it precedes summative assessments, but that the performer has opportunities, if results are less than optimal, to reshape the performance to better achieve the goal. In summative assessment, the feedback comes too late; the performance is over” (Wiggins 1).

**Feedback is important**

Most educators would agree with the “conventional wisdom [which] dictates that giving students feedback promotes learning. Instructors in all disciplines spend hours laboriously correcting and explaining errors on quizzes and tests, reports and papers. Their belief in the importance and effectiveness of feedback is supported by research in a variety of contexts” (Sims-Knight 1). And while research conducted by New Zealand professors Parr and Timberly highlight both the potential positive and negative impacts of feedback, they would also concur that quality formative feedback is powerful in helping student writers (Parr and Timperley 68).

So does feedback help student writers improve? The research shows the answer to be both yes and no. Providing feedback is problematic and depending on the nature of the feedback and the timing, can be helpful--or not (Parr and Timperley 69).

**Timing of Feedback**

One element of feedback which appears to be critical to student learning is the timing of the feedback. Greg Giberson suggest that for our responses to be effective, the appropriate time to respond or “kairos,” is important and suggests that both prewriting and drafting stages are particularly important ones (413). Petersen concurs: “Feedback on writing is most valuable to students’ writing development when it takes place at the beginning or middle stages of the writing process. This is the time when students can use the feedback to revise and edit their writing” (5). In contrast, “feedback that is deferred until after the summative task has been completed in unlikely to affect student understanding because students’ attention is now focused
on a new topic” (Frey and Fisher 66). Students who receive feedback early in the writing process “are more inclined to use it to revise and edit their drafts than they would be if they received the suggestions on a graded, polished copy . . . Focusing on individual students’ immediate writing needs, this ongoing feedback is a form of differentiated instruction that complements the teaching of mini-lessons to small groups or the whole class” (Petersen 1). And Sommers notes that particular kinds of feedback are more important that others at certain times; for example, early comments should respond to global, not local, concerns: “Our comments need to be suited to the draft we are reading. In a first or second draft, we need to respond as any reader would, registering questions, reflecting befuddlement, and noting places where we are puzzled about the meaning of the text” (155). Even after reflecting on the difficulties of providing such rich reader response, author/educator Grant Wiggins still claims: “A great problem in education, however, is untimely feedback. Vital feedback on key performances often comes days, weeks, or even months after the performance—think of writing and handing in papers or getting back results on standardized tests. As educators, we should work overtime to figure out ways to ensure that students get more timely feedback and opportunities to use it while the attempt and effects are still fresh in their minds” (1).

**Writing More Is Better**

There is ample evidence to support the assertion that to become a better writer, one must write. In her essay “Write More, Grade Less” Lisa Lucas claims that “writing frequently is undisputedly the best way to help students gain fluency,” and Carnegie Mellon reminds its instructors that “in order for students to learn to write well, we must increase the amount and frequency of writing they do, vary the types of writing, and provide feedback on their performance so they can continue to develop as writers” (Lucas 238; “Respond to Student
Kellogg affirms that assertion in citing a 1993 study showing “that student reported gains in writing are linked directly to the “number of opportunities to compose in writing classes” (Kellogg 8).

**Teachers Have Limited Time to Respond**

Since writing more is helpful in students learning to write well, teachers must then decide how they will respond in a timely way to the many words/sentences/paragraphs/essays required in helping a student learn to communicate effectively. Of course, because time is finite, teachers often may feel “that a major impediment to assigning enough writing tasks is the time and effort involved in grading papers to provide feedback” (Kellogg 8).

**Purposes of Responding**

Responding to student writing can take many forms and teachers can have many purposes in providing it: to evaluate, to provide feedback, to assign grades, to assess progress. In his text *Re-Articulating Writing Assessment*, Brian Huot suggests that before we quickly move to the question of how we respond, “we first focus on why we respond” (112). He suggests that we “read student writing to teach student writers,” so “teacher commentary should be used to foster writing skills in our students” (113). While that seems self-evident, teachers can easily slide into using comments to justify grades or rank students (Huot 64, 75).

**Elements of Good Feedback**

Reading student writing, then, as Huot suggests, to teach student writers, what should we look for and what does the research show are elements of good feedback? Brookhart describes good feedback in terms of student response. “Your feedback is good if it gets the following results: your students do learn--their work improves; your students become more motivated--they believe they can learn; they want to learn, and they take more control over their own
learning; [and] your classroom becomes a place where feedback, including constructive
criticism, is valued and viewed as productive” (30) In her article in support of the Collins
Writing Program, Lisa Lucas asserts that research shows that frequent, focused feedback is the
most effective kind (Lucas 139). Lucas also cites Wiggins (1998) in stating “that to serve
learning, feedback must meet four criteria: It must be timely, specific, understandable to the
receiver, and formed to allow for self-adjustment on the student’s part. Specificity is essential in
order to help students understand both their strengths and the areas in which they can improve “
(Lucas 138).

   Petersen urges that written comments “be given in the spirit of showing student writers
the positive effects their writing has on readers, identify potential areas where students may
revise their writing to clarify meaning or more fully engage readers,” and “take the form of
suggestions, observations and open-ended questions, rather than instructions and criticisms”
(Peterson 3). Nancy Sommers reminds us that “the key to successful commenting is to have what
is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each
other” (155) Instructors are urged to remember that feedback is dialogic, that commenting is a
form of conversation, and that the commenting itself is meant to be “discursive” and
“interactive” (Nicol 503). Nicol describes effective feedback as “understandable . . . selective . .
timely . . . contextualised[sic] . . . nonjudgmental . . . balanced . . . forward looking . .
transferable . . . [and] personal,” noting that implementing these practices is challenging (512-13). Wiggins offers a similar list of recommendations: “Whether feedback is just there to be
grasped or is provided by another person, helpful feedback is goal-referenced; tangible and
transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; ongoing; and
consistent” (1).
Intermittent or No Feedback

Another tool teachers can use which may seem counterintuitive is the use of intermittent or no feedback, in essence, forcing the student to provide feedback to himself/herself. A study conducted at the University of Massachusetts in 2001 showed that “feedback [from others] can prevent students from engaging in the active processing that results in generalized understanding. Delayed feedback and intermittent feedback force students to do this” (Sims-Knight 3). In an article instructing online writing teachers, Cox and Black propose that “there are some situations where giving no feedback to your students can provide rich learning opportunities that encourage students’ cognitive presence,” for example, posting on discussion boards or creating word sketches (383). And while formative feedback is important, unmonitored practice time can be equally important: “Certainly a good deal of practice takes place under the guidance and coaching of professionals—analagous to providing drafts for teachers who provide formative feedback. But highly skilled athletes and performers also practice a great deal on their own, privately, without receiving feedback. A musician, for example, typically attends lessons with an expert once per week but practices skills daily on his or her own, without receiving immediate feedback.... As crucial as formative feedback is in helping learners improve, then, it also seems apparent that learners in any domain also need opportunities to practice their skill extensively, at times without an audience. This awareness might encourage all of us, across disciplines, to integrate writing more enthusiastically into the curriculum; if opportunities to write extensively ultimately matter more than feedback, we can be freed of the perceived obligation to read and respond to every single word and instead, just ask our students to do as athletes- and musicians-in-training do: engage as often as possible in the target skill” (Cassity 30).
Similarly, Kellogg proposes that while it is clear that research shows that students plainly need to write more, instructors should also recognize the benefits of intermittent feedback: students should write more frequently but instructors do not need to grade all writing (Kellogg 250). Additionally, Kellogg cites a study that supports his “less is more proposal” in terms of commenting on essays. “Intermittent feedback has been shown to slow the acquisition of a skill during training compared with continuous feedback, but it has the benefit of enhancing long term retention of the skill” (Kellogg 261). In other words, instructors often feel that each piece and element of student work be evaluated; to not respond to student writing is to be lazy or worse—to allow bad habits to develop in their students. This study suggests that the opposite may be true: perhaps the best way to truly affect students’ writing in the long term is to allow them to write more (practice the skill), to grapple with articulating their ideas on their own, and to purposefully not give them continuous feedback. Again, Kellogg cites a study that shows that the “amount of feedback is less important than the opportunities to compose in writing class” (Kellogg 262).

**Strategies for Responding**

Still, despite the difficulties of providing rich feedback, teachers have developed and adopted many strategies for efficiently and effectively dealing with student writing. In her article “Write More, Grade Less,” Lisa Lucas offers the Collins Writing Program as a proven model (Lucas 136). The Collins Program divides all writing into five levels. The first two levels or Quickwrites focus on writer fluidity and require little instructor feedback, either a completion grade or a quick check for comprehension. The third level works on refining writer skills but makes use of two or three focus correction areas that, again, make for quicker grading. The fourth type of writing undergoes peer editing before being submitted to a teacher who will assess
based on chosen focus correction areas. The fifth level is publishable writing that has undergone extensive student/peer editing before submission. She claims that the program “has a sound research base...and is easy to implement and makes sense; it provides students with meaningful assignments and teachers with clear guidelines on how to efficiently grade writing” (Lucas 136). A distinguished scholar in this field, Peter Elbow concurs. He suggests two ways to make the grading of writing “easier, fairer and more helpful for students: using minimal grades or fewer levels of quality, and using criteria that spell out the features of good writing that we are looking for in the assignment” (Elbow 14).

**Harmful Feedback**

While good feedback appears to help student writers, not all feedback is equally useful. In “What’s Wrong with Giving Students Feedback,” Sims-Knight finds that “Although there are strong and consistent findings that feedback improves immediate performance under some circumstances, it is also clear that in some situations feedback is irrelevant and sometimes even harmful. In a meta-analysis of research in educational, organizational, and laboratory settings, Kluger and DeLisi found that in one-third of the comparisons the feedback condition had worse performance than the group who was given no feedback.” (1) This is especially true in the case of grades or evaluative comments which draw the attention of the student “away from the learning task” (3) They cite research indicating that both praise and feedback that was designed to discourage eliminate the positive effect of feedback, instead distracting the writer’s attention from the task and toward self (3). Other research studies come to similar conclusions. The Educational Testing Service study previously cited shows that “a grade appears to undermine the effort that students are willing to put forward in order to improve their work. Receiving a satisfactory grade may prevent students from channeling their effort toward further mastery of
their work; rather, their focus on the quantitative aspect of learning leads them to lose motivation before they can perfect their work” (Lipnevich and Smith 37). The study did show that grades “may be helpful if no other options are available and can beneficially be accompanied by some form of encouragement. At the same time, grades were shown to decrease the effect of detailed feedback. It appears that this occurs because it reduces a sense of self-efficacy and elicits negative affect around the assessment task” (Lipnevich and Smith 39).

Brookhart’s review of current research reveals a similar disincentive with grades: “Butler and Nisan’s work affirms an observation that many classroom teachers have made about their students: if a paper is returned with both a grade and a comment, many students will pay attention to the grade and ignore the comment. The grade “trumps” the comment; the student will read a comment that the teacher intended to be descriptive as an explanation of the grade” (30). Similarly, Kellogg claims that often grades have a dampening effect, particularly on high achieving students and that “receiving positive feedback...can have the effect of reducing effort at the task as the writer brings performance down to match the socially prescribed standard” (Kellogg 261). Peter Elbow would concur. He asserts that grades present several challenges in a writing program, among them that grades “undermine the climate for teaching and learning” (Elbow 127). Knowing the power of grades, many teachers decide to focus the bulk of their commenting energies on drafts and use only a brief holistic comment to accompany a final grade.

**Using Peers**

While grades are largely unhelpful, another feedback strategy which research shows can help developing writers and decrease workload for instructors is peer review. “Peer review offers a way to assign more and longer writing tasks without overburdening already stressed instructors... Peers... Peer review also allows each student to become directly involved in a collaborative learning
effort. The student benefits greatly from commenting on the work of others, and engaging in the critical thinking skills necessary to, in essence, teach the art of writing to his classmates” (Limbach 2). As Julia Kaufman points out in her study on peer online assessments, many educators “note that students who assess the work of their peers are engaging in a cognitively demanding activity that extends their understanding of subject matter and writing. For the student who receives peer review, studies report deepened subject matter knowledge (Barak and Rafaeli 2004; Venables and Summit 2003) and a more positive attitude about writing (Katstra et al. 1987)” (2). Other “research shows that peers can also make helpful contributions to students’ writing development. They provide reader-based feedback that shows student writers the effect that the writing is having on a peer audience” (Petersen 3). Indeed, some studies show that peer comments and feedback make more of a difference than instructor comments, and feedback from multiple peers benefitted the most (Kellogg 262).

