Final Master's Portfolio

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FINAL MASTER’S 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

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Dr. Ethan Jordan, First Reader
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader
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Analytical Narrative

When I entered BGSU’s MA in English program in 2019, my primary objective was to prepare and credential myself to teach college writing, and that objective remains the same today. I entered the program on the Individualized Track, with excitement as to the many possible directions of study, but quickly discovered that without a clearer path, the options would be overwhelming. With the help of my advisor, I added the certificate in College Writing: Theory and Practice to my program and found that this served as a perfect guide to direct my studies toward my primary goal. Now, as I reflect on the learning and growth that has come out of my time in the program, I notice the distinct theme that has arisen in my research projects has pointed directly to that same end. This focus on my future of teaching college writing is where my passion has been throughout the program, and it has paid off in the practical value of the four major papers in this portfolio.

My first paper, “Preparing for OWI: A Theory and Plan for Teaching Writing Online,” serves as my substantive research paper. I wrote this paper for Dr. Duffy’s Teaching of Writing class in the summer of 2020. As I wrote this paper, I knew what I really needed and wanted to know was how to create a successful online composition course in the context in which I was preparing to teach. Using research on theory and best practices for writing and online instruction, I was able to compile a framework from which to create a well-planned online writing course in one of the six-week sessions used in my school’s online program. At the end of the course, Dr. Duffy and I were both satisfied that this paper fulfilled its purpose and appropriately synthesized a wealth of excellent scholarship in the field.

After consulting with Dr. Jordan on a revision plan for this portfolio, we determined that this piece was in good shape and mostly in need of only a few minor editing changes. However,
one area of potential concern was the vast amount of outside source knowledge in the first portion of the paper. Concerns raised by peer reviewers and Dr. Jordan indicated that it could sound as if my voice was not present through a significant portion of the paper. As we discussed it further, Dr. Jordan and I agreed that this project would make most sense if viewed as a synthesis paper, in which the first portions are largely summary of the literature I encountered in my research, followed by analysis and synthesis of that information into the framework my research efforts were working to create. As I made my final revisions with this in mind, I made sure to insert my voice of summary and explanation in a few key spots throughout the first portion of the paper and made sure the introduction included a clear direction for the paper to ensure the reader would know to expect this flow of information. Though my voice comes through the research much clearer midway through the paper than it does in the beginning, I am pleased with the way this organization serves the purpose of this paper to create a framework for an online writing course based on current scholarship in online instruction and online writing instruction. Since its conception, this paper has already served its purpose, as I have since used this framework to create the first online writing course I taught in Fall 2020.

My second project, “Co-Teaching Technical Writing: Using Interdisciplinary Pedagogy to Strengthen the Demand for Excellence in Technical Communication,” is a final project created for Dr. Heba’s Professional Technical Communication and Rhetorical Theory class in the fall of 2020. One of the challenges in forming this project was my desire to focus on research that would be practically and directly useful to my career as a teacher of college writing while keeping in mind that the emphasis of the course was on the field of professional technical communication, rather than the teaching of technical communication. After Dr. Heba patiently directed all of my pre-writing and research efforts into something that did justice to both goals,
we were both pleased with the result of this paper. The focus of research for this piece was on co-teaching technical writing, as co-teaching interdisciplinary courses was a hot topic among the faculty of my school. By focusing my research in this way, I was able to create a researched proposal for a course that could directly benefit my institution, where the faculty were tasked with creating interdisciplinary courses, and benefit the field of technical communication by creating an awareness of technical communication in an institution where no technical communication courses currently exist.

With Dr. Jordan’s direction, my revisions of this piece addressed some technical issues of formatting and citations as well as a few questions of phrasing to sharpen it up to the best version of itself. I am confident that the revised paper continues to fulfill its purpose to determine why and how to co-teach technical writing, resulting in a practical assessment of the benefits and challenges of co-teaching to benefit our entire faculty, and a workable proposal for a course I could potentially have the opportunity to teach.

Throughout my time in the program, though I aimed my research at learning things that would be most helpful in my teaching career, I also relished the opportunity to stray from the traditional research paper and practice the work of preparing for an actual course by creating a lesson plan. This was the case with my third project, “College Writing – Descriptive Writing Unit,” which serves as my teaching-based project, completed for Dr. Hoy’s Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing class in the fall of 2019. In this project, I was able to construct a teaching unit that would address important topics of fairness and humanity in grammar studies while also providing a framework for using grammar toward rhetorical, creative purposes, rather than grammar for the sake of grammar. Dr. Hoy was confident in my final product, and I was
pleased to have a usable, detailed course unit to get me started on how to convey these important concepts to future students.

While this piece again did not require extensive revision to fulfill its primary purpose, Dr. Jordan guided me toward correcting formatting and citation issues again, along with some changes in my supplemental materials to address some copyright and accessibility concerns that were still relatively unfamiliar to me. I removed a few photocopied pages from printed books that may be suitable to use as classroom examples but not to publish online. I also added alternative text to my images and reformatted one of my handouts to be accessible to screen-readers, along with a few minor heading changes to make instructions clearer or assignments more reader-friendly. With these revisions, I am confident that this piece still provides me with a valuable tool to take with me into the college writing classroom, as it was intended to do.

My fourth and final project, “Resource Guide for Teaching Technical writing,” is also a teaching-focused project that was created as part of Dr. Heba’s Teaching Technical Writing course in the summer of 2019. Throughout the course, we created a syllabus, assessed texts, examined theory, and created a lesson plan, culminating in a guidebook of resources meant to help prepare a teacher to teach technical writing. This project, again, was perfectly suited to my goals for my MA program and provided knowledge and practice on skills that I would need in my career as a writing teacher, and again Dr. Heba and I were both satisfied with the final product at the end of the course.

Dr. Jordan has guided me in my revisions to polish up some minor surface issues, including usage of abbreviations and making sure all hyperlinks included are still active links. I’ve also clarified some of the instructions on where to find rubrics and included a link to Gerson’s rubric, where it can be accessed by both teachers and students without creating
readability issues in the Resource Guide document. These minor revisions have sharpened up the usability of this piece as a guide to help a new teacher teach an introductory technical writing course. As such, it serves as an additional tool to turn to as my teaching career unfolds and I consider creating new writing courses to offer at my school.

As I complete and compile my major projects for this portfolio, I find I could not have asked for a better outcome from my time in the MA program or from my research endeavors throughout. Though the road can be challenging at times, the pieces in this portfolio demonstrate that the journey was not wasted, as they evidence the growth of knowledge, the exposure to vast resources and theories, and the invaluable experience of practice in preparing for a teaching career in college writing. I have already, and will continue, to use this knowledge and these projects in the real-world teaching environment I have already begun to inhabit. As such, I conclude my work in this program and on these projects confident that they have done justice to both means and end in the process of earning my teaching credentials.
Preparing for OWI:
A Theory and Plan for Teaching Writing Online

As a graduate student preparing to enter the world of writing instruction through the threshold of online learning, with no prior teaching experience on which to draw, I find the need is great to develop a solid foundation from which to approach the online first-year composition (FYC) course I have been tasked with teaching. As a discipline, online writing instruction (OWI) faces certain challenges which often remain unaddressed. These issues include a hesitancy—perhaps due to lack of understanding—toward teaching online by full-time, onsite faculty, and a resultant lack of training for the contingent instructors then tasked with teaching this foundational course on the peripheries of the college’s resources, community, and knowledge base (Mechenbier). This is certainly the case at a small institution with limited resources and minimal faculty, such as my own. Furthermore, as a current online student, with four years of experience learning online, I perceive in the current approach to online instruction and OWI a lack of the online student voice to help inform best practices.