**Challenges with Peer Review**

One of the primary reasons peer review is not used, however, is because of perceived and real peer bias in reviewing writing. Students may be either too harsh or too easy in judging other’s works or they may just not go to the trouble to think critically about the piece of writing (Limbach 2). In her paper exploring teacher commentary and student revision, Deborah Morris related the challenges she found in using peer review:

> Even though I carefully design Peer Review sheets to allow a peer reader to give strong, formative feedback to the writer of the draft, the actual feedback that is given often varies based on the writing level (or interest level) of the peer reader. I try to have students seek out different peer readers for each draft in order to gain different feedback, but sometimes students will seek only readers whom they see as “equals” in writing ability or social
status. In Zoe’s case, she had multiple peer reviews completed by different peer readers, but interestingly, all three peers were minority students who were also struggling writers so the level of feedback that she received was minimal. While all blanks were filled with some sort of response, the reviewers gave only positive feedback and often did not fully answer the prompt/question (Morris 187).

**Ways to Meet Challenges of Peer Review**

Researchers have been attempting to address the problem Morris and others raise. One study shows that extensive coaching for students early in the year (as much as seven hours) does make them more effective reviewers and ultimately helps student writing (Stanley). Wiggins concurs that for peer review to work, “it's essential . . . to train students to do small-group peer review to high standards, without immature criticisms or unhelpful praise” (1).

Another possible answer is the use of technology to facilitate peer to peer interactions. One such tool is Peerceptiv, uses “the journal publication process as a model. Students write and publish a paper online, receive feedback from reviewers, revise the paper and respond to the reviewers, and then publish the final draft” (Kellogg 262). This program was formerly known as SWoRD Peer Assessment but has been purchased by Panther Corporation and remodeled as Peerceptiv. “Peerceptiv is a **cloud-based**, double-blind student peer-to-peer student assessment system, with no software to download or servers to support. Students upload their assignments into Peerceptiv, which automatically and anonymously assigns the document to from 3 to 6 of the student’s classmates . . . Peerceptiv engages students on the giving side of the formative feedback loop, making assessment part of the learning process itself, and allows instructors to assign the tasks that build these skills without placing more burdens on their time (“Why Peerceptive?”). Another study, however, found students had negative perceptions of this online
tool and investigated possible reasons (Kaufman 1). The study showed that the students were concerned about the fairness of using peer review when it stood alone; when it was used in conjunction with instructor review, there was no negative perception. The study also concluded that better training in use of the program would help “students to give more positive, useful feedback to their peers” and that “students’ continued exposure to peer assessment (Sluijsmans et al. 2001; Wen and Tsai 2006) will help them to view that assessment more positively” (Kaufman 11).

**Rubrics**

Rubrics are another way some teachers have found to facilitate grading and provide effective feedback. Many teachers and students feel that rubrics make standards clear and grading more fair. From the students’ perspective, one study found that students preferred rubrics to support the grade rather than comments because the instructor appeared to be more objective (Smith 329). Others, however, argue against rubrics because they standardize too much and leave out “the human response of the reader. Rubrics ‘work’ largely because they look at a piece of writing with blinders on; rubrics only ‘see’ what they are designed to see” (Morris 4). In his text on rubrics, Bob Broad argues that “traditional rubrics and scoring guides prevent us from telling the truth about what we believe, what we teach, and what we value in composition courses and programs” (Broad 2). While he acknowledges that “traditional rubrics achieve evaluative brevity and clarity” he asserts that “in so doing, they surrender their descriptive and informative potential: responsiveness, detail, and complexity in accounting for how writing is actually evaluated” (Broad 2). Broad suggests that “instead of a process of inquiry and a document that would highlight for our students the complexity, ambiguity, and context-sensitivity of rhetorical evaluation, we have presented our students with a process and
document born long ago of a very different need: to make assessment quick, simple, and agreeable. In the field of writing assessment, increasing demands for truthfulness, usefulness, and meaningfulness are now at odds with the requirements of efficiency and standardization. The age of the rubric has passed” (Broad 4). Still, many instructors still value rubrics, particularly in conjunction with comments, for some of the the very elements Broad sees as challenging: their clearly stated criteria, perceived objectivity, and efficiency.

Best Practices

Since there are many approaches to managing student writing and the task of assessment, it is worthwhile to examine exactly what the research now defines as “best practices.” In an intriguing article, Dana Ferris explored whether teachers actually are using, not just acknowledging, accepted best practices with their students. She offered an extensively sourced list of best practices in writing teacher responses including in part the following:

1. Teacher feedback (whether written or oral) should focus on a range of issues, including content, organization, language, mechanics, and style, and the focus of response should depend upon individual students’ needs at that point in time.
2. Feedback should be provided on multiple drafts of student papers, not only final graded drafts.
3. Students should receive feedback from multiple sources (e.g., instructor and peers) so that they can benefit from reactions from different readers.
4. Teachers should give clear and text-specific feedback that includes both encouragement and constructive criticism and that avoids appropriation (taking over) the student’s text. Where possible, questions are preferable to imperatives, as they are less directive and promote student autonomy.
5. Selective error feedback on several patterns of error is more beneficial than comprehensive error correction, as the latter is exhausting and overwhelming to teachers and students.

6. If feedback on errors is provided, indirect error feedback (in which the error is indicated but not corrected) is more beneficial to long-term student development than direct correction (in which the teacher or peer provides the correct form to the writer).

7. For peer response activities to be successful, the teacher should (a) model the process for students before beginning (i.e., provide training); (b) structure peer response tasks carefully; (c) form peer review groups thoughtfully; and (d) include accountability/reflection mechanisms so that students take the process seriously. (Ferris 8)

Interestingly, Ferris does not offer intermittent or no feedback as a possible strategy for helping student writers. This omission may be because this research was predicated on situations in which the feedback itself was being studied, not the lack of it.

**Technology Answers to Feedback**

The best practices Ferris offers still require large investments of teacher time and energy to provide powerful feedback. Ferris describes responding to writing as “ubiquitous . . . time-consuming and often exhausting” (22). To ease the load on teachers and supplement teacher and peer feedback, electronic feedback is being explored as a way to speed the feedback cycle while still providing quality feedback.

One critical research study comparing electronic versus instructor feedback was a research project in 2007 funded by the Educational Testing Service examining the effect of
feedback on college writing students (Lipnevich and Smith 13). The experiment had students write an online essay. Each essay then received no feedback, detailed instructor feedback, or detailed computer feedback. Additional input included praise or no praise and grade or no grade.

Students were placed in a computer lab and asked to write a 500-word essay for the psychology course they were in. Students had an extensive rubric they could reference as they wrote. They submitted their essays online and were invited to return the next week. Upon return, some students were asked to reread their essays, consult the rubric, and revise their work. The second group was shown their graded essay along with feedback. They then filled out a short evaluation and continued on to revising their essays using the feedback they received. Both groups answered an evaluation on the effectiveness of the feedback they received. ETS software E-rater was used in assessing as well as instructor input for the content. The E-rater technology assesses each essay for grammar, mechanics, usage, style (overlong long or short sentences and repeated word choices), vocabulary, and organization/development (Monaghan 4). The group was divided into three parts with one third of the students receiving no feedback. With another third of the students, the feedback they received was actually computer generated but personalized so that it appeared to be from an instructor (personal names, more casual comments, and even a photo of a professor as the comment icon). The remaining third group received computer generated comments that were impersonal and neutral. Additionally, three levels of praise were assigned to students. The final essays were then scored and correlated (Lipnevich and Smith 21).

The analysis of this study showed that “feedback strongly influenced students’ subsequent performance, but there were no differences for perceived source of feedback. Receipt of a grade led to a substantial decline in performance for students who
thought the grade had come from the instructor, but a praise statement from the instructor appeared to ameliorate that effect. In the absence of detailed feedback, a grade appeared to modestly enhance subsequent performance” (Lipnevich and Smith 24). “The most pervasive and strongest finding of the study is that descriptive feedback specific to individual work is critical to improvement . . . It is interesting to note that the highest performing group in the study was the one receiving detailed feedback perceived to come from the instructor with no grade and no praise accompanying it” (Lipnevich and Smith 31). For example, an example from the ETS study included this feedback: “Name, these sentences begin with coordinating conjunctions. Try to combine the sentence that begins with but with the sentence that comes before it” (Lipnevich and Smith 28). The study cites Kluger and DeNisi’s (1996) findings that feedback containing information about a student’s performance and detailed prescriptions were much more effective than just summative feedback. The study suggests that grades (even good ones) may cause a student to focus on the grade rather than mastery (Lipnevich and Smith 34).

Finally, as technology becomes ubiquitous, the cumulative results of online and electronic tools are providing more and more information about what actually transpires in teacher commenting. In fact, as more and more teachers and students use digital tools, so does the body of information available for analysis, including information about effective feedback. At a study conducted at a Florida university, head researcher Zachary Dixon examined whether instructors at their university actually used their program’s rubric in making comments on student papers. He noted that they “were curious to see if instructors and students explicitly used these terms when discussing texts. In other words, we were interested in exploring how often our instructors explicitly employ language from our programmatic rubric within their own comments because we thought this analysis would give us some insight into our
students’ writing and perhaps identify needed additional curricular materials or rubric changes” (Smith 242). As they seek to improve writing at the university, the hope is that this electronic information will inform and mold choices in writing instruction. He notes that many studies “have repeatedly found that teachers tend to overemphasize local concerns—issues related to ‘correctness’ such as grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and word choice—over more global, rhetorical concerns—issues more related to deep learning matters, such as a student’s ability to summarize multiple sources and put them in conversation with one another from an historical, causal, or analytical perspective” (Smith 241).

Dixon predicts that as this body of information grows, analysis of it will produce much worthwhile information about what really goes on in the writing and responding process. Dixon concluded, “When students conduct their writing in digital formats their favorite subjects, their stylistic traits, their common errors, their strengths, and their instructors’ responses become available for analysis” (Smith 251). All of this information will, hopefully, inform and change our approach to commenting on and assessing writing effectively.

Automated essay scoring continues to attract attention and research as a possible means of addressing helping writers write more and get feedback. The argument over the usefulness of electronic grading, however, can sometimes be quite divided. A 2013 article discussed a statement adopted by the NCTE asserting that using computers to assess writing on standardized tests “can short circuit the process of developing ideas in writing” (Berrett 2). The chair of the NCTE committee drafting the statement explains that algorithms used in these programs predicts good answers “largely on its use of certain words” rather than other less easily recognized components of good writing (Berrett 2). Similarly, several researchers have highlighted flaws in this technology, noting that some programs are “insensitive to cohesive links among sentences,
syntactical mistakes, and errors in factual content” (McGee cited in Kellogg 263). The chair of the NCTE worries also that having machines grade writing tells students that writing is not important, and that teachers will begin training students in writing that has little substance or creativity (Berrett 2). With an opposing view, Marc Bousquet of Emory University claims that human grades are equally flawed and research (and common sense) shows that to be true. As several companies (ETS among them) have attempted to process hundreds of thousands of essays, they have struggled to provide a fair system using human evaluators. “Human evaluators must be extensively trained to reach adequately high levels of interrater reliability. Fatigue, mood, and motivation add variability to the outcome in ways that are hard to control” (Kellogg 263). But Mark Shermis (University of Akron) is lead researcher in a study that shows that humans and computers were equally adept at grading “short, impromptu prompts” (Berrett 2). MIT’s Les Perlman, however, says computers can be fooled but still supports the use of e-raters in certain instances. He reminds us that “An important distinction . . . is whether machines are used for high-stakes tests or for formative evaluations, which are likely to be low-stakes assignments that a student can revise and resubmit” (Berrett 2).

The previously mentioned research study by Educational Testing Service adds other interesting findings about computer generated feedback. In this experiment, students revised essays based on computer and (supposed) instructor comments. The analysis showed that, “students’ improvement in performance was nearly equivalent for both computer-feedback and instructor feedback conditions (Lipnevich and Smith 32). The presentation of meaningful comment, regardless of their source, was shown to help students learn” (Lipnevich and Smith 32). Interestingly, student perception was that the instructor’s feedback was of more value than the computers, but the study concluded, “It is evident that, notwithstanding the higher perceived
accuracy of instructor’s feedback, students’ need for guidance and assistance may be addressed with equal success by both computer- and instructor-generated feedback” (Lipnevich and Smith 35). Examples of the specific instructor comments compared with the computer comments generated in the ETS research study show that the instructor comments includes only a marginally more personal tone, but that tone may make a difference:

Instructor: “Name, a good essay usually contains three main ideas, each developed in a paragraph. Use examples, explanations, and details to support and extend your main ideas. Try to center them around the theories of motivation I discussed in class. Include details and theory-specific terminology.”

Computer: “Content: A good essay usually contains three main ideas, each developed in a paragraph. Use examples, explanations, and details to support and extend your main ideas. Center them around the theories of motivation. Include details and theory-specific terminology” (Lipnevich and Smith 28).

Both comments seemed appropriately focused to allow student writers to make appropriate changes.

Audio feedback may prove useful in saving time in commenting.

Another form of technology which appears to show promise in saving teacher time and/or energy while providing robust feedback is audio feedback. Research done on giving feedback in an online class suggests that “audio recordings can be an effective way to reinforce teacher presence while taking less time to produce. In a self-study of four classes, [the instructor] found audio end comments took half the time to create as written ones” (Cox, Black 387). In a study exploring the use of Kaizena, an audio commenting tool used in Google docs, “teachers in both user groups noted that providing audio feedback with Kaizena saved them time when compared
to providing written feedback” (Bless 180). Even when teachers have found that audio commenting has not saved them time, they still comment that “providing personalized and detailed audio feedback was less taxing than providing written feedback” (Bless 192). Another instructor commented that “the physiological intensity (degree of concentration, stress, and marking ennui)...was much lower when producing audio files over a prolonged period” (Bless 103). Some students and teachers find audio comments difficult to link to actual text, but more advanced programs (Kaizena) are attempting to solve this disconnect using the highlight features of Google docs.

**Student Self-Feedback**

In addition to teachers, peers, and technology, the student’s ability to assess her own writing can be an often overlooked but powerful element. Sommers urges teachers to “sabotage our students’ convictions that the drafts they have written are complete and coherent” and “force[] them back into the chaos” (154). Ultimately, claims Huot, “people who write well have the ability to assess their own writing, and if we are to teach students to write successfully, then we have to teach them to assess their own writing” (10). Inoue asserts that students need to learn what their own writing needs: “My students must leave my course with the beginnings of a theorizing (or at least an understanding) of their own writing and assessment practices. They can’t get this if I assess their writing for them” (210).

**Students Must Use Feedback for It To Be Effective**

Indeed, all of this feedback, from others and self, however finely crafted and delivered, is ultimately of little value (and a waste of teachers’ efforts) if students do not actually use it. In the conclusion of an article summarizing best practices and examining whether teachers actually implement these practices, Dana Ferris suggests that “teachers should pay more attention to what
students do after receiving feedback. There are useful ways in which teachers can ask students to reflect upon and analyze feedback they have received from instructors or peers and how it might apply to their future writing. Having put so much effort into constructing oral or written commentary, teachers should take the final step of ensuring that students can and do utilize it effectively (see also Hamp-Lyons, 2006)” (21). Reid and others concur that “extensive comments on essays that students do not actually revise have limited pedagogical value” (1). In addition to the actual revisions a student makes, Petersen and others suggest that students should “submit a ‘revise-and-resubmit’ letter, explaining how the feedback has been addressed, or providing a rationale for disregarding it. Writing such letters enhances students’ metacognitive awareness of their writing processes and intentions” (3).

**Learning to Write Well Takes Time**

Still, neither students nor teachers will likely see fast improvement in writing skills no matter the quality of feedback. Kellogg and others remind us that learning to write well is a long process, requiring the same elements of practice that competitive athletes and musicians employ. Kellogg: “The development of writing skills arguably requires decades of learning and moves through increasingly sophisticated stages of knowledge-telling, knowledge-transforming, and knowledgecrafting. Serious written composition simultaneously challenges the human capacities for language, memory, and thinking. The most advanced stage - achieved only at professional levels of expertise - involves routinely and adeptly juggling multiple representations in working memory and coordinating numerous interactions among multiple writing processes” (Kellogg 20). Kellogg describes the steps of this process as “deliberative practice” and says that for writers to grow, the process must involve “(1) effortful exertion to improve performance, (2) intrinsic motivation to engage in the task, (3) practice tasks that are within reach of the
individual’s current level of ability, (4) feedback that provides knowledge of results, and (5) high levels of repetition” (17). Cassity concurs “Key to training is to provide learners with frequent--ideally daily--opportunities to use the target skill over a lengthy period of time, receiving regular formative feedback, and being provided immediate opportunities to apply and assimilate that feedback” (Cassity 27). Quoting Kellogg, Cassity reminds us that despite our eagerness to see clear progress in the student writers under our care, research suggests a “time lag is built in to developing writers cognitive structure” (23). It may appear that progress has slowed or stopped when it hasn’t.

Conclusions

Research then, confirms what writers teachers already know: Students need to write to become better writers and effective feedback can help. This feedback can come from teachers, peers, technology, or self and, among many important elements, it needs to be timely. Teachers should remember that “fewer, carefully-targeted, engaged-with comments” will be more effective than numerous global and local comments (Reid). The element of timeliness can also be facilitated through using rubrics, peers, technology, and by training students to self-assess. Lastly, learning to write well is a complex skill taking many years (much like learning to comment on student writing), and growth will likely happen unevenly. Teachers should recognize that the burden of helping burgeoning writers is not entirely dependent on instructors’ copious written comments. With commenting feedback, sometimes less is more, and other feedback strategies can move writers forward. The good news for writing teachers is that, with some different approaches, perhaps those late nights grading don’t have be quite so late.


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Project 2 revised (Teaching)

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Dr. Riley-Mukavetz

English 6200

24 March 2017, Revised 16 February 2018

WRITER’S MEMO

Good morning, Dr. RM,

Composing this M.A.D assignment has been a challenge, but one I am glad to be grappling with. I really appreciate your requirements that we marry lesson plans and researched best practice. This is exactly what I need so that I leave this class not just thinking that I have encountered lots of good ideas, but that I leave this class with a clear vision of the how and why I will set up my next classroom.

AUDIENCE:

My audience for this project is ninth grade English students of mixed ability in an independent school. Interestingly, I have found teachers in independent schools sometimes more traditional in their practices than I perceive many public high school teachers are. For that reason I think it is even more important that students be exposed to a range of writing purposes, particularly in high school where often I have found the focus to be five paragraph essays and literary analysis. This project attempts to insert some diversity of purpose into the writing classroom.

PURPOSE:

My purpose in this project is for students to practice, become familiar with, and/or be reminded of the many faces and kinds of writing, specifically writing to express and reflect,
inform and explain, evaluate and judge, and inquire and explore. I have modeled much of what I intend to do using Kelly Gallagher’s two books: *Write Like This* and *In the Best Interests of Students*. Ultimately each student will choose a topic they will use as a focal point for this unit. They will create several pieces for each kind of writing (on varied topics) with one piece of each type of writing centered on their chosen topic. The goal is for them to create 4-6 pieces of different types of writing all centered around the same topic and for each to create a short e-magazine composed of their work. For example, a student violinist might choose violin as her topic and write an express/reflect piece, inform/explain piece, evaluate/judge piece, and inquire/explore piece about different facets of the violin world. I believe this project is in the best interests of students, but I think it is also in my best interests. I need to focus on including different kinds of writing in my classroom rather than depending on the familiar every year. In the past, my writing assignments have looked something like this:

1. Begin the year with daily or maybe three times a week of reflective writing on random prompts I would post as a bellringer activity. My rationale was that this task got students writing and honed the skill of fluency, ideas I was pretty sure I had read in some article. I probably also did this because I personally like journaling and I enjoyed the connection of reading students’ thoughts. My plan was to have students share these with me (either electronically or hard journals) each three weeks. They were graded for completion. What actually happened was that gradually I would assign these more and more infrequently as the year got busier, and soon they would disappear. Some magic dust made them disappear from the grading scale, too, and I would offer vague answers when students asked why we dropped them.

2. For each major work that we read in class (and rarely did I include any individual reading), students would write a critical essay, typically five paragraph, from a list of topics (3-5) I would choose. My rationale for this was that the task prepared them for the next grade level, forced them to organize scattered thoughts, forced them to examine the literature more closely, prodded them to think. Over the year, I would do less and less scaffolding.

3. For each major work that we did (or in between), I would assign a creative project. Sometimes it would allow no choice. (Write a mini-epic of 2-3 pages using the
Odyssey as a model. Include this checklist of elements.) Other times, I would include creative writing as one choice among other choices (visual, auditory). My rationale here was that it allowed students’ right brains to work and gave my creative writers some relief from that awful analytical writing which kept them in boxes. I also assigned this because it was interesting. These projects I typically wanted to read (as opposed to the critical essays which were like kale: good for all of us but boring).

4. I would always include a research paper of typically 5-6 pages. Year after year I assigned one on the war poets from the Great War. Each student would do some initial research and then pick a poet. The paper required many check ins and a formulaic approach (notecards! and outlines!). Often, their resources were already curated for them by the kindly librarian. In general, students liked learning about real people in real events. They struggled with the poetry explication requirement. It was hard going for them and me, but I felt that they learned a ton about using MLA and a little about synthesizing sources.

5. Occasionally, I would assign a persuasive paper after asking students to find a topic they felt strongly about. They I asked them to turn the paper into a speech. This helped them see the similarities and differences of each. And presenting their speeches was a highlight. They were so much more invested in the whole assignment because they knew their peers would see it.

I also have asked students to write a This I Believe speech and record it. In hindsight, I think this was a very valuable assignment as it merged expression and reflection and gave us the chance to talk about how story can show much better than telling.

As I think about these past years and assignments and hold them up to much of the research we have been reading, I see some successes and many flaws. As I struggle with creating this project, I am reminded that because teaching writing is difficult, I have often followed the same path of least resistance and replicated sub-par assignments and mirrored methods I saw modeled in the classroom as a student. Sitting here drafting this project has reminded me of the repetition of those awesome and awful times in August when I am preparing for the year. With school a week away, I might have two to three days to prepare a strategy for the year (if those darn administrators actually let us have planning time and those darn linear brained math teachers interrupting my planning). Each August, I sit down at the computer and prepare to do it right
this time. Not get caught up in the urgent. Not let curriculum and book choices mandate what I teach. Focus on the important. Promise myself and my students that this year things will be different--more real, more practical, more creative, more authentic, more sustainable, more stretching, more humane, more…

And then--thinking is hard. Remembering what is most important and why is hard. But time is passing so I take what I think is most important in one hand and my book choices in the other and then try to cram all of it into the neat lesson plan boxes for the year. As I do, I occasionally get excited and then overwhelmed. How do I get it all in? I think of the hopeful students who will soon be in front of me. I feel the eyes of parents looking over my shoulder. Am I having students write enough? Read enough? Am I commenting enough? Are we doing grammar enough? What about SAT vocabulary? But echoes of research and other experienced teachers ask different questions: Are you writing yourself, Liz? Will you write in front of your students? Have you talked with your students one one one lately? Have you listened to your students? Have you let your students learn from each other?

So that is a long way around to get back to the purpose for this project. I would like to start the school year reminding students and me of the many different purposes of writing and have them write a good deal before we dive into writing about literature. I think I have often considered other kinds of writing in my classroom as “soft,” when really, aside from English classes, writing critical analysis of literature has limited applications, although the skill sets behind it have many.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

The goals I have for my students are many:

- I would like my students to explore ideas about subjects they care about
- I would like them to be challenged by different types of writing
● I would like them to become aware of different kinds of writing in their lives
● I want them to experience the fun of being creative and enjoying their own unique thoughts
● I want them to practice writing
● I want them to see writing and thinking taking place as I model
● I want them to try out their ideas on me and their peers and get helpful feedback
● I want them to create a finished project of a short e-zine that they can share with peers
● I want them to express and reflect, inform and explain, evaluate and judge, inquire and explore

QUESTIONS:

I am very interested in researching and getting more information about actually using the following strategies because I know myself well enough to know that unless I can clearly see how I would use a great sounding practice, I won’t actually try it in my classroom.

Using modeling in the classroom. Questions: How do you do this authentically if you teach five sections of the same class every day? My creativity is not endless. And writing is hard. At some point I would think I would have to be acting and trying to act authentic just sounds wrong from the start.

What if I am a slow thinker and writer (and I am)? How do I keep the class moving as I am sitting there thinking out loud? What about trying to keep the goof offs in the back on task as I am trying to write? How does this actually work?

Using the workshop approach. How do you really keep students on task when doing this?

How do I make the one on one conferencing time worthwhile and not run over? What does workshopping really mean? Urbanski refers often to Graves and I need to go back and read him.

What does formative assessment really look like?

Peer Review. How does peer review work best? I have struggled with this in my classes.
TIMING:

This assignment would be the one of the first we would do in the school year. I am assuming students are coming from varied backgrounds because often students change schools between eighth and ninth grade, although in a K-12 independent school there can be large retention. The idea would be to do an overview of lots of different kinds of writing for the first five weeks, and then go back and look at each more specifically through the year. I am trying to change up the typical scenario in my classroom in which we start into a major assignment (typically a character analysis from a short story) a few weeks into the year and then spend three weeks on that. By the end of that assignment, it is approaching the end of the first quarter and the only writing we have done is some reflections in our journals and one five paragraph essay--and students are not all that thrilled about writing because it is largely irrelevant to their lives.