While this scenario presents some discouraging realities in the resistance to teaching online in our increasingly digital world, and the resultant pushing of this responsibility to the peripheries of adjunct and graduate assistant teaching with little to no prior experience or training, it also presents some promising prospects for the future. The rising popularity and accessibility for non-traditional students to be trained online brings with it the hope of increasing numbers of online instructors who have also been online students. It is my intention with this study to take a step toward this hoped-for future. I present this paper as an instructional tool with several audiences in mind, beginning with my own need for OWI training and extending to future colleagues in similar positions, along with administrators in my institution who might
benefit from a study with this particular scope and direction. In this paper, I will first summarize key points in the literature on writing instruction and OWI to examine key elements in online instruction (vs. onsite instruction), in writing instruction, and more specifically in online writing instruction. I will then insert the student-user voice, examine how these elements overlap and synthesize, and conclude by suggesting how they might be simplified and prioritized to fit the particular six-week, online environment of Barclay College.

**Key Elements in Online Instruction (vs. Onsite Instruction)**

In her volume written for onsite teachers considering the transition to online teaching, Claire Howell Major highlights, among other things, that in transitioning to online instruction, the media and the tools essentially become the message. Therefore, instructors need to view pedagogy through the lens of the technology used in online instruction in order to successfully transition from the media of onsite teaching. Early on, Major draws attention to faculty knowledge in terms of how content knowledge must interact with pedagogical knowledge, both of which must then interact with technological knowledge, as illustrated in the chart below from page 30 of her book:

![Figure 1 - Major's "TPACK" (30)](image-url)
This complex interaction of knowledge bases indicates that making the switch to online instruction requires a significant shift in understanding and mindset toward content knowledge and pedagogy and how they interact with technology.

Along with this shift in thinking, three other themes have come to the forefront of my research in online instruction best practices:

- **Simplicity** – in assignment creation, course design, and language used to provide instruction (owicommunity.org; Borgman’s “Clarity”; Warnock).

- **Accessibility** – of the instructor, course materials and technology, and for inclusivity of students of all backgrounds and ability levels (Borgman & McArdle; Hewett; Warnock).

- **User Experience** – considering OWI with the student experience in mind (Borgman & McArdle).

These three elements are all addressed specifically in the work of Borgman and McArdle. Though their focus is specifically on OWI, Borgman and McArdle make clear some important key considerations applicable to online instruction in general, and especially necessary to OWI, with two underscoring themes of simplicity and accessibility. In their book, *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic*, they detail a specific approach to OWI that has proven useful to them in their experience of learning online instruction through trial and error. I have listed here some key takeaways as related to each theme in their *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic* (PARS) approach:

**Personal.** It takes extra work to be personal with students when separated by distance and technology. To do so, instructors should:
• Consider creating a personalized “office space” on your online classroom that includes a photo of you, along with details on how and when to best contact you, and expectations for your availability and email response times.

• Also consider including an introductory video for students to see your face and hear your voice to confirm that you are, in fact, a human.

• When students stop participating, reach out to them personally—perhaps with a phone call—to open up the lines of communication and let them know it is okay to reach out for help.

• Finally, consider starting the course with an icebreaker activity to get students comfortable with the human, personal interaction of the course (Borgman and McArdle suggest even something fun and silly like “two truths and a lie”).

These and other efforts to be personal work toward taking the isolation out of the online student experience, along with the misconception that online classes mean no personal interaction requirements.

Accessible. Accessibility and inclusivity should be a concern no matter the course delivery, but especially in the digital online environment. Instructors should:

• Make course content available using all senses and learning styles—including written, audio, and close-captioned video.

• Keep course navigation simple to avoid students getting lost or frustrated within the course Learning Management System (LMS).

• Make sure documents, videos, etc. are in formats accessible via the current LMS/technology.
• “[T]hink before you do” (it is likely that no one wants to watch three-hour video lectures, so consider this before creating three-hour video lectures!) (42).

• Keep in mind that as an instructor you will be doing some tech support—consider making Q&A videos for common scenarios (47).

• Don’t let the LMS be a barrier—consider making an overview video introducing students to the course and the LMS at the beginning of the class (47).

Borgman and McArdle also provide an excellent chart on page 47 of their book for considering learning styles and preferences in making course content accessible to all types of learners.

**Responsive.** To move beyond simply responding to be truly responsive, Borgman and McArdle offer the following suggestions:

• Set expectations and timeframes for feedback and responsiveness.

• Schedule office hours, time to assess and respond to student writing, time to respond on discussion boards, time for emails, time for planning and building courses, and time off—to take care of yourself, exercise, seek professional development, etc.

• Learn to take advantage of the “spaces” in online learning (a practice which, in my experience, takes time to learn as a student and probably as an instructor too).

• Have a plan for how you will respond effectively to student writing.

• Include at least one voice or video feedback (with captions or transcript) early on so students understand your tone in feedback and can apply it to your written feedback as well.
• Find the balance to be involved, but not overly involved by, “being responsive without being on call” (66). You cannot be available 24/7 even though the course material is.
• Don’t ask students to do what you cannot.
• Learn to be a “master scheduler” (66), including recognition of time zones in the context of your availability and due dates.

**Strategic.** In every aspect of the PARS approach, it is necessary to be strategic. Toward this end, Borgman and McArdle suggest the importance of planning the whole course ahead of time—map out the whole semester and connect it back to PARS as well as to course and institutional outcomes.

Borgman and McArdle’s conclusion ultimately brings the picture back around to the centrality of the student in online instruction. They suggest taking opportunities to get user (student) feedback whenever possible, because (drawing on the book’s golf metaphor) teaching is a game that you continue to improve for life. In improving this game, it is crucial not to let student-users become an afterthought.

In summary, successful online instruction requires a shift in faculty mindset to consider how content and pedagogical knowledge interact with the media used to present online instruction. I would suggest that Borgman and McArdle’s approach to Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic online writing instruction embodies this shift in thinking toward effectively overlapping content and pedagogy with the technological media of online instruction by focusing on the needs of the student-user. In so doing, they have created a framework from which to create effective student-focused online instruction.
Key Elements in Writing Instruction

As mentioned above, an underlying theme in my research findings on online instruction has been concern for accessibility. Hand in hand with this concern, and particularly in writing instruction, is inclusivity. This inclusivity requires a sensitivity to the underlying, and often unrecognized and unintentional, racial elitism of writing studies and the concept of “good writing”; a sensitivity to the ways that literacy can still be used to oppress underrepresented groups, even unintentionally, when meeting assumed standards of writing begins to overshadow the needs, challenges, and value of the student, as examined in depth in Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s collection (Re)Considering What We Know.

The needs of these students—the non-traditional students often found in FYC courses—can be understood and addressed through a framework of certain threshold concepts considered to be understood by those in the writing discipline, but often troublesome to students attempting to enter the discipline. Phillips, et al., in their essay “Thinking Like a Writer: Threshold Concepts and First-Year Writers in Open-Admissions Classrooms,” have adapted threshold concepts theory to address the needs of this group of students with four expanded threshold concepts:

- Writing can be taught and learned.
- Writers write for different purposes and audiences, and often in genres with predictable conventions.
- Reading and writing are interconnected activities.
- Writing processes are individualized, require readers, and require revision. (62)
These concepts, as Phillips, et al. suggest, should be considered in writing instruction, whether online or onsite, as some of the key understandings that first-year composition students need to develop in order to cross the threshold into the discipline of writing. Therefore, it is fitting to consider these as underlying understandings toward informing a theory and foundation for teaching writing online.