The cost is, of course, that they will be five weeks into school and not have completed a critical analysis based on literature--but knowing what I know now, I can live with that. Ideally, this overview project would be followed by six other projects, each taking up a different kind of writing to focus on: express and reflect, inform and explain, evaluate and judge, inquire and explore, analyze and interpret, take a stand/propose a solution.

I am purposely omitting the last two types of writing (analysis/persuasive) from this project because I am confident we will do plenty of those this year (and there is not enough time to do them justice). In fact, I would like to follow this overview with a unit on analyzing and interpreting followed by a unit on taking a stand and proposing a solution. Particularly with the analysis and interpretation unit, I am looking forward to exploring analysis with students generally and in other writing, then moving it to the literature we are studying, and then back out
again to writing outside the classroom. Then we might cycle back to where we began, express and reflect, depending on the literature we are studying at the time.

I recognize, too, that this focus on writing will mean that we are not studying any literature together. I will have students do independent reading for this first five weeks and then we will move into studying a novel together.

What have I learned or experienced while composing this project? I have new grace for myself for struggling in the writing classroom. It is difficult, very difficult, to take the readings and theory and actually apply them to the classroom. I now understand why I have continued to replicate less than my ideal in the classroom: Before I may not even have known what best practices were. Now I do know, but implementing them and keeping laser focused on them is difficult because of all the competing goods. Still, I have found this project very worthwhile because it has caused me to mentally walk through the hours and days of class time and imagine what the reality (and successes and challenges) of these strategies would really look like. It has also opened my eyes to the ways in which literature drives so much of the activities which happen in the classroom. While that is not all bad, writing often seems to take second place and it seems essential that I carve out the time and energy required if I truly value writing.

I think I mentioned several questions earlier. Really, this project has shown me that I have so many mental gaps in envisioning how I would actually implement many of these strategies or perspectives. I’m glad we still have a month of reading and thinking before this class is over. I need it. I do imagine coming back and revisiting and reworking these ideas. As I’ve said before, this kind of grappling is exactly what I hoped to do in my graduate work and I want to keep wrestling with ideology and pedagogy and strategies and my own internal teaching compass as I consider what will be my north stars in the classroom.
DAILY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1:
The purpose of Week 1 is to introduce the unit and explain the purposes behind it. One goal for this week is to remind students of the many different purposes that writing can serve and have us find examples of different kinds of writing. Then we will practice creating our own topics. The end goal of this project is that we will each create 4-6 pieces of writing revolving around a specific topic we are interested in. I might choose cooking while someone else might choose violin or skateboarding or Star Wars. At the end of the unit we will gather the pieces together in magazines and share these with each other.

Day 1--I will introduce the unit and go over Handout 1 which explains the unit. Then we will talk about different types of writing and real world examples (Handout 2) might look like (Gallagher’s phrase)¹ and look at chart of examples of them (Handout 3). Then I will hand out magazines and we will look for examples of each. Before the students do, I will model searching and finding articles which fit the different categories which will allow students to hear me think aloud as I choose and decide what type of writing each is. Students should write down the titles and page numbers of their articles.

Day 2--Continue. Remind students that there can be overlap in types of writing. Then have students Pair/Share their findings with one other person. Give preview of 1 topic, 18 subjects assignment which we will complete in tomorrow’s class.

Day 3--I will model 1 topic, 15 subjects (Handout 4) which I have renamed a DI chart (deep interest) chart.² Then I will have students complete the chart. I will circulate* (workshop).

¹ Both Gallagher and Urbanski remind us of the importance of using mentor texts in the classroom. Urbanski reports that “I use published writers as my personal models for writing, and I have found it quite powerful for my students to see that fact. As I mentioned earlier, Donald Murray’s Shoptalk (1990) is a great source of inspiration for me. Other great texts include Anne Lamott's Bird by Bird (1994), Annie Dillard’s The Writing I (1989), and Stephen King’s On Writing (2000). I place their quotes on the walls in my classroom. I refer to them often when I am talking to my students about my writing as well as theirs. I also refer to them when I don't want to write or when I am frustrated with what I am writing. In essence, I model first by showing students what can be learned from other writers. Though they see me as a professional, they see that I need direction and guidance just as they do” (19-20). In Write Like This, Gallagher concurs: “Beyond teacher modeling in the classroom, my students benefit immensely from closely examining writing from the real world. If I want my students to write editorials, it helps to show them some strong editorials. If I want my students to write reviews, it helps to show them some previously posted Amazon reviews. Yes, it is important to show students how the teacher writes, but it is also of paramount importance to provide students with mentor texts so they can see how other writers compose” (20)

² Gallagher, Urbanski, and others repeatedly stress the importance of modeling, in real time, writing in front of students. In fact, Gallagher asserts that “No strategy improves my students writing more than having my students watch and listen to me as I write and think aloud” (Write Like This 15).
Day 4--I will model completing Quickwrites on several topics from my own DI chart so students can see how different purposes could lead to different pieces of writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Introduce unit and goals and discuss (Handout 1) I do. Pull examples from magazines * (Handout 2 and 3) Give out magazines--look for these</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Get in Pair/Share groups and share findings Talk about how there can be overlap in purpose. So what? So writing in the real world is for lots of different purposes. It’s important to know your purpose.*</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>1 topic 15 subjects DI chart (Handout 4)</td>
<td>Complete for homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>I do/they do Quickwrites on our DI charts</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEEK 2:
The purpose of Week 2 is to focus on reflective and expressive writing. Students will practice with several shorter pieces and write a longer piece for inclusion in their e-zine.

Day 1--I will model and they will follow with creating six word memoirs and then longer tweet memoirs. If time, we will move into sentence starters. Again, I will model and then they will do.

Day 2--We will continue on with sentence starters and I will model turning the sentence starter into a paragraph. Then they will practice the same as I circulate.
Sentence Starters:
I appreciate ___ because ___
I really wish I hadn’t ____
I remember trying to learn ______
Once, I almost ______
The best thing I ever did was ______
One lesson I learned the hard way was ______

Day 3--I will choose one of the topics from my express/reflect on my DI chart and model writing a longer piece, a very rough draft. Then they will spend time drafting. An alternate assignment for them is to use their DI topic and write about “A Watermark Moment.” (See Gallagher, Write Like This 48). I will explain the term watermark and give some examples I create from my own DI topic.

Day 4--Today is a writing/workshop day for their longer reflective piece they began on Day 3. I will circulate around the room and then ask students to come conference with me as needed at the table at the back. 3 We will sit beside each other with the draft between us as we talk. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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</table>

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3 Frey and Fisher discussed formative assessment and noted that “in most cases, students don't need another version of the same lesson that had been taught previously. Rather, they needed time to apply knowledge in the company of a skilled adult who coached them through confusions and partial understanding” (70).

4 Urbanski reminded us that the number one reason to conference is because “we want [students] to see themselves as writers” (124). The second reason is so we can see through the paper through students’ eyes. Our job is to ask questions (“What do you think this piece needs?”) and listen (121). Urbanski quotes Graves in reminding us that when the child talks, the child learns and we learn and the teacher can help (128). She suggests that we leave the paper we are discussing on the table between teacher and student to remind us not to take ownership (136).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Six word memoir; tweet memoir; sentence starters</th>
<th>Independent reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Sentence starters continued and quickwrites. I do/they do.</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>A watermark event related to your DI subject or choose one of your express/reflect topics from your DI chart and write it. I do/they do</td>
<td>Work on reflective piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Drafting/workshop day</td>
<td>Complete reflective piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEEK 3
We will begin Week 3 by sharing and suggesting changes to the completed piece from last week. The purpose of Week 3 is to focus on writing to inform and explain. Students will practice with several shorter pieces and write a longer piece for inclusion in their e-zine.

Day 1--I will model the peer review process for my students. We will have a conversation about higher and lower level concerns, and I will ask them to use this review for only higher order concerns. I will show them examples of pieces of writing that might be unresponsive to the task or that have undeveloped ideas or that are disorganized and hard to follow. I will also show them an example that has spelling and capitalization errors and remind them to ignore those errors at this stage. We will brainstorm ways that we could tactfully communicate those ideas to a writer. Students will then listen to my draft as I read it to them. Then I will give them a peer review sheet and will read my essay to them again. I will ask them to complete a peer review sheet for my essay. We will review the suggestions together as a class, and I will incorporate or dismiss the suggestions I get and articulate why. I will then assign two peer reviewers to each author, explaining that sometimes different students are better at finding lower and higher concern. I will ask authors to get with one of their reviewers and complete a similar peer review and then switch to the second reviewer. (Handout 5)

Day 2--The writing purpose for this week is to inform and explain. I will model for them and them have them create their own reverse bucket list, 15 things that they would never want to do. Then I will ask them to research their birthday in history. They will pick one interesting event, research it briefly and write a paragraph on the event (Gallagher, In the Best Interests 73). This will be a good time to talk about citing sources and the need to cite correctly for formal writing. Because this is informal, I will not require citations but will remind them to at least copy URLs so they have the information at hand if they decided to go back and formalize this piece.

Day 3--For their longer inform/explain piece this week, students will have two choices. One is to write an article modeled after ESPN’s Six Things You Should Know.

5 Although many sources and studies confirm the benefit of peer input in revising student writing, many teachers and students report that it has challenges. One study shows that extensive coaching for students early in the year (as much as seven hours) does make them more effective reviewers and ultimately helps student writing (Stanley). I would love to craft and include that kind of two week commenting workshop in my classroom as a second unit, but I don’t want a peer review workshop to come before this initial one focusing on student writing. Still, I do want to include peer review as I set the stage in this unit for the writing community I hope to create. For that reason, I will allocate at least two days here in Week 3 to teach students how to comment (a mini-commenting workshop).

6 I want to include modeling (both with my own writing and other examples). I also want to include two peer reviewers to help navigate the sticky wicket of a strong writer being matched with a weak one or two weak writers being paired together (Marchionda; Chong).
(http://www.espn.com/espnmag/story?id=3632363), again using their DI subject (Gallagher, In the Best Interests 79). Again, I will model the beginning of this. The second choice is to create an article based on Sherman Alexie’s (2007) novel, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. In it, “the narrator, Junior, a native American relocated to an all-white school, shares the following unofficial and unwritten rules to fighting: The Unofficial and Unwritten (but you better follow them or you’re going to get beaten twice as hard) Spokane Indian Rules of Fisticuffs

Rule 1: “If somebody insults you, then you have to fight him.” Rule 2: “If you think someone is going to insult you, then you have to fight him.” Rule 3: “If you think someone is thinking about insulting you, then you have to fight him.” (61)” Gallagher Write Like This 75). Students will create an article in which they use their DI topic and create their own list of written and unwritten rules. I will model both and then students will begin.

Day 4--Today is a writing/workshop day for the articles they began on Day 3. I will circulate around the room and then ask students to come conference with me as needed at the table at the back. We will sit beside each other with the draft between us as we talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 3</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Modeling of peer review7 and the pair and peer review. (Handout 5)</td>
<td>Complete changes suggested in peer review and other revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Continue with peer review. Reverse bucket list. Your birthday in history</td>
<td>Insert other changes. Copyedit. Submit final to dropbox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Six Things You Should Know OR The Unofficial and Unwritten Rules</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Drafting/Workshop Day</td>
<td>Complete inform/explain piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WEEK 4

As Julia Kaufman points out in her study on peer online assessments, many educators “note that students who assess the work of their peers are engaging in a cognitively demanding activity that extends their understanding of subject matter and writing. For the student who receives peer review, studies report deepened subject matter knowledge (Barak and Rafaeli 2004; Venables and Summit 2003) and a more positive attitude about writing (Katstra et al. 1987)” (2). Indeed, some studies show that peer comments and feedback make more of a difference than instructor comments, and feedback from multiple peers benefitted the most (Kellogg 262).
The purpose of this week is to focus on writing to evaluate and judge. Students will complete several shorter activities and then write a longer review for inclusion in their e-zine.

Day 1—As I did last Monday, I will model the peer review and revision\(^8\) process for my students. Students will read my draft of my Six Things You Should Know as I read it to them. I will ask them to orally complete a peer review sheet with me. I will remind them of the differences between revising and copyediting. Then I will ask them to get with their partners and complete a similar peer review for each other.

Day 2—This week we are focusing on writing to evaluate and judge. In class today we will study reviews on online. We will start with Amazon review. I will model writing a review for a book I read recently. They will write reviews on one of the books they read for summer reading. This will be a Quickwrite. I will assign their next piece which is to review something connected to their DI topic. This may require them to do some research.

Day 3—Begin drafting their review of the object they have chosen.

Day 4—Today is reserved for peer review and editing of our reviews.

*Another alternate assignment for this week is to have them write a review comparing two objects associated with their DI topic. They would create a graph comparing important aspects of the two and then write an analysis discussing the graph and their ultimate choice between the two.

---

\(^8\) Nancy Sommers reminded us of the dissonance writers feel when we read what we have written and it isn't quite what we wanted. This is an important metaphor and one I think students will understand. While I haven't included it in the lesson here, I can imagine a short lesson on this by playing music that wants to resolve and doesn't or atonal pieces to perhaps help students know what they are looking/listening for in revision (Sommers “Revision Strategies” 385).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 4</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Again, model peer review and then pair and share</td>
<td>Complete changes suggested in peer review and other revisions. Copyedit. Submit to dropbox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Examine reviews on line. I model book review. They write book review. Consider object for review from your DI topic.</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>After they see me model, begin drafting review of object.</td>
<td>Continue drafting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Complete drafting and pair/share.</td>
<td>Complete changes suggested in peer review and other revisions. Copyedit. Submit to dropbox.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEEK 5:
The purpose of this week is to write to inquire and explore. Day 1--Students will examine newspapers and create a list of things they would like to know more about. From their list they will choose one and create a graphic organizer on which they can list “What I Think I Might Find about the Topic” and “What I Found” on the opposite side. At the bottom they would list their source(s).

Day 2--Today they will move their inquiry back to the DT topic and create a list of “Burning Questions” (Gallagher, Write Like This 126) they have about some aspect of that topic. After the creation of the list, they will choose one to research and begin.

Day 3--Today students will complete research on their burning question and begin drafting their summaries of their findings.

Day 4--Today we will conduct peer review and edits on our work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 5</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Examine newspapers, create list of topics, and research one using T organizer.</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Create Burning Questions list about DT topic. Choose one and use graphic organizer to complete research (if needed).</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Complete research. Draft article in writing workshop.</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Peer review and edits.</td>
<td>Incorporate revision changes. Copyedit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 This concept of inquiry is critical and is one we will build on throughout the year, especially as we move into more substantive research projects. Malloy, et al. describe inquiry as “questioning the known to understand better” and they quote Elliot Eisner in encouraging teachers to use inquiry to enable students to become the architects of their own education so they can invent themselves in their own lives” (65). Peter Elbow felt that questions and perplexity come “to us in all different parts of our life” and described writing as “a way to deal with perplexity” (17). “Perplexity is what I want to keep having..and keep encouraging my students to have” (17).

10 Most of the writing is fairly narrowly directed even though I am allowing some choice so it will be important that students have other opportunities this year to pose authentic questions and conduct authentic research.
WEEK 6:
The purpose of this week is to revisit each piece to prepare it for publication.

Day 1--Students will re-read articles listening and looking for any dissonance that requires revision. Students will also add photos as needed.

Day 2--Students will share the task of copyediting each other’s pieces.

Day 3--Today we will share and read each other’s publications online. For each magazine, each student will complete a short feedback slip sharing one thing they learned from the magazine or one new thought they had not considered and one thing they think the author did well. These are anonymous and will be turned in to the author at the end of class.

Day 4--Today in class we will each write a Writer’s Memo reflecting on the project and ourselves as writers. (Handout 6). Reflection is an important part of the writing process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 6</th>
<th>In Class</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>RE-vision and add photos</td>
<td>Complete changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Copyedit each other’s articles</td>
<td>Complete copy edits and upload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Publication review day! (Feedback)</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Writer’s Memo (Handout 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CCSS Standards Met During the Course of This E-Zine Project

Text Types and Purposes:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C

Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.E

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.F

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 here.)*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Works Cited


Gallagher, Kelly. *In the Best Interests of Students*. Stenhouse, 2015


Malloy, et. al. “Keeping the Mic On: Emboldening voices through Discussion-Based Inquiry.”


Urbanski, Cynthia. Using the Workshop Approach in the High School English Classroom

Skyhorse Publishing. 2015.
Handout 1--Introduction for Students

English 9--The E-Zine Project

What is the E-zine Project?
A project in which each of us will produce our own short online magazine focusing on a topic which interests us.

Why are we doing this?
To explore individual topics through writing and practice writing for a variety of purposes. Primarily, I want us to explore the process of writing and work on creating a writing community.

What do you mean “for a variety of purposes”?
In English class we do a lot of writing analyzing the literature we read. In this project, I’d like us to try writing for some different objectives:

- Reflect. Sometimes we want or need to write to express our thoughts or emotions, reflect on something we’ve experienced, or observed or tell a story (Week 2).
- Inform. Sometimes (often in school) we write to inform some person or group about information you have or to explain something (Week 3).
- Evaluate. Sometimes we write to think through choices and evaluate the best options (Week 4).
- Explore. And sometimes we write to try to figure out the answers to questions we or others have (Week 5).

Do we get to choose our own topic or will you assign us one?
You choose based on your own interests--sailing, cooking, skateboarding, violin, rap, ramen noodles, whatever. Barnes and Nobles carries 594 different magazines on wide ranging topics (and you can find online magazines on almost any topic), so your choices are almost endless.

How long will we work on this?
Six weeks

What exactly do we have to produce?
Four articles, one of each kind (reflect, inform, evaluate, explore)

What are the due dates?
Week 1: Overview. Create: 18 topics/Quickwrites
Week 2: Reflect. Create: Six word memoir, tweet memoir, sentence starters, a watermark event article
Week 3: Inform and explain. Create: reverse bucket list, your birthday in history, six things you should know OR the unwritten rules article
Week 4: Evaluate and judge; Create: Amazon book review, Amazon merchandise review (research)
Week 5: Writing to inquire and explore; Create: Burning Questions list and burning question article
Week 6: Polish and Publish

Will we really publish these magazines?
Yes. We will use the online generator https://madmagz.com/ which allows you to create a magazine and view it online at no charge.

Footnotes:
In its position statement on composition, the NCTE affirms us that “in the act of composing writers learn about themselves and their world and communicate their insights to others. Writing confers the power to grow personally and to effect change in the world” (612). Additionally, there is ample evidence to support the assertion that to become a better writer, one must write. Carnegie Mellon reminds its instructors that “in order for students to learn to write well, we must increase the amount and frequency of writing they do, vary the types of writing, and provide feedback on their performance so they can continue to develop as writers” (“Respond to Student Writing”). In the *Educational Psychologist*, Ronald Kellogg asserts that 1993 study shows “that student reported gains in writing are linked directly to the “number of opportunities to compose in writing classes” (Kellogg 8).

In his text *In the Best Interests of Students*, Kelly Gallagher reminds teachers to not neglect other kinds of writing even though the CCSS focus on the big three: narrative, inform and explain, argument (106). The NCTE also states that “writing grows out of many different purposes” and encourages teachers to ask students to write over a range of topics (NCTE “Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing” 2004).

The NCTE also encourages teachers to provide students opportunities to produce many different kinds of writing because “The specific purposes for writing vary widely, from discovering the writer's own feelings, to persuading others to a course of action, recreating experience imaginatively, reporting the results of observation, and more. Writing assignments should reflect this range of purposes. Student writers should have the opportunity to define and pursue writing aims that are important to them” (“Teaching Composition” 1985).

I am using “we” here to remind students that I am a fellow writer. Again, the 1984 NCTE position statement on composition reminded us that “Writing teachers should themselves be writers” (613). Additionally, in her response to Nancy Sommers’ essay, fellow researcher Carol Rutz stressed the “Critical importance of including the classroom relationship between those who teach and assign writing and those who submit writing to their teachers” (216). In a similar vein as Sommers, she “encourage[s] teachers to retire their comma-cop badges and instead, become reader-colleagues for their students in courses at all levels” (261).

In “Revision Strategies of Student Writers,” Nancy Sommers reminds us that students write best when they are engaged in the topic. Having students write different pieces using different purposes all circling around a topic they care about is the foundation of this project. “When we asked students each year to describe their best writing experiences, two overriding characteristics emerged: the opportunity to write about something that matters to the student, and the opportunity to engage with an instructor through feedback” (251).

Portfolios are a powerful way for students to maintain ownership of their work and have a voice in advocating for their progress as writers as Gallagher, Inoue, and Urbanski assert.
Handout 2--Examples of writings for different purposes

Writing to Reflect:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/19v3mIrTkgm7muBxH2rWIMx4vJyaGs2U/view?usp=sharing

Writing to Inform:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pRGST_rrQIldUiiK2c1zcNvQleXBuKSZpv/view?usp=sharing

Writing to Evaluate:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oolurqUK0btoWkBDrbqijBZeO4Mkf_MdJEvi_Lx_x4k/edit?usp=sharing

Writing to Explore/Inquire:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hSQly5k3E0NSumfjaBBSuYb2nH2VrGm2/view?usp=sharing
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xbk8BvlZ8dmyRMhfLeEeTLJqTVrgeVL/view?usp=sharing

Handout 3----Chart of Different Purposes for Writing

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TwHNUmkJvekNnUwRk276_KWo19M7zBWZUyB6r8JNhM/edit?usp=sharing

Handout 4--Chart of One Topic = 15

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BnFSWJ7_nc6_k6-JVRIYqdJBe8HxkOma0xFuDB8U/edit?usp=sharing
HANDOUT 5

Peer Review Response Form

Author of the draft _________________________

Reader _________________________

**Author:**

1. Please read your draft to your reader. (Remember to read slowly for those of us who have trouble processing aurally.)
2. When you are done, give the reader a copy of your essay and read it over to them again. Write here what you would most like the reader to think about as he or she reads your draft:

**Reader:**

1. Listen to the author read his/her essay to you. As you listen, focus on the ideas and content. What stands out to you? What do you like? What is confusing?
2. Read over the following list of questions.
3. As the author reads the essay to you a second time, read along. What comments do you have that will help the writer compose a better next draft? Ignore editing errors. What do you like most about the draft? What has the writer done well?

What is the best or most interesting point the author has made? Why? Suggestions:

As a reader, was there any part of the writing that was unclear to you? Explain:

Do you see/hear any places where the writer might add more specific details to make the idea come alive? Can you suggest any details that might help? (5-W’s and H or the five senses?)

Could you logically follow the writer’s ideas? Were there any “chunks” that seemed out of place or unexpected?
HANDOUT 6
Writer’s Memo

In a letter addressed to me, reflect on the last six weeks and tell me about this project from your perspective. In your letter, make sure you address the following questions, although you are free to change the order of the ideas you address.

As you wrote your e-zine articles, who did you imagine your audience to be? Describe them. Give one example of how that changed a decision for you in writing one of your final pieces.

We spent a lot of time generating writing ideas. Are there topics you have thought of that are not on your lists but you still want to explore? What are they?

What was the most enjoyable of the activities we worked on in this unit? Why?

What was the most challenging part of this unit for you? Why?

Which of the articles that you wrote are you the most proud of? Why?

Would you do anything differently if you could go back and redo some part of the unit? Explain.

Why did you choose the topic you did for your e-zine?

What problems did you have in completing this unit? Do you have any ideas for how to solve those?

What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the final project you produced?

What are three things you learned as a writer through this project?

As you look over this rubric, what grade do you think you work merits and why?
Rationale for Writing Plan

I’ve chosen to create lesson plans for an eight week writing course geared to tenth grade students in an independent school or a homeschool co-op because that has been (and likely will be) my teaching experience. This semester, in fact, I taught a small writing class to four homeschool students, my tenth grade daughter among them. Although I’ve taught for many years, I have new motivation to “get teaching writing right,” but not because some administrator or parent is looking over my shoulder or a curriculum demands it. As both a parent and a teacher, I’m fixated on nurturing these students’ interests and skills so they can share the deep satisfaction and benefit of becoming competent writers.

Admittedly, my plans are a mash up of many of the authors we have read in this class and in other classes in this program. I envision this unit as starting the year. I debated over how to organize the course: Should I use the writing process, or writing different genres, or the six traits of good writing? Ultimately, I combined my approach, beginning the year with focusing on invention and ideas and then giving assignments that asked students to write for different purposes. After the first weeks when we have written a few articles, we explore the elements of good writing and identify or incorporate them in our own.

As I look back at most of my previous experiences teaching writing in the classroom, my writing plans have felt fragmented and lurching. While students did create some wonderful
pieces throughout the year, there was no real momentum or building of skills (other than, perhaps, organization and idea generating). This summer I completed a course designed to help parents and teachers teach writing (IEW). The course both attracted and repelled me. To me the content and writing ideas seemed forced and rigid, allowing students little freedom to explore authentic subjects. On the other hand, every class contained a lesson on style and for every piece of writing, students had a checklist rubric of required style elements. I was impressed with the consistency and skills built by that weekly repetition and determined to somehow wed those ideas to authentic writing assignments. In this unit, I’ve at least attempted to do that, so each week has a “Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool” in which students are introduced to a new tool (participles, appositives, parallelism) and asked to use that tool with their own writing.