**Key Elements in Online Writing Instruction**

Finally, in my search for principles specific to online writing instruction, I found significant guidance in Beth L. Hewett’s “Grounding Principles of OWI,” and Scott Warnock’s “Teaching the OWI course.”

Hewett’s piece focuses on the discussion surrounding the 15 “grounding principles of OWI” as determined by the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices. These principles warrant far deeper exploration, but here I will simply list them for reference. Though it seems fitting to include all 15 principles here, let it be noted that the first six—focused on pedagogical considerations—are most significant for the scope of this study.

- “OWI Principle 1: Online writing instruction should be universally inclusive and accessible” (38). (explicitly stated as overarching on p. 37)
- “OWI Principle 2: An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies” (45).
- “OWI Principle 3: Appropriate composition teaching/learning strategies should be developed for the unique features of the online instructional environment” (49).
• “OWI Principle 4: Appropriate onsite composition theories, pedagogies, and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the online instructional environment” (52).

• “OWI Principle 5: Online writing teachers should retain reasonable control over their own content and/or techniques for conveying, teaching, and assessing their students’ writing in their OWCs” (54).

• “OWI Principle 6: Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI models should be subject to the same principles of pedagogical soundness, teacher/designer preparation, and oversight detailed in this document” (57).

• “OWI Principle 7: Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes” (59).

• “OWI Principle 8: Online writing teachers should receive fair and equitable compensation for their work” (63).

• “OWI Principle 9: OWCs should be capped responsibly at 20 students per course with 15 being a preferable number” (65).

• “OWI Principle 10: Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI” (69).

• “OWI Principle 11: Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success” (73).

• “OWI Principle 12: Institutions should foster teacher satisfaction in online writing courses as rigorously as they do for student and programmatic success” (75).
• “OWI Principle 13: OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource; they should have access to onsite support components as a secondary set of resources” (78).

• “OWI Principle 14: Online writing lab administrators and tutors should undergo selection, training, and ongoing professional development activities that match the environment in which they will work” (82).

• “OWI Principle 15: OWI/OWL administrators and teachers/tutors should be committed to ongoing research into their programs and courses as well as the very principles in this document” (85).

Building on OWI Principles 2-6, Warnock offers his own suggestions toward OWI. I have summarized some key elements applicable to this study as follows:

• Use available technologies to enhance the teaching of writing, but not so much so that learning or adapting to them gets in the way of teaching writing.

• Be strategic:
  
  o In your use of technologies—how do they help accomplish your established goals and philosophies? (156)
  
  o Create files of frequently used announcements, etc. to save time.
  
  o Reinforce learning through repetition and multiple media.
  
  o Make instruction clear and concise to avoid confusion or overload: “In asynchronous, text-based courses, the pressures of heavy reading and writing loads and the need for clarity and teacher modeling increase” (158).
  
  o Model good communication, writing, and involvement. (This, I must note, also connects reading and writing, as addressed in the threshold concept listed above.)
o "[I]deally teachers would have a full semester or more before teaching online to become trained in the necessary pedagogies and technologies" (155).

- Students are commonly disappointed when teachers fail to engage in asynchronous discussion (164). Be present. (This relates to being personal.)

- The digital environment and the abundance of low stakes writing provide opportunities for metacognition/reflection: “For instance, message boards—a simple way to enable students to have asynchronous written conversations—provide many meta-writing opportunities to help students think through their writing processes and practices as well as those of other students” (168).

- Working from our own created content, rather than pre-packaged content, is preferable and allows room to consider the students’ interests in each course, though some uniformity in a writing program or an institution’s syllabi is understandable and may afford some level of helpful guidance.

- Dialogue about a program’s pedagogy and self-reflection should be encouraged where teacher evaluation is concerned for OWI.

- Warnock states (drawing, as he indicates, on the work of Peter Thiel), “At some point teachers have to believe in what they are doing as educators despite the astonishing pressure driven by standardized assessments and testing” (177).

**Inserting My Student-User Voice**

Though my experiences as an online student will, of course, not be representative of all online student experiences, they afford a valuable perspective and a strength in planning for my own online teaching. Just as new teachers onsite bring with them ideas from their positive and
negative experiences as students in the classroom, I am able to draw on experiences in the online classroom that often those who teach online do not have. I am including here a list of significant elements that have impacted my student-user experience over four years, two institutions, and two Learning Management Systems.

- Simplicity is crucial. Complex processes, instructions, and navigation all require extra time and energy to interpret and distract from learning the important things. (OWI Principle 2; accessible)

- Consistency is stabilizing. Learning the flow of each new class I enter is a necessary adjustment. The easier it is to pick up on the flow, the quicker I will be able, as a student, to find my footing in the class and focus on the learning. (OWI Principles 3 and 10; strategic)

- Excessive or large discussion boards hinder genuine, deep discussion. If I can’t keep up with what every classmate is saying on the board, I am not fully engaging the discussion, and inordinate amounts of time spent trying to do so replace excitement and genuine learning with fatigue and frustration. (OWI Principles 3 and 11; personal; responsive; strategic)

- Classes with no opportunity for discussion or reflection hinder the learning process. When information is taken in quickly, discussion allows for deeper cognitive understanding as the material is processed with other minds and perspectives, and regular reflection promotes the meta-cognition that positions the new knowledge within my life and amidst my other knowledge. (OWI Principles 3 and 11; personal; responsive; strategic)
• Lack of instructor engagement, whether in discussion boards or feedback, leads me to feel as though the instructor does not want to be there, that they expect me to do what they are not willing to do, and that I am paying for an experience I could accomplish with a group of interested friends (since there is no expert speaking into the situation anyway).

(OWI Principle 11; personal; responsive)

• Having larger assignments scaffolded by smaller assignments makes the task seem doable and gives the assignments purpose to make them worth the effort to do them.

(OWI Principles 1, 3, and 4; accessible; strategic)

Applying to My Context

To synthesize the themes in these related avenues of research—online instruction, writing instruction, and online writing instruction—I will draw on my student-user experience to address the most pressing elements and suggestions to consider in my own teaching context, in the six-week online delivery format, and within the outcomes and mission of Barclay College, while utilizing best practices in online writing instruction.

My online writing instruction should consider the course outcomes set by my institution for my course (Hawkins):

• Adopt effective writing process strategies, including invention, drafting and analyzing your own drafts and those of others, revising, and editing.

• Focus, develop, and organize your ideas.

• Summarize a text’s main points accurately and critically respond to it.

• Analyze texts (e.g., essays and advertisements) and evaluate how authors convey a message.
• Understand how to address specific audiences.
• Demonstrate proficiency in a wide range of academic and professional writing and reading strategies, such as reflecting critically, creating a narrowed thesis, supporting generalizations with details and examples, and interpreting texts from different points of view.