I’ve purposely tried to divorce revision for style and editing from each other because I want students to focus on higher order concerns. Still, I studied the lists of Hairston’s status marking errors, the Connors and Lunsford study, Weaver, and Schuster and determined that I did want to teach editing skills that students will need. I also realized that, like the style tools, this information had to be embedded weekly if students were truly going to learn it. I did decide to not begin teaching editing tips the first week of class, so students did not immediately connect writing with error fixing. I felt guilty resorting to worksheets to reinforce some of these ideas (Commonly Confused Words), but I resolved that some conventions require a worksheet type of reinforcement as long as students are required to then transfer the conventions to their own writing.

As with most lesson plans, the struggle is not to try to do too much but to, as Weaver reminds, teach an inch wide and a mile deep. That advice has led me to omit much good information and many topics, but I have tried to teach what I think are the most important pieces
here at the beginning of the year. If there is time later on, those other topics can be addressed. I also structured this first semester unit so the whole class was moving through writing a piece at the same time because it seemed the most efficient way to help students learn information I think the majority needs. I would like to structure second semester as a writing workshop in which students could be exploring writing genres and topics they are most interested in and style and editing tools could be taught as mini-lessons or individually.

Creating this unit was more of a challenge than I anticipated, and I still walk away unsatisfied with the outcome. Still, I am hopeful that I am one step closer to creating a writing classroom in which students can voice their best ideas in their writing and feel confident that they have articulated them persuasively.
Eight Week Writing Unit
(90 minute class once each week)

“Learning to write is learning to use all one’s mind in making” James Sledd (1996).

“Trying to write while worrying about errors is like trying to waltz in a ballroom with loose floorboards” (Schuster xiv).

Steinbeck: “A book is like a man--clever and dull, brave and cowardly, beautiful and ugly. For every flowering thought there will be a page like a wet and mangy mongrel, and for every looping flight, a tap on the wing and a reminder that a wax cannot hold the feathers firm too near the sun” (Schuster 970).

“When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art.’ I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing” (George Orwell).

“I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say” (Flannery O’Connor).

“So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I’ve learned some things. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled ‘file and forget,’ and I can neither file nor forget. Nor will certain ideas forget me; they keep filing away at my lethargy, my complacency” (Ralph Ellison).

“I just knew there were stories I wanted to tell” (Octavia E. Butler).

“We write to be fully alive. Writing draws us into the moment. We see the blades of grass, hear the miniscule chirp of the morning cricket, watch the shade travel from one edge of the yard to the other, seemingly for the first time. Writing helps us make art out of everyday, ordinary moments” (Joe Bunting).
UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is intended as a semester introduction to writing for grade ten. Each week we will generate and write about topics we care about, thinking and questioning as we discover what we want to say. Every week we will also explore a new writing rhetoric tool and a new editing tip.

Week 1

Objectives: Students will

1. Reflect on and share their own thoughts on writing and their writing experiences
2. Students will explore the question: “What is writing and why write?”
3. Students will free write as an example of idea generation
4. Students will identify writing for different purposes
5. Students will practice writing with participles (Rhetoric Style Tool Lesson 1)

Objective 1:

Consider the quotes above and comment on one idea you either agree with or disagree with. How does your own experience as a writer either align with or challenge the idea the quote contains?

Objective 2:

Brainstorm with class: We know we are supposed to care about writing well. What is writing? Where do you typically see examples of writing? (textbooks, texts, FB, Instagram, e-mails, books, newspapers, magazines, signs, labels, blogs…)

So writing appears in many different places and serves many different purposes. What are some of those purposes? (to give information, tell about how you feel or think, persuade you…)

So one truism of pretty much anything is that the way to get better at it is to practice. Repeatedly.

Objective 3: In class writing workshop: We will “prime the pump” by practicing writing with a time limit. This is a free write to so you have to kill the editor in your head that wants to go back and make corrections. The purpose here is just to write and let the thoughts tumble out without paying attention to punctuation or whether what you are saying actually makes sense. The rules are you need to write for the full time, even if you end up getting off topic or even writing “I don’t know what else to write about.” Topic for today: soda pop or anything else. 7 minutes. Go.
Objective 4:

Give out HANDOUT 1 (pdf) which discusses writing for different purposes. Then read the following articles which are examples of writing for different purposes. (We also know that one piece of writing can serve several purposes at the same time, so these divisions may not always be clear cut.)

HANDOUT 2 (pdf):

- [Writing to Inform pdf](#)
- [Writing to Inquire pdf](#) and [second page](#)
- [Writing to Reflect pdf](#)
- [Writing to Take a Stand](#)
- [Writing to evaluate](#)

Pair and share about why you think I categorized the articles the way I did. Do you see elements of more than one purpose in my examples? Discuss and share.

Objective 5--Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool Lesson: Participles:

Show examples of participles from literature (HANDOUT 3 at end of document)
Teacher models creating participles.
Teacher and students create more together.
Students pair and create.
Students create one individually.
Students to go back to their soda pop journal from this class and add a participle or participial phrase.

Homework:

A. Find examples of each of the five writing purposes we examined in class today. (While the chart has six purposes, we will omit the category for analysis and focus on the others because you have had plenty of experience analyzing in your high school classes.) Bring in your five examples and be prepared to explain why you think they fit the category. Also bring in one example of a participle you found in your reading this week.

B. Write in journal three times each week
Week 2

Objectives: Students will

1. Identify the steps of the writing process
2. Identify and practice generating ideas
3. Students will practice writing with absolutes (Rhetoric Style Tool Lesson 2) and
distinguish between 7 more easily confused words (Rhetoric Editing Tip 1)

Teacher asks students if they want to share any journal ideas? Begin a section of your notebook
or create a document you will add to entitled “Invention and Ideas” Look through journal and jot
down any ideas you find from your journals that you think you may want to explore some time in
the future. So what we just did was to practice the first piece of the process of writing:
invention.

Objective 1 and 2: The phases of writing--Invention, Writing, Revising, Editing, Publishing

We write better when we care about what we are writing. How to come up with ideas? Focusing on Invention—Coming up with ideas we want to write about.
(Brainstorming/prewriting/invention/clustering/bullet points/listing/conversations/writing)
Time/strategies for invention and getting ideas is key
Most important element of writing is good ideas

Student Task: Look through your journals from this week and add any ideas you find to a
section of your notebook labeled “Invention”

Give out Topic generator sheet (HANDOUT 4 pdf). Teacher will model creating 15 topics from 1
topic (This link takes you to a screencast I did of me modeling this form for students. I created
this for a technology class I took this semester as I thought through how I would do a class like
this online. [https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1247604/pages/1-topic-=--15-
topics?module_item_id=15214907](https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1247604/pages/1-topic-=--15-
topics?module_item_id=15214907) For the current scenario, I am envisioning a face to face
class.)

Student Task: Students will then fill out their own 15 topics from one idea generator.

We will generate more ideas for thinking of ideas. Teacher will model creating a reverse bucket
list (things you would never want to do), choose one of the topics, and do a 7 minute Quickwrite
on it.

My reverse bucket list:

Get a tattoo
Live in a planned community
Carry my phone with me 24/7
Stop reading
Drink kabucha again
Dust the top of the refrigerator
Raise snakes
Have a pet rat
Filing
Eat uncooked food
Be a dentist
Study statistics
Subscribe to Sports Illustrated

Student Task: Students will create a reverse bucket list and do a 7 minute Quickwrite paragraph. Students should then add any of these ideas to their “Invention” list.

Objective 3--Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool: Adding absolutes to focus in on detail. Show the following powerpoint which takes students through a thorough exploration of absolutes with the following steps:

- Compare and contrast sentences with and without absolutes
- Note where absolutes can be located within sentences
- Read examples from literature
- Read examples from students
- Students read examples from literature and identify the absolutes
- Students are given strips of parts of sentences containing absolutes from literature and rearrange them
- Students read simple examples of absolutes from literature and imitate/create their own
- Students combine sentences with absolutes
- Students expand sentences with absolutes
- Students compose their own sentences using absolutes using images provided

Students then will to go back to their Quickwrite paragraph from the “Bucket List” from this class and add one absolute and one participle or participial phrase.

Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip: Review advice/advise through Cite/Site/Sight on “Commonly Confused Words” handout (HANDOUT 5 at end of document)

Homework: A. Write in journal three times using the journal prompts.

B. Write in journal three times each week
Week 3

Objectives: Students will

1. Continue to identify and practice generating ideas
2. Students will practice thinking/generating ideas through questioning
3. Students will practice writing narratives to inform and express
4. Students will practice writing with appositives (Rhetoric Style Tool Lesson 3) and distinguish between 7 more easily confused words (Rhetoric Editing Tip 1)

Objective 1: Teacher will ask students to will make a list of moments that mattered in their lives and to try to list as many as they can, big and small. They will be asked to write enough to remind themselves of the memory and why it was important to them. Teacher will model this brainstorming:

Teacher list:
Jenny being born
Playing the cranberry in the Thanksgiving play in second grade
Having my brother train me to do 100 situps
When my mom spanked me for climbing on a tower
Sitting with my Dad the day before he died
The moment I accepted Christ
That talk with my Dad
Watching Mathilda on Broadway

Objective 2: Teacher will ask students to choose one of the prompts above for her to model. Then students are instructed to ask her questions about the event--who, when, where, why, how? The idea is to get the writer’s thoughts flowing in answering these questions. Teacher will then do a 7 minute Quickwrite on the topic students chose for her, talking out loud as she makes writing choices.

Objective 3--Student Task: Choose one of the moments that mattered and get in groups of two and ask each other questions about the topic. Then, do a 10 minute Quickwrite on your memory.

Objective 4--Today's Rhetoric Style Tool: Adding appositives to add detail and combine/expand ideas. Show examples of appositives from literature. (HANDOUT 6 at end of document) Teacher models combining sentences and creating appositives Teacher and students create more together.
Students pair and create.
Students create one individually.
Students will add a appositive or appositive phrase to their “Moment That Mattered” writing for homework (in addition to an appositive and participle).

Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip: Review Could of/Would of/and Others through Loose/Lose on “Commonly Confused Words” handout

Homework:

A. Return to your Quickwrite of Moments that Mattered, and revise it, adding detail and describing why it mattered.

B. Revise your “Moment” again, this time, including at least one participle, one absolute, and one appositive.

C. Write in journal three times each week
Week 4

Objectives: Students will

1. Practice responding to peer writing and giving feedback.
2. Brainstorm and identify the elements of good writing.
3. Identify and practice choosing an organizational strategy for their writing.
4. Practice writing a well-organized descriptive paragraph.
5. Practice writing with dependent clauses (AAAWUBBIS) in Rhetoric Style Tool 4 and distinguish between 7 more easily confused words (Editing Tip 1)

Objective 1: In pairs, students will listen to each other read their “Moments” essay and complete a peer response sheet for each other (HANDOUT 7 at end of document).

Objective 2: Have a discussion with students on their thoughts on what makes good writing or, conversely, what makes bad writing? With some leading, they will probably come up with most of the following: content, ideas, organization, voice, style, word choice, conventions (six plus one traits). Show them examples of what each would look like (HANDOUT 8). We have been focusing on generating content and ideas so far and now we are going to focus on the third: organization.

Objective 3 and 4: Write sentences on the board that might come from a description of shopping at the grocery store (Get out of the car. Get a cart. Choose fruit. Get chicken at deli. Stand in line at the checkout. Pay. Put groceries in car.). In writing the list on the board, however, mix up the chronology. Remind students they make choices about how to arrange the information. Here they would clearly arrange it chronologically (although some could see it as spatial). Remind students that they can arrange their ideas chronologically, spatially or by importance. The important piece is to find an organizational plan and then stick to it or revise.

Teacher will then take a piece of candy (Whopper) and teacher and student will brainstorm ideas to describe it. Then student and teacher will together create a descriptive paragraph about the piece of candy. One of the first choices we will need to make is how to organize our thoughts. In this case, students will likely see that describing it from the outside in (spatially) makes the most sense. We will create the paragraph together.

Students will then choose a piece of candy and write their own descriptive paragraph.

Objective 5--Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool: AAAWWUBBIS.
Introduce students to concept (HANDOUT 9), including using a comma after introductory ones. Students take turns reading the first part of sentences on the handout.
(including the comma) and then someone else reads the second part. Then we move to making up our own sentences using a topic like holidays. Someone starts a sentence: “Because it is Christmas comma” and someone else finishes it “We will eat candy.” We will also look at placing these clauses at other places in the sentence. Then we look at examples in literature on the same handout. Finally, we will go back to the Whopper paragraph we wrote in class earlier and together identify (or add) examples of an AAWWUBBIS, appositive, absolute, and participle.

**Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip:** Review Passed/Past through Threw/Through on “Commonly Confused Words” handout.

**Homework:**

A. Using the descriptive paragraph each student wrote earlier in class, students will revise and identify or add one example of each—AAAWWUBBIS, appositive, absolute, and participle—underlining each in their drafts.

B. Write in journal three times each week
Week 5

Objectives: Students will

1. Reflect on their own writing.
2. Examine word choice and its rhetorical value
3. Write to inform, choosing words which reflect their audience and purpose.
4. Practice varying sentence length in their own writing (Rhetoric Style Tool 5) and complete their work on easily confused words.

Objective 1: Students will reflect on their experience as writers by filling out the writing reflection sheet (HANDOUT 10 at end of document). They will focus primarily on the candy and moment piece.

Objective 2: Teacher will review the elements of good writing: content, ideas, organization, voice, style, word choice, conventions and ask students to focus on word choice. Students will examine the following sets of words and discuss the differences among them:

- companion/friend/buddy
careful/stingy/thrifty/tight
- picky/careful/prudent
slumber/snooze/sleep
- slender/skinny/scrawny
foolhardy/daring/rash/bold

Bertrand Russell: “I am firm. You are obstinate. He is pigheaded.”

We will discuss the words’ connotations, where on the continuum of formal to informal they would lie, and how to make rhetorical choices about when to use each.

Students will complete the following simile HANDOUT 11 at end of document with the expected images and then with unexpected ones. We will model the first two together.

Objective 3: Students will write an article modeled after ESPN’s “Six Things You Should Know.” ("Six Things" example) First they will go back to their “Invention” section of their notebooks (including the 15 from 1 topic) and choose a topic to write about, imagining that this article would appear in a subject magazine based on their interest. Teacher will model this first, choosing and drafting two paragraphs of the article out loud in front of the class and modeling how audience and purpose will make choices in her writing.

Objective 5--Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool: Varying Sentence Length (HANDOUT 12 at end of document).
Students will read the handout about varying sentence length and practice revising the example to add fluidity and style. Teacher will review her “Six Things” article for sentence length and revise. Students will follow in revising their own articles for sentence length.

**Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip:** Review Two/Too/To through You’re/Your on “Commonly Confused Words” handout.

**Homework:**
A. Students should revise the “Six Things” article they wrote in class today, checking that sentence lengths have some variety and that word choice fits the intended audience.

B. Write in journal three times each week
Week 6

Objectives: Students will

1. Practice summarizing news articles
2. Evaluate the information in the article and refute or defend the article.
3. Practice writing with effective verbs and creating sentences in which subjects and verbs agree.

Objective 1: Students and teacher together will read a news article and then have a class discussion about what it was about, listing important points. Teacher and students together will then write a paragraph summarizing the article. Students will then read a second article (Editorial) and have a class discussion about its important points. They will then each write his/her own summary.

Objective 2: Students will have a class discussion about the second article and then either support or refute its views in a paragraph.

Objective 3 --Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool: Writing with Effective Verbs (HANDOUT 13 at end of document). Show examples of strong verb use from literature. (-including example to revise)
Teacher models revising for strong verb use in her own writing
Teacher and students revise an example together
Students pair and revise.
Students return to the article written in today’s class and revise verbs.

Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip: Subject Verb Agreement 1 (HANDOUT 14 pdf). Teacher will present the information in Rules 1-4 of SV Agreement, modeling completion of the first several in each exercise. Students will complete and check against answers.

HOMEWORK:

A. Students should go back to one of their pieces written in Weeks 1-5 and revise for verbs and specific nouns.
B. Students should then go back to one of their pieces in Weeks 1-5 and use Summary Rubric 1 which includes many of the skills we have studied to date (HANDOUT 15 at end of document).
C. Write in journal three times each week
WEEK 7

Objectives: Students will

1. Practice generating ideas.
2. Practice writing to inquire and explore.
3. Practice citing sources appropriately.
4. Practice using parallelism.

Objective 1: Students will brainstorm a list of “Things I Wonder About…”

Objective 2: Each will then pick a topic from his/her list and complete whatever research is necessary. For most students, this will require finding two to three sources. Students will write a short article (250-300 words) asking and answering their question.

Objective 3: We will do a mini-lesson on using sources and creating a Works Cited. (Most students will have done this in ninth grade, so this will be a review lesson.)

Objective 4: Today’s Rhetoric Style Tool: Parallelism. Students will review the handout on parallel structure and create two of their own sentences using parallelism.

Objective 5: Today’s Rhetoric Editing Tip: Using a comma between two independent clauses joined by a conjunction and using a comma with introductory elements. Read #1 and #2 on the this OWL page on when to use commas.

HOMEWORK:

A. To practice using commas effectively, complete Commas with Introductory Elements Exercise 1 and Commas with Introductory Elements Exercise 2 from the Purdue OWL website.

B. Students should review their piece of exploratory writing from today and revise to include one element of parallel structure and check comma usage.
WEEK 8

Objectives: Students will

1. Students will reflect on their writing journey over the past seven weeks.
2. Students will use their reflections as a springboard for an analysis of one element of their writing journey over the past seven weeks.
3. Students will integrate the style tips and editing tips they have practiced over the past seven weeks into their analysis.

Objective 1: One of the writing purposes we have not yet practiced is writing to analyze and interpret. To practice that skill, students will analyze their work and their thoughts from this unit by completing a writer’s memo/letter about their journey.

Writing About Writing:

Objective 1:

In a letter addressed to me, reflect on the last six weeks and tell me about this unit from your perspective.

1. Think about some of the different purposes for writing we explored in the first week. Now review your journal entries over the past six weeks. What kinds of prompts did you most enjoy writing about? What purposes for writing do you find in reviewing your entries?

2. Which rhetoric style tool(s) do you think has made the greatest difference in your own writing? Why?

3. Which editing tips have you found most helpful? Why?

4. As a writer, have you found that editing is an important part of getting your ideas across to others in writing? Why or why not?

5. We practiced several ways to discover some of the great ideas locked in our brains. What do you think is the best way for you to generate writing ideas? Explain.

6. Thinking about all that we have done in the past weeks, have your views of “writing” and yourself as a writer changed? Explain.

Objective 2:
Much of the writing we have done in this unit has purposely NOT been tied to classroom topics but has rather been driven by your own interests (although certainly academic topics can be one of those!). Writing persuasively (making a claim, addressing a counterclaim, and supporting your ideas) is a critical skill you will need in most of your courses. In our last assignment, I’d like you to practice this skill by writing a short (one page) persuasive piece. In it, make a claim about one of the topics we’ve explored so far: writing, revision, invention, journals, other--and support that claim. Then address a counterclaim that someone could raise about your claim and refute it based on your experience over the past seven weeks.

For example, one claim I might make is the following:

Claim: The best writing happens when I don’t know exactly where my writing will go when I begin.

Support: 1. Journal Prompt #5--I loved that I came up with the image of the the moon as the watch keeper, anad I didn’t know that was in my head when I started.

Support 2: Before I began my research on my recycling, I didn’t know where I was convinced it was actually helpful. It wasn’t until I started laying out my research in words that I could see the logic and decide what I really thought.

Support 3: When I responded to Prompt #51 (“What kinds of things do you think are beautiful?”), I remembered how much I love pansies and why.

Counterclaim: It’s important to plan ahead before you begin writing.

Refute: While planning is sometimes important, not beginning to write until you know what you want to say can lead to paralysis and stunted thinking. For example, when I began my article, “Five Things You Should Know About Being a Violinist’s Mother,” I only knew the first two points. Once I had those out of my head, I had clarity to think of other reasons. If I had waited until I had an organized plan, I might not have even begun.

HOMEWORK:

A. Students show review their persuasive writing piece from today using Handout 16 (Summary Rubric 2)
Works Cited


Gallagher, Kelly, *Write Like This*. Stenhouse, 2011.


Journal: Week 1-6 (30 minutes)

Each week, find time to write three journal entries. For this first week, use the five ideas below or choose something that you just feel like writing about. Try to space them out over three separate days. As we did in class, push yourself to write for at least 10 minutes without stopping. Don’t edit yourself or worry about spelling or mechanics. The goal here is to just keep writing whatever comes into your head. It doesn’t even have to make sense to someone else. Some of us think too much, so the goal of this exercise is primarily to practice fluency. Sometimes in writing you might discover a topic you will want to write about later.

1. If you could break the Guinness Book of Records it would be for?
2. Where would you prefer to be right now—mountains, desert, beach—and why?
3. What is your favorite day of the week? Why?
4. What if cows gave root beer instead of milk?
5. What is your favorite room in your home and why?
6. Your own topic

Other Journal Topics

1. What is something you like about yourself?
2. What is something you do well?
3. What is your favorite room in your home and why?
4. What is a good neighbor?
5. What is your favorite time of day?
6. What is something you are optimistic about?
7. What is something you are pessimistic about?
8. What is your most indispensable possession and why?
9. What is your favorite song and why?
10. What is the best birthday present you ever received?
11. What is the best birthday present you could receive?
12. What is something that makes you feel sad?
13. What is your favorite book and why?
14. What is something that really bugs you?
15. What is something that really makes you angry?
16. What is the best advice you ever received?
17. What is your favorite holiday? What makes this holiday special?
18. What is your favorite day of the week? Why?
19. What is your favorite month? Why?
20. What would happen if you could fly whenever you wanted? When would you use this ability?
21. What would happen if there were no television? Why would this be good? bad?
22. What would happen if everyone lived in space? What type of houses would they live in?
23. What type of clothing would they wear? What type of food would they eat? How would they travel?
24. What if cows gave root beer instead of milk?
25. What if all the streets were rivers? What would be different?
26. What would happen if it really did rain cats and dogs?
27. What would happen if animals could talk? What are some of the questions you would like to ask animals?
28. What would happen if you grew taller than trees? How would this change your life?
29. What would happen if there were no cars, buses, trains, boats, or planes? How would this change your life?
30. What would happen if you found gold in your backyard?
31. What would you do if you did very poorly on a test?
32. What would you do if a friend borrows things from you but never returns them?
33. What would you do if you woke up in another country and no one could understand you?
34. What would you do if someone got in front of you when you were in line at the movies?
35. What would you do if someone said you did something wrong and you didn’t?
36. If you could only take 3 people with you on a trip around the world, who would you take and why?
37. If you were five years older you would…
38. If you were lost in the woods and it got dark, what would you do?
39. If you owned a store, what would you do to discourage people from stealing from you?
40. If you could break the Guinness Book of Records it would be for?
41. If you had to describe yourself as a color, which would you choose?
42. If your friend told you of a secret plan to run away from home, what would you do and why?
43. What do you think about ghosts?
44. What do you think of someone who has bad manners?
45. What do you think about people who take advantage of others?
46. What do you think about when you can’t fall asleep?
47. What do you think courage means?
48. What do you think makes a good friend?
49. What do you think makes a happy family?
50. What pollutants do you think do the most damage and why?
51. What things do you think are beautiful?
52. What do you like most about yourself?
53. What kind of trophy would you like to win?
54. What does “The early bird gets the worm” mean to you?
55. What do we mean when we say, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”?
56. What do we mean when we say, “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar”?
57. What does “There are two sides to every coin” mean to you?
58. What are junk foods?
59. What are some nutritious foods that you like?
60. What is more important to you, appearance or personality?
61. What is something that makes you melancholy?
62. What makes you laugh?
63. What would you invent to make life better?
64. What would you do to entertain your family without spending any money?
65. What effects do cigarette and alcohol advertising have on young people?
66. What has been the most fun activity at school so far this year?
67. What quality do you like about yourself—creativity, personality, appearance—why?
68. What eccentric behavior in a friend disturbs you the most?
69. What parts of nature do you like best?
70. How do you feel when your parents are upset with you?
71. How would you change the world to make it better?
72. Explain how to play your favorite game.
73. Which place would you most like to visit—Africa, China, Alaska—why?
74. Which is least important to you—money, power, fame—and why?
75. Where would you prefer to be right now—mountains, desert, beach—and why?
76. Why is it important to be honest?
77. Why is important to have good manners?
78. Why should or shouldn’t a man stay home to care for the house and children while his wife goes to work?
79. Why do you think tact is an important quality?
80. Why is it not wise to squander your money?
81. Do you think it is necessary to have alcohol at a party in order to have a good time?
82. Should there be a dress code in places such as school, restaurants, and places of business?
83. Should animals be used for medical research?
STANDARDS

As a teacher in a homeschool setting as well as independent schools, meeting the Common Core standards is not required. The national standards do serve, however, as a good benchmark in creating the standards within our homeschool or private school. The pertinent writing standards that would apply in this unit include the following:

Text Types and Purposes:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1**

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.A**

Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.B**

Develop claim (s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.C**

Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.D**

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.E**

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A

Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B
Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C

Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.E

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.F

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

Production and Distribution of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 here.)