This means the assignments I choose should be selected and designed first to address these outcomes. However, the six-week format means that requiring fewer assignments than would be assigned in a full-semester course will be a necessary adjustment as I consider the balance of expectations. I, as an instructor, must not expect to be available to this course 24/7, and I must also not expect my students to meet outrageous time requirements. For the sake of favoring quality student and teacher participation and feedback over quantity, this is a necessary concession. Furthermore, in the process of these assignments, it is necessary to allow time for drafting, reflection, peer review, collaboration, and revision, while also considering the time students spend in informal reading and writing within the discussion boards. These practices all speak to the threshold concepts listed as particularly important for the majority, non-traditional FYC student.

In following with demands unique to online instruction, all elements of my course will be considered under the Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic approach to OWI and within the context of inclusivity. In my experience as an online student, and in the identity and mission of our institution—“To prepare students in a Bible-centered environment for effective Christian life, service, and leadership”—these guiding principles align with creating a meaningful learning experience, as well as the expected manifestations of a Christian responsibility to view
humankind through the eyes of Christ. To address this, within the six-week context as well as in my context as contingent faculty, my course will include the following elements:

- Personal elements of photographs, videos, and/or audio feedback (*personal* and *accessible*).
- Low stakes writing narrative assignment to engage each student individually in their personal experience with writing (*personal* and inclusive).
- Commitment to availability and responsiveness equal to or greater than that which I expect from my students (*personal, responsive, strategic*, and Christian service and leadership).
- My own involvement in discussion boards to remind students that I am there learning with them (*personal* and *responsive*).
- An icebreaker to begin the class and develop personal rapport and comfort among the students and myself (*personal* and inclusive).
- A grading policy that combines graded assignments with labor-based and completion assignments in order to make success accessible regardless of innate skill level (*accessible, inclusive*, and helping students understand that “writing can be taught and learned” (Phillips et al.)).

Because online students also have time constraints and often many other demands on their time and energy, especially in the fast-paced six-week learning environment (as do I), my course will also include these elements:

- Clear and concise instructions presented in multiple formats (*accessible* and *strategic*).
• Simple course navigation to prevent students wasting time lost in the Canvas LMS, including all discussions pinned in order within the Discussion link so students will not have to search an ever-changing list to find the discussion they want (strategic, accessible, and mindful of user experience).

Because meta-cognition also embodies a threshold concept of writing (Concept 5.0 Writing is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity, and related concepts (Dryer et al.)) that is also significant toward goals of higher education to promote understanding and critical thinking, and to help students integrate the learning they will do before moving on to more learning in the quick, six-week experience, my course will also include:

• Weekly reflections for meta-cognition and retention of new knowledge and for application to Christian life, service, and leadership.

• Process reflections and process memos to address metacognition in writing and threshold concepts of writing as a process, in need of revision, as well as inclusivity in providing reflection as opportunities to learn and succeed apart from mastery of the craft.

To further embrace best practices in writing instruction as well as course outcomes, my course will include:

• Peer review (writing requires readers and revision threshold concept).

• Collaboration (to prepare students for real-world and academic collaborative writing).

Finally, in my context as an adjunct faculty member and online student with work and family demands, a situation not uncommon in the OWI landscape, having a successful online writing course will require:
• A mindset that recognizes that online instruction requires extra time and work to be responsive to my students, but it is worth the effort and can be balanced and enjoyed *(personal, responsive, strategic).* As Hewett encourages, “OWI is not an easy way to learn to write, yet it is absolutely a legitimate, do-able, and often a necessary option for taking a writing course or a writing-intensive disciplinary course” (34). This means, as Warnock exhorts, I must believe in what I am doing.

• Using, when possible, months in advance of teaching to ensure plenty of time to succeed at creating an excellent online writing course *(strategic).* It would be my suggestion that adjuncts be candidly warned of the demands of online instruction so that they may choose to do the same. Such an advanced warning may go a long way toward strategic online instruction.

• Learning personal and accessible technologies, such as screen casting and closed captioning of videos.

**Conclusion**

While this study attempts to digest a vast amount of information all at once, and perhaps ends with even more questions and uncertainty, it is merely a stepping-stone in the direction of well-informed online writing instructors and well-executed online writing instruction. My hope in gathering and synthesizing this information is that it can be used more immediately as a springboard for my own OWI, and in the long-term as a guide to informing current and future colleagues, whether in OWI or online instruction more generally. However, my hope is to continue study into many related topics—including how writing instruction differs inherently from content-delivery based instruction/subjects; concerns and challenges for contingent faculty
in OWI; creating community for online and OWI instructors; hearing the student voice in OWI, online learning, course design, and Learning Management Systems; fostering professional development for online and contingent faculty; creating effective online tutoring and writing centers; the significance of metacognition in online learning; and a more in-depth exploration of Hewett’s OWI principles—in hopes of expanding this knowledge base within my institution. In the broader context and possibilities for online education and OWI, this study has only begun to scratch the surface, providing the exciting opportunity for immense future expansion of this project.
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Appendix

Course Preparation Questionnaire

How have I made my course…

Personal?

______________________________________________________________________________

Accessible?

______________________________________________________________________________

Responsive?

______________________________________________________________________________

Strategic?

______________________________________________________________________________

Simple?

______________________________________________________________________________

Inclusive?

______________________________________________________________________________

Consistent?

______________________________________________________________________________

How have I provided opportunities for cognition/metacognition?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

How have I addressed real-world/career demands of writing?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
How have I addressed each course outcome?

Adopt effective writing process strategies, including invention, drafting and analyzing your own drafts and those of others, revising, and editing.

Focus, develop, and organize your ideas.

Summarize a text’s main points accurately and critically respond to it.

Analyze texts (e.g., essays and advertisements) and evaluate how authors convey a message.

Understand how to address specific audiences.

Demonstrate proficiency in a wide range of academic and professional writing and reading strategies, such as reflecting critically, creating a narrowed thesis, supporting generalizations with details and examples, and interpreting texts from different points of view.
How have I embraced crucial threshold concepts of writing?

Writing can be taught and learned.

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Writers write for different purposes and audiences, and often in genres with predictable conventions.

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Reading and writing are interconnected activities.

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Writing processes are individualized, require readers, and require revision.

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Writing is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity.

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

How have I scaffolded learning processes?

________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
How have I embraced Barclay College’s mission statement to prepare students in a Bible-centered environment for effective Christian life, service, and leadership?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

How have I prevented technology/LMS from becoming a barrier to learning?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Other comments/considerations:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Co-Teaching Technical Writing: Using Interdisciplinary Pedagogy to Strengthen the Demand for Excellence in Technical Communication

Technical communication, both as a field and as a course of study, has endured an ironic history, at best. Beginning as engineering writing, technical writing has been a necessary skill, with a growing awareness of its importance sparking in the engineering boom of World War II, yet it has largely remained orphaned as a field of study within academia. Despite the victorious post-war struggle to embed the humanities alongside the sciences in engineering education, “…neither freshmen composition nor technical writing courses were claimed or championed by either side” (Connors 12). While the war brought forth the great demand for technical writers to supply manuals for the era’s many new technologies, still “few colleges offered technical writing majors or structural changes in technical writing courses” (12). Engineering faculty and the industry complained of graduates’ inability to write well, even in the 1950s, and yet the Modern Language Association did not give technical writing recognition as “a legitimate function of English scholars” until 1976 (16).

Technical writing has long since become associated with workplace writing far beyond the engineering workplace, and as Connors describes it, “We have come a long way from 1939, when teaching technical writing was called ‘professional suicide’” (17). However, it is still apparent today that technical writing struggles to find its footing as an essential element of writing studies and workplace studies. I posit that this reality is evidenced by the lack of technical writing programs, or even courses, in colleges that are preparing students to be writers in the workplace, while teachers and employers continue the age-old lament that graduates and employees do not know how to write well. This paper will examine how institutions might remedy this lack of technical writing courses by embedding them within the disciplines as co-
taught, interdisciplinary courses. Using my own teaching context at Barclay College, a private college with no English or writing majors and no technical writing course offerings, I will discuss the benefits of teaching technical writing as a co-taught, interdisciplinary course and propose a specific co-taught course with consideration to the basic logistics of implementing such a course and the implications of undertaking such an endeavor.

**Benefits of Co-teaching Technical Writing**

In his history of technical writing, Robert Connors notes that “The most successful experiments of the fifties were probably the cooperative courses that were team-taught by English and engineering teachers” (13). Drawing on this positive take on co-teaching, and from the literature about co-teaching in general and co-teaching technical writing specifically, we can identify numerous benefits to taking a co-taught approach to teaching technical writing. These include observed benefits to the students, to the co-teaching instructors, and to the teaching institution.

**Benefits to Students.** Positive student feedback, as well as teacher observations, cite the most benefits of co-teaching as benefits to the students. These benefits include the value of learning important life and workplace skills through modeling, as their co-teaching instructors model:

- Collaboration, as they design, create, instruct, and troubleshoot the course materials together.
- Conflict management, as they work through differences of opinion, scheduling, teaching styles, etc.
- Community, as they work together with unity and respect, sharing leadership as equals – skills that are arguably foundational to business as well as to Barclay College’s mission.
• Critical variety, as they expose the students to their varying perspectives and teaching methods in one common course.

Along with such modeling, students experience the benefits of greater instructor availability with two instructors available to help students with questions, instructions, or course materials.

Finally, students also receive improved instruction on skills that they may not know they need or may not choose for themselves as business majors. By adjoining a writing teacher to a business class, students who may not choose technical writing as a stand-alone class gain the opportunity to receive training in grammar and usage that employers demand. Furthermore, by attaching the humanities to a business course, students benefit from being taught business writing in a rhetorical context that will offer them the flexibility to move beyond form-based writing practices and learn to adapt to their future workplace contexts. While grammar and rhetorical skills can certainly be taught by an adept business teacher, many of these benefits cannot be obtained to the same degree with only one teacher in the classroom, giving co-teaching a unique place in the development of the whole student.

**Benefits to the Instructors.** Though the literature indicates that co-teaching instructors admit to challenges and time demands associated with co-teaching, there is a feeling of consensus that the personal benefits outweigh the challenges (see Williamson & Sweany; Thrush & Hooper; Lock et al.; Chanmugam & Gerlach; Bacharach & Heck; Ferguson & Wilson; Matlin & Carr). Such benefits include personal and professional growth from: encountering and trying new teaching practices that the other instructor brings to the classroom; forming new discipline knowledge; having a forum to share, discuss, and reflect on the teaching experience with an equally participating colleague; and negotiating the challenges of sharing decision-making power with an equal partner. I would posit that co-teaching a technical writing class may also work to counter
issues with lack of confidence and underinvestment in the multi-major professional writing course (see Read & Michaud) by tying the course directly to an established major and providing a teacher with expertise in the major to bring major-specific value to the professional writing course. To the teacher looking to grow their pedagogy and challenge themselves to bring new and diverse meanings to the classroom, these benefits will be worth considering.

**Benefits to the Institution.** To build on the institutional benefits that stem from both student and instructor growth, as mentioned above, Williamson and Sweaney examine interdisciplinary technical writing instruction in ways that highlight the potential benefits to the teaching institution. These benefits include a hope for building a more effective pedagogy through interdisciplinary efforts, as well as building interdisciplinary and interdepartmental relationships, and increasing interest in technical communication by attaching it to the content of another discipline. For an institution like Barclay College in which a stand-alone technical communication course does not exist, or for an institution in which enrollment in technical communication courses is either minimal or compulsory, the potential benefits of placing such an essential course of instruction hand-in-hand with an established discipline are two-fold: The interdisciplinary approach may (1) serve to broaden the institution’s offerings and weed out any stand-alone technical writing courses that are less appealing to students, and therefore less economical for the institution, and (2) produce graduates who are better prepared for the writing demands of the workplace by engaging students in technical communication within the constructs of their selected majors.

These benefits combine to make co-teaching technical writing a worthy consideration for institutions and instructors, but especially for an institution without a technical writing program. In an age when employers continue to bemoan the writing skills of their employees, this
approach can empower such institutions to improve their technical writing offerings by attaching the strengths of technical communication directly to the strengths of an existing major. To further illustrate how such an approach might work in the “real world,” I will propose a co-taught Technical Writing in Business Administration course designed for my current teaching context at Barclay College.

**Technical Writing in Business Administration**

*Genres.* My proposed Technical Writing in Business Administration course would be taught, at least in its early experimental occurrences, as a genre-based course. Based on research conducted about teaching technical writing, and discussions with Barclay College’s Chair of Business Management Distance Education, Kayleen Stevens, and Vice President for Business Services, Lee Anders, I have determined the following genres as essential elements in a business technical writing class:

- Reports, summaries, letters, and emails as letters (Lee Anders)
- Well-formatted resume and cover letter (Kayleen Stevens)
- Email as a “chameleon genre,” with conventions that will change from one context to the next to meet the values and expectations of each workplace, making it “a genre that does whatever its users want it to do” (Droz & Jacobs 68)
- A wiki-based collaboration project (Barton & Heiman)

For future offerings, once the instructors are better acquainted and practiced in co-teaching, I would propose turning the Technical Writing in Business Administration class into a mock business endeavor, beginning with the job search (resume and cover letter), hiring, corporate
collaboration via email with classmates viewed and treated as coworkers, all leading up to a business proposal or recommendation report. This idea stemmed from the work of Williamson and Sweany, who assigned their students a “real-client” project that linked their classroom experience to the professional world. While this mock-business experience is not quite to the same extent of real-world connection as Williamson and Sweany’s model, it is one step closer to the goal of ultimately connecting students to the reality of the workforce as authentically as possible, with the potential to build toward this goal as the Technical Writing in Business Administration course evolves over time.

Theory. While theory will not be a major component within the actual instruction of the Technical Writing in Business Administration class, the major foundational theory of this class will come from the basic instruction found in Gerson’s *Writing that Works*, which focuses primarily on the elements that seem to be of most concern to employers who claim that employees “can’t write” – namely, the clarity, conciseness, and correctness expected of the most effective technical writing. This will form the basis of theory for the technical writing aspect of this course, while the theory of business writing will be informed by Baker and David’s “The Rhetoric of Power: Political Issues in Management Writing,” which will be included as a reading for students in the class while they learn to negotiate the relationship between business writing and power.

Texts and Resources. The Technical Writing for Business Administration course will use for genre and form instruction Gerson’s *Writing that Works*, along with Lannon and Gurak’s *Technical Communication, 12th Edition*. In agreement with Thrush and Hooper’s research on team-teaching, the course will blend the theoretical and the practical aspects of technical writing, using Baker and David’s “The Rhetoric of Power,” as well as Doheny-Farina’s examination of
the reciprocal relationship between business context and business writing in his “Writing in an Emerging Organization,” and Droz and Jacobs’ call for rhetorical adaptability in workplace email-writing in their article, “Genre Chameleon: Email, Professional Writing Curriculum, and Workplace Writing Expectations.” These supplemental pieces will help balance workplace writing theory with the practical genre instruction provided by Gerson’s text and Lannon and Gurak’s text.

**Instruction Time, Assessment, and Grading.** Instruction time for the proposed co-taught Technical Writing in Business Administration course would be shared throughout the whole course. As the literature suggests, planning, instruction, communication, and engagement should be mutual and ongoing throughout the course, with power and decision-making fully shared by both instructors (Lock et al.; Chanmagum & Gerlach; Matlin & Carr). Assessment and grading will also be shared between both instructors. As suggested by Chanmagum and Gerlach, rubrics for assignments will be designed by both instructors together, and both instructors will grade all assignments. Instructors could further streamline this process by deciding together on separate criteria to be considered by each instructor in grading each assignment. This would allow each expert-instructor to grade based on the criteria most relevant to his or her expertise while helping to alleviate potential confusion for students over who will be grading each paper and whose preferences and criteria to focus on. Bacharach & Heck, along with Ferguson & Wilson discuss this confusion, and it effectively represents the types of minor drawbacks reported by students of co-taught classes, which can be remedied through careful planning, particularly where assessment is concerned.

**Compensation and Workload.** While compensation and workload considerations are formidable and fluid challenges to be addressed most appropriately by college administration, in my
research, as well as discussions with Barclay College’s Vice President for Business Services, Lee Anders, and Vice President for Academic Services, Tim Hawkins, I have gathered the following suggestions for tackling these challenges as each course offering’s unique circumstance might demand:

- Since this course will require equally shared planning and power (Chanmagum & Gerlach; Bacharach & Heck; Matlin & Carr), I posit that compensation and workload should always be considered equally, no matter the difference in status or position between the two instructors involved.

- Discussion with Tim Hawkins, VP for Academic Services, indicates that these courses could be compensated at the overload or adjunct pay rate (these are equal pay rates at this time) and split between the two instructors. However, I have raised my concerns that due to the increased demands on two teachers co-teaching, the minimal pay allotted for overload courses or adjunct instructors may not be sufficient when split between two instructors.

- Thrush and Hooper suggest the possibility of considering the workload as one course every two times it is taught, but this suggestion has some major potential complications. Since research indicates that the co-taught course will increase rather than decrease time demands for the instructors involved (Williamson & Sweany; Matlin & Carr), it is necessary to consider that instructors may not be satisfied receiving only half the credit or compensation for one course offering.

- Since much of the research indicates that instructors enjoy noteworthy professional and personal development from the experience of co-teaching (Lock et al.; Chanmagum & Gerlach; Ferguson & Wilson; Matlin & Carr), including the co-teaching experience as a
measurable portion of an instructor’s professional development may work as a sufficient supplement to the monetary compensation that may be shared between two instructors. Ultimately, it will come down to the institution to determine financially whether the benefits of co-taught courses will justify paying two instructors for their work, or to two mission-driven instructors willing to commit more effort than will be measurably compensated for the purpose of bettering the self, the students, and the institution.

Implications

For the Institution. For an institution such as Barclay College, or a similar institution that does not currently offer a technical writing program or technical writing courses, potential implications of offering technical writing as a co-taught class include:

- The potential to produce more workplace-ready students by offering an upper-level writing class that does not yet exist in this context
- Allowing the college to offer technical writing without the cost and risk of creating a new major, minor, or even an undesirable multi-major professional writing course, by embedding the course within an existing major, such as Business Administration (See Read & Michaud for definition and discussion of the multi-major professional writing course)
- A new course that serves Barclay College’s mission statement toward effective Christian life, service, and leadership, as well as the institutional outcome toward effective verbal and written communication
• The creation of a new interdisciplinary elective (a current goal for Barclay College faculty), including a previously absent element of education (technical writing)

For the Field. While this endeavor is admittedly academically focused, it does bear some important implications for professional technical writing as a field. These include:

• An increased awareness of professional technical communication as a potential career path among students who would not otherwise encounter professional technical communication in their chosen major
• An increased ability to meet the workplace’s demands for excellence in technical communication, despite its absence in many degree programs
• Even programs that include technical communication struggle to muster student interest in such courses. Introducing technical communication into the curriculum by embedding the content within another major may make an opening and create interest for it where it may have been lacking before.

Such implications for the field, though not guaranteed as positive results of co-taught technical writing courses, have the potential to increase awareness of technical writing as a necessity in the workplace as well as an in-demand career in its own right. As Moore and Earnshaw postulate from their study on “How to Better Prepare Technical Communication Students in an Evolving Field”:

Technical communication does not just reside in technology companies but also in healthcare, finance, non-profit organizations, and smaller businesses. In addition, it is important for students to recognize that technical communication is multi-disciplinary
and sometimes crosses over into other fields…. As technical communicators, we need to leverage our expertise and coordinate with other departments and programs. (76)

While this may or may not be the outcome of a Technical Writing in Business Administration course, this collaboration might encourage new professional technical writers or new professionals in many fields who respect, and learn to master, technical writing as a significant contributor to their workplace success.

**Conclusion**

Research and planning for a co-taught technical writing course have uncovered a great deal of potential benefits and challenges to undertaking technical writing as a co-teaching endeavor. It is my belief that the benefits may very well outweigh the challenges of co-teaching in this context as long as the instructors involved are willing participants, comfortable with stretching themselves through extended collaboration, and desiring to use the experience as an opportunity to develop themselves professionally and personally. Additionally, an administration that supports and encourages the effort as an overall benefit to the college will be a must in order to successfully capitalize on those benefits and overcome the inevitable challenges to such an endeavor (Chanmagum & Gerlach).

Ultimately, I believe such benefits can be accomplished with cooperation, trust, communication, humility, engagement, planning, and time commitment, all of which are qualities and practices that Barclay College’s mission statement warrants from its staff, faculty, and administration in order to instill them into its students. If such cooperation and dedication can be mustered for a co-taught technical communication course, it may thereby install technical
communication into an environment in which it was previously overlooked by equalizing its importance within an existing major and dedicating extra cooperation, resources, and time to addressing its significance as well as its absence. While this application is only theoretical until the first offering of the course is undertaken, it holds great potential to turn the tides of writing instruction, specifically technical writing instruction, within Barclay College, and potentially other similar institutions, if they should so choose.
Works Cited


College Writing – Descriptive Writing Unit

Rationale

In a course during my graduate studies on *Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing*, we explored a few major concepts surrounding grammar and writing instruction. Among the most prominent were the research that compellingly indicates that teaching grammar in isolation does not work, the need to recognize and respect different grammars even while teaching Standard American English (SAE), and the value of grammar as a rhetorical tool rather than just a set of rules. As I plan to teach English Composition at the college level, where mini-lessons and basic writing instruction will likely not be a suitable approach for most of my students, I do believe it is still essential to address grammar instruction, and I have chosen to focus this lesson plan on the latter two concepts mentioned above.

While I do expect that most students entering my college classroom will already have the basics of grammar that are taught throughout their earlier school years, I recognize that many might still struggle with some of the finer points of standard English grammar, and some may be accustomed to different grammars, including the occasional non-native English speaker. Because this diversity will be the case in almost any situation in these students’ lives, and because many of them may not have ever encountered an appreciation for diverse vernaculars in the context of learning to master the language that has what Crovitz and Devereaux call “social capital,” I find it essential to ensure that they encounter this mindset in my classroom (23). In doing so, I intend to create an environment that is respectful and safe, making sure, as Constance Weaver’s *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* suggests, “to attend to the humanity of the writer” (263). This lesson, intended for the beginning of the semester, is designed to do just that so students can feel safe and confident in writing and in taking risks in their writing.
Furthermore, I intend to use these lessons on respect and diversity in language to nurture the critical thinking skills so necessary in life and so essential to college education (Keow Ngang). Helping students gain perspective and broaden their thinking and understanding is crucial to their ability to live well, serve, and lead others, which is a stated goal in Barclay College’s mission statement. Additionally, challenging what students already know and encouraging teachability is crucial to our institutional outcome for students to be able to “Critically evaluate diverse perspectives.”

These practices of fostering respect, acceptance, and perspective also align with my personal teaching philosophy that college students should learn, in every class, not only the subject matter, but how to think (and act) responsibly in the midst of a diverse humanity. As such, I have designed this teaching unit to begin challenging students’ thought processes from the very first day of class. I will do this by starting the first day with a discussion on what we think makes one dialect of English right and another wrong. We will examine sentences that appear to be wrong in certain contexts but are perfectly useful in other contexts, and we will discuss how much students already know and how well they already communicate. This will serve the dual purpose of addressing the misconceptions of grammar as “right” or “wrong” while also introducing the concept of making choices based on audience and purpose, which we will address later in the unit.

In the first week of class, we will also do a “Lost in Translation” exercise, similar to that found in John W. White’s article, “De-centering English: Highlighting the Dynamic Nature of the English Language to Promote the Teaching of Code-Switching,” which involves translating song lyrics from their original vernacular into Standard American English and examining what is lost in this process of “correcting” the artist’s grammar (46-47). This will move the lesson
beyond recognizing multiple vernaculars to appreciating the value of diverse vernaculars. This, again, is intended to help those who use a nonstandard dialect to recognize that they are not being asked to abandon themselves and their identities, but rather to add knowledge to their toolboxes, while also helping those students who use standard English well to reconsider and challenge any underlying notions of superiority and trade them in for acceptance and equality. These elements are crucial to both critical thinking and the Christian life that we uphold in our mission statement.

Essential to the process of creating a safe writing and learning environment through respect and acceptance will also be changing students’ perspectives on making mistakes. As Constance Weaver’s text insists again and again, mistakes are not a mark of failure, but a sign of growth. As students begin to learn that they will not be punished for their mistakes, the text explains, they will begin to gain the confidence necessary to take risks in their writing. These risks allow them to try new things. When they try new things, they have the opportunity to see what they can already do and to learn the most effective way to do the things they are trying to do but do not yet know how to do (263-64).

In my teaching context, beyond simply giving students freedom to make mistakes, I desire to change the perspective that says that using a nonstandard grammar is equivalent to making mistakes. Weaver, in several chapters of her text, addresses the concept of code-switching, which is to recognize that an individual consistently using a non-mainstream vernacular is not using “bad” grammar, or failing to use grammar at all. Rather, the individual is following a different set of grammar rules that are fully capable of communicating their message. However, since the reality stands that the language of power is Standard American English (or the conception of Standard American English by which others are often measured), we want
students to learn to “code-switch” and choose which grammar to use in certain circumstances. In this way, we are able to help students to understand SAE as a tool to help them succeed rather than a correction to the grammar they already use. This is a distinction that students of all kinds could use as they learn to communicate most effectively in their world.

The lessons and discussions in the first week of this unit are meant to work toward this goal of shifting student perspective on errors. The students will write a grammar narrative that will help me understand their current perspectives on grammar, writing, and error-making. It will also serve the purposes of getting students straight into the practice of writing and of reflecting thoughtfully on their own experiences and mindsets. These will all serve toward the goals of getting to know one another as students and teacher, understanding the needs of each student, and beginning to create the environment of understanding and respect that will be necessary for students to feel free to learn to write.

To help encourage students to feel free to write and learn, we will also be addressing writing as a process, also emphasized by Weaver as an important part of learning to write and building confidence in writing. In this discussion, we will focus on the value and purpose of the rough draft and the process of revision. As a demonstration, we will look at some of my own rough drafts, as well as rough drafts from professional writers. The goal of this exercise will be to help students understand that it is perfectly normal to make many mistakes in writing, and for writing to require revisions. I hope to use this lesson to help them see the importance of proofreading and revision, but also to help them understand that striving for perfection should not hinder them from getting their thoughts out on paper – there will be time to “fix” it all later. As Weaver’s text notes, “It is expected that the first drafts will contain a number of errors because we are encouraging the student writer to experiment with language. This belief in
experimentation and the willingness to allow for error will encourage growth (Weaver, 1996a)” (264). The hope for this lesson is to ease the fear and discomfort in writing for students who may have a negative view of writing, associating it with failure and mistakes rather than creativity and growth. This discussion also begins to address the course outcome for students to adopt effective writing process strategies, supported by a discussion on why these strategies are important to them.

Furthermore, my students will need to be able to meet the institutional outcome to, “Communicate effectively in written and oral forms.” With this goal in mind, the remainder of this unit will focus on moving students beyond the basics of writing, which often includes a mentality of servitude to the rules of grammar, into the process of using language and grammar to serve their purposes. We will begin this mental switch in our discussions, as well as in the exercise of creating our rubric together as a class, giving the class some sense of control over the writing process. From there we will explore how grammar can improve descriptive writing using Harry Noden’s five “brush strokes” to develop images in their writing. Noden likens this process to developing writing the way a painter uses brush strokes to develop an artistic image. These “brush strokes” include: the participle, the absolute, the appositive, adjectives shifted out of order, and action verbs (4). The students will be introduced to each of these grammar concepts through reading in the assigned Kolln & Gray text, and we will discuss these in Noden’s terms of brush strokes as we put them into practice in class. Further reading and discussion of Kolln & Gray will highlight how grammar can also create rhythm and flow in writing. In the process, we will be examining how to do all of this with real-world effectiveness through assignments that demonstrate how word choice can affect the whole feel of a piece and practicing the discipline of
choosing descriptive features wisely. These activities will begin students toward the outcomes of invention, development of ideas, and the process of revision.

For the purpose of helping students develop the language tools they will need to turn language into power in the real world, we will also address sentence structure and flow, clarity and coherence, and writing for audience and purpose through our readings in Kolln and Gray’s *Rhetorical Grammar* and audience and purpose handouts from ReadWriteThink. Because most careers will require graduates to understand the purpose and practice of technical writing, I have decided to make this unit a dual lesson on how to use grammar to create imagery in descriptive writing and how to discipline the use of description and wordiness to create the concise and effective descriptions that will be favored in resumes, recommendation reports, written policies or procedures, and the like. These assignments will require students to think critically about who their audience is and what they need or want to know, which is a practice that will serve them well in their communication efforts and work toward the course outcomes of focusing ideas, analyzing their own drafts for revision, and addressing specific audiences. This is essential because students will find themselves faced with decisions about how to speak, write, and behave in all of life’s situations. As Rhoda Byler Yoder describes helping her (much younger) students learn Standard American English, “Their goal in combing their hair, like their goal in mastering SAE, is to expressively present their most impressive selves” (87). My hope is to help my college-aged students to understand the same value in learning to use formal English grammar to their advantage.

All of these lessons, and the practice of these skills, will be supplemented by the commonplace book exercise, as introduced by Laura Micciche in her article “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar” (724). The purpose of this semester-long assignment is to help students to
recognize that grammar and writing are used, and used effectively, in real-world circumstances all around them. Since this is not a literature class involving immersion in many types of text, this assignment is also the students’ opportunity to be immersed in effective language all around them, as addressed in Deborah Dean’s “Shifting Perspectives about Grammar: Changing What and How We Teach,” in her statement that, “It’s hard to see how language use in one context differs from or is similar to that in another if a person isn’t exposed to very many kinds of texts” (23). The commonplace book is intended to promote that immersion and work toward the outcome of analyzing texts and evaluating how authors convey messages.

Finally, to help make sure that students gain an understanding of the concepts we are learning, while also removing some of the pressure to be perfect, the students will complete a process memo with this unit’s major assignment, which gives them the opportunity to explain what they are trying to do in their writing, even if they were not fully successful in accomplishing what they set out to do. In this way, students have the opportunity to learn the concepts and practice them with the understanding that it is okay for them to make mistakes while they learn. The process memo will allow them to compensate for the skills that may still be newly developing by demonstrating that they are learning and trying at what they are being asked to do. Using this rationale, this unit, the first of four in my College Writing class, will begin to prepare students with the writing skills they will need for the remainder of their college writing as well as life after and outside of the classroom.

Standards

- Barclay College mission statement: “To prepare students in a Bible-centered environment for effective Christian life, service, and leadership.”
• Institutional outcomes (K. White email)
  ▪ Upon graduation from Barclay College, our graduates should be able to:
    1. Exhibit immersion in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
    2. Model the life and teachings of Jesus Christ
    3. Discern their ministry calling within and outside their culture
    4. Articulate the distinct path of Friends
    5. Interpret and apply Scripture
    6. Critically evaluate diverse perspectives
    7. Form and answer questions to advance knowledge
    8. Communicate effectively in written and oral forms
    9. Team with others to accomplish goals

• Course Outcomes (Hawkins 1)
  ▪ Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
    1. Adopt effective writing process strategies, including invention, drafting and analyzing your own drafts and those of others, revising, and editing.
    2. Focus, develop, and organize your ideas.
    3. Summarize a text’s main points accurately and critically respond to it.
    4. Analyze texts (e.g., essays and advertisements) and evaluate how authors convey a message.
    5. Understand how to address specific audiences.
    6. Demonstrate proficiency in a wide range of academic and professional writing and reading strategies, such as reflecting critically, creating a
narrowed thesis, supporting generalizations with details and examples, and interpreting texts from different points of view.

Lesson Plan: Descriptive Writing

- Unit 1 – first month of semester for College Writing
- 100-level English Composition class
- 50-minute sessions, three times per week

**Week 1 – Dialects, grammars, and language differences**

*Session 1* – Lecture/discuss dialects, grammars, and language differences. Why do they matter? Under what contexts do these differences matter? Should they matter? What are we going to do about it? We will learn how and when to use the language with the most “social capital” (Crovitz & Devereaux 23). In some cases, it becomes necessary to work within “the system.” Learn to work the system (with integrity); do not let the system work you. Set expectations of respectful accepting, and encouraging atmosphere, no matter what we deem our writing level to be.

- Start out with “right” and “wrong” sentences in different contexts. Let students decide/discuss which is right or wrong. (Outcomes: Communicate effectively in written and oral forms; Understand how to address specific audiences.)
  - *You know I got word skillz.* Vs. *I have been told I have a way with words.*
o Same two sentences in response to a text message: “Your speech killed it. The whole class was shook.”
o Same two sentences in the “skills” section of a resume.

- Discuss how much students already know, and how well they already communicate within the grammar that they already use. They do not need to trash that grammar. They should add to it. (Outcome: Critically evaluate diverse perspectives.)

- Introduce low-stakes grammar narrative due in session 3. The idea is to get to know each other as students and teacher, to get straight into the habit of writing, and to immediately introduce reflective writing. The very broad parameters for this introductory assignment are: Each student is to write a brief narrative about their experience with and feelings toward writing and grammar. This will be given a value of 15 points for completion. Score may be reduced, and a one-on-one discussion held, to address any papers that lack personal reflection or do not show evidence of effort, to determine whether an effort was made, and to provide further assistance on reflective writing, if necessary. (Outcome: proficiency in reflecting critically.)

- Introduce commonplace book (Micciche 724). Starting right away, they are to collect a sentence or passage each week that stands out to them in some way and analyze why and how it “works” using the questions provided as guidance. They may earn bonus points for extra passages – 2 bonus points each, up to 40 for the semester. (Outcome: Analyze texts and evaluate how authors convey a message.)

- Introduce syllabus

- Give option to students to bring lyrics to a popular song for translation task in next session.
Session 2 – Lecture/discuss the value in diverse vernaculars. Tie this in with our call as believers to regard others higher than ourselves and all as equals in Christ; to learning to be “All things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Discuss how this does not equate to trying to be someone else, but to broadening our horizons to be as effective as possible at what we set out to do. Give analogy of changing the way we dress to do the job we want to do (my analogy) and Yoder’s combing our hair (or mastering SAE) to “present [our] most impressive selves” (87). Sometimes we have to conform to some expectations and choose wisely which ones we should reject. (Outcome: Exhibit immersion in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Model the life and teachings of Jesus Christ; Interpret and apply Scripture; Critically evaluate diverse perspectives.)

- Translate Tupac/translation task (adapted from J. White 46-47). I provide a selection of songs to choose from for students to “translate” into formal English, or students may have chosen to bring their own appropriate song lyrics. They will do this in class, in groups, and we will discuss the impact this translation has on the messages of the songs and the value that nonstandard English brings in many of life’s circumstances, contrasted with the value of standard English when looking to be viewed favorably in the workforce – right or wrong, it is the reality.

This will not be a graded assignment but will be used as a catalyst for fostering understanding, appreciation, and respect for diverse vernaculars and the value they bring to the picture of human and social interaction. (Outcomes: Critically evaluate diverse perspectives; Analyze texts and evaluate how authors convey a message.)

Session 3 – Share my grammar narrative and invite students to share theirs. Discuss their concerns and/or things they are looking forward to in this class. Give them the choice to read
their narrative, summarize it, or mention one or two things they wrote about, if they are comfortable with it.

- Begin introducing descriptive writing and creating a rubric together as a class for what our descriptive writing should look like. We will revisit this and add to it if necessary as we dig into descriptive writing. We will also refer to this throughout the unit to determine whether our descriptive writing activities are “measuring up” to our rubric. (I will compare this to my minimal descriptive writing rubric to ensure we address at least the items on that list.)

- Assign Kolln & Gray pp. 39-46 (passive voice/action verbs); pp. 95-103 (adjectives out of order and participial phrases, plus relative clauses); pp. 110-16 (appositives); and pp. 124-27 (absolutes). (Outcome: Communicate effectively in written and oral forms.)

**Week 2 – Writing as a process**

*Session 1 – Emphasis: We should not expect our writing to be perfect in the first draft. The first draft should afford us freedom to get our thoughts out without pressure or anxiety. Once they are out, then they are available to us to shape into something more. (Outcome: Adopt effective writing process strategies – invention and drafting.)*

- Show students some of my own rough drafts. Let them know it is a little embarrassing to show how many mistakes I make, but it is silly for me to feel embarrassed – it is a rough draft! Also provide some rough drafts from professional writers (Zinsser pp. 10-11 has a final draft that has been marked up and revised even more; Burroway pp. 212-23 provides some writers’ rough drafts.) (