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B**

Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., "Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.").
HANDOUT 1 (attached pdf)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W1dQkDKmr86E6lq6WjRCmK8t74nUUyZN/view

HANDOUT 2 (pdfs in Week 1 lesson plan)

HANDOUT 3

Rhetoric Tool Lesson: Participles

“Readers want a picture—something to see, not just a paragraph to read. A picture made out of words. That’s what makes a pro out of an amateur. An amateur writer tells a story. A pro shows the story, creates a picture to look at instead of just words to read. A good author writes with a camera, not with a pen.

The amateur writes: “Bill was nervous.”

The pro writes: “Bill sat in a dentist’s waiting room, peeling the skin at the edge of his thumb, until the raw, red flesh began to show. Biting the torn cuticle, he ripped it away, and sucked at the warm sweetness of his own blood.” (Robert Newton Peck, Secrets of Successful Fiction. 1985, 4).

Rhetoric Tool 1: (Participles)

The diamondback water snake attacked its prey.

Hissing, slithering and coiling, the diamondback water snake attacked its prey. (three participles)

Hissing its forked red tongue and coiling its cold body, the diamond back snake attacked its prey. (two participle phrases)

Examples from novels:

Shifting the weight of the line to his left shoulder and kneeling carefully, he washed his hand in the ocean and held it there, submerged, for more than a minute, watching the blood trail away and the steady movement of the water against his hand as the boat moved. (Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway, 1952, 56-7)
The man got out of his chair with difficulty, pushing himself up with his arms, holding his breath as he rose. (*The Bourne Identity*, Robert Ludlum, 1975, 23).

Your example 1:

Your example 2:

**HANDOUT 4 (attached pdf)**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tRgVT6odQfksMbZJOOtBI2pmAY14JGMhn90j6fPL4o/edit?usp=sharing

**HANDOUT 5**

Information and text (somewhat abridged) taken from the following text:

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS--#1
COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS--#2
COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS--#3
COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS--#4
COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS QUIZ

**HANDOUT 6**

Appositives in Use
"The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears." (Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum," 1842)

"This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air."
(F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 1925)

"This was not Aunt Dahlia, my good and kindly aunt, but my Aunt Agatha, the one who chews broken bottles and kills rats with her teeth." (P.G. Wodehouse)

"The sidewalk just outside the Casino was strewn with discarded tickets, the chaff of wasted hope." (Jonathan Lethem, Motherless Brooklyn. Doubleday, 1999)

“It was good listening to the beetle hum, the sleepy mosquito buzz and delicate filigree murmur of the old man’s voice at first scolding him and then consoling him in the late hour of night as he emerged…” (Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451,)

“The dawn came quickly now, a wash, a glow, a lightness, and then an explosion of fire, as the sun arose out of the Gulf. (John Steinbeck, The Pearl)

And from the New York Times:

“Youth hockey in western Canada is a perpetual series of long drives across dark and icy landscapes….It meant a radio usually tuned to hockey — maybe the Toronto Maple Leafs, Derek’s favorite team, or the hometown junior league team, the Melfort Mustangs.”

—“Punched Out: The Life and Death of a Hockey Enforcer” by John Branch

“As the scandal over Bo Xilai continues to reverberate, the authorities here are eager to paint Mr. Bo, a fallen leader who was one of 25 members of China’s ruling Politburo, as a rogue operator who abused his power, even as his family members accumulated a substantial fortune.”

—“Princelings’ in China Use Family Ties to Gain Riches” by David Barboza and Sharon LaFraniere

Using appositives to combine ideas:

Using appositives, revise the following passages:
1. Alan B. Shepard was the first American to fly in space. He was launched on a 302 mile suborbital shot over the Atlantic in 1961.

2. The Gateway Arch in St. Louis is the nation’s tallest memorial. It commemorates the westward expansion of the United States. It was designed by architect Eero Saarinen. It is made of stainless steel and rises 630 feet high from its foundation.

HANDOUT 7

Peer Feedback

Elements of “Good Writing”:

Ideas (content, food for thought, interesting details)
Organization (easy to follow, logical)
Word choice (interesting)
Style (sentences have variety; sentence flow)
Accurate copy
Voice (writing conveys author’s attitude, personality and character)

Something this writer did well:

One good detail this writer included:

One great word choice:

HANDOUT 8 (Good Writing pdf)
HANDOUT 9

AAAAWWUBBIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After</th>
<th>As</th>
<th>Although</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>While</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Until</td>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>If</td>
<td>Since</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are words that can help join ideas together and show their importance to each other. (There are other words that have a similar purpose, but these are used most often.)

They often occur at the beginning of sentences.

When they are at the beginning of sentences, they are a “comma causer.”

Examples:

*When the quartet finished performing,* the audience stood and applauded.

*Because the forensic evidence was still fresh,* the detective worked quickly.

Remember: If a sentence starts with an AAAWWUBBIS, you probably need a comma.

They can also appear at other places in sentences, like in the middle of the sentence:

I discovered later, *after everyone returned home,* that I was alone but not lonely.

My brother, *when he was only four years old,* actually drove the family car for about a block.
Finally, they can appear at the end of the sentence. In this instance, they don’t get set off with commas.

My brother actually drive the family car for about a block when he was four years old.

Examples and ideas taken from both--


**Examples from literature:**

I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do.

Willa Cather (1873 - 1947), *O Pioneers!* (1913)

As long as Buttercup feels he has the chance of catching the elusive light under his paws, he's bristling with aggression.

While Washington’s ability had become subject to question, as one failure followed another, Lee’s reputation had never been higher. David McCullough, *1776*, 230.

“How many of us start something new, full of excitement and good intentions, and the give up--permanently--when we encounter the first real obstacle, the first long plateau in progress.” Angela Duckworth, *Grit*.

**HANDOUT 10**

**Writing Reflection**

Think about the steps you took in creating this piece of writing. What steps made this piece of writing good?

Do you feel you were successful with this piece of writing? Do you like it? What about it do you like?
What is one sentence you like stylistically and why?

If you were going to go back, would you change anything about the process or in your writing?

HANDOUT 11

WORD CHOICE/DICTION

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is large matter. ‘Tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” Mark Twain, The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain

Words are powerful. As a writer, you choose words that add up to images in the mind of a reader, but to use words effectively, you have to understand the associations they are likely to have for the reader. If you use overused images (cliches), the reader can’t see what you want them to say. To help them, try to describe the idea in a fresh and imaginative way.

For the following, first fill in the expected answer (cliche). Then, try to create your own unexpected simile.

1. Scared as a
Reading a paragraph in which each sentence is about the same length can become monotonous to the reader. Here is an example:

“This sentence has five words. This sentence has five words, too. Five word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of drums, and crash of cymbals, and sounds that say listen to this, it is important.” (Gary Provost in Make Your Words Work as quoted in Weaver, Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 55)
Think how some of our favorite novels would sound if they all used short, choppy sentences of about the same length. Here is a paragraph from Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* which as been revised to sound repetitive and monotonous:

His training had not yet begun. He left the auditorium. He felt apartness. He made his way through the crowd. He was holding the folder she had given him. He was looking for his family unit. He was also looking for Asher. People moved aside for him. They watched him. He thought he could hear whispers.

Using some of the techniques we have reviewed so far, try revising this paragraph to add flow and style:

**HANDOUT 13**

**VERBS--SHOWING, NOT TELLING and THE DREADED BE VERB**

“Writing is not a butterfly collection of adverbs and adjectives. Good fiction is a head-on crash of nouns and verbs”

*(Robert Newton Peck, 1980, 10 quoted in Noden 30)*

“When writing teachers promote the virtues of showing rather than telling, what do they mean? They mean that you don’t have to tell us that the old woman on the park bench is sad; you can shows us:

**The old woman on the park bench wept quietly.**

You don’t even have to tell us that she’s old:

**Wearing a shawl around her shoulders, the woman on the park bench wept quietly, wisps of gray hair escaping the woolen cap, frail, bony fingers clutching her handkerchief.**
A well chosen verb not only heightens the drama of a sentence and makes its meaning clear but also sends message to the reader that the writer has crafted the sentence carefully, that the idea matters. The overuse of the linking-be is a common signal that the writer is telling rather than showing: “The old woman is old and sad.” “She was glad her day of hard work as a housecleaner was over.” You may be surprised, in checking a paragraph or two of your own prose, by how often you’ve used a form of be as the main verb. An overabundance of such examples—say, more than two or three in a paragraph—constitutes a clear “revise” message.

The potential drama and meaning of your prose are weakened or missing altogether when the verbs don’t pull their weight. Sometimes the culprit is one of our other common verbs, such as have, make, go, do, say, get, or take. Because these verbs have so many nuances of meaning, you can often find a more precise one. For example, where you have selected the word make, you could probably express yourself more exactly with constitute, render, produce, form, complete, compel, or create, all of which are indexed under make in Roget’s Thesaurus.

It’s important to note, however, that these alternatives to make are not uncommon or esoteric words; they’re certainly a part of your active vocabulary; Unfortunately, the precise verb doesn’t always come to mind when you need it—especially when you’re composing the first draft. Rather than stop mid sentence or mid paragraph to find it, just circle the word you’ve used—or highlight it if you’re using a word processor. Then, during the revision stage, you can take time to think about it again. At that point, you may want to consult your dictionary or thesaurus just to remind yourself of some more specific verbs.

(Warning: Not every word in the thesaurus will suit your purpose. If you’re not sure of it or if it doesn’t sound natural in your voice, then don’t use it….)” (from Rhetorical Grammar, Kolln and Gray, 44-45)

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Still, if we look at what real writers do, we will find that they often use “regular” verbs, even “be” verbs,” along with strong and vivid verbs and nouns. Sometimes if we work too hard to energize every verb our writing loses its authenticity. Consider this original and the revision in which the student tried to energize every verb:

Original: If another person or dog would even look like going near that place, Fox and I would run them off in a frenzy. There was a lot of rocks around, so I could build forts and traps.

Revision: If another person or dog would even advance slightly toward that place, Fox and I would impel them to leave. Rocks abounded, so I could construct forts and traps.

The revision has a strained, unnatural voice and loses the character the student is creating in the rest of the piece.
Consider also the use of a strong verb in place of other describing words like adjectives or adverbs, especially qualifying ones—the ones that increase or decrease the meaning of the word it is in front of:

- The air was *somewhat* cold that morning
- The climber *very* cautiously set her route.

Similar qualifier words are *very, quite, rather, too, still, even, much,* and *fairly.* Some adverbs, often the -ly ones, are used as qualifiers too: *dangerously close, particularly harmful, absolutely true…*  

“As a rule, professional writers let a single word do all the work it can. *Rushed* and *dashed* and *bolted* are stronger than *ran very fast;* leaves that *flickered* are more delicate in movement than leaves that *moved slightly.* The experienced writer, instead of describing a person as *really nice or very nice or very beautiful,* might use instead *cooperative or stunning.* In most cases, the difference is not a matter of knowing unusual words. The difference is a matter of precision, of choosing words carefully. Such precision, even in the small details, can make a difference in the overall effect on the reader” (Schuster 205).

**HANDOUT 14 (Subject/Verb Agreement pdf)**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r8mVjijrRikYbFdCMjCuuyz8Nt6OpAzw/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r8mVjijrRikYbFdCMjCuuyz8Nt6OpAzw/view)

**HANDOUT 15**

**SUMMARY RUBRIC 1**

Review and revise the piece you have chosen, looking to add style elements that seem appropriate for the we have studied so far this year. While you may not want or need to include all of them, look for and identify the following
elements of style you find or add. When you find them, underline and label them in the margin of your paper.

____  Participles (Week 1)
____  Absolutes (Week 2)
____  Appositives (Week 3)
____  AAWWUBBIS (Week 4)
____  Varying Sentence Length (Week 5)
____  Word Choice (Week 5)
____  Writing with Effective Verbs (Week 6)

Additionally, check your text against any of the editing tips we have reviewed so far and correct any elements which weaken your conversation with the reader.

____  Commonly confused words
____  Subject verb agreement

HANDOUT 16

SUMMARY RUBRIC 2

Review and revise the piece you have chosen, looking to add style elements that seem appropriate for the we have studied so far this year. While you may not want or need to include all of them, look for and identify the following elements of style you find or add. When you find them, underline and label them in the margin of your paper.

____  Participles (Week 1)
____  Absolutes (Week 2)
____  Appositives (Week 3)
____  AAWWUBBIS (Week 4)
____  Varying Sentence Length (Week 5)
Additionally, check your text against any of the editing tips we have reviewed so far and correct any elements which weaken your conversation with the reader.

Commonly confused words
Subject verb agreement
Commas after introductory phrases/clauses and between two independent clauses.
Project 4 revised

Dream Writing Class (online writing class)
https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1305866

This Canvas class is public and should be accessible if you have a Canvas log in. If you have difficulty in accessing it, please contact me at armorelizabeth@gmail.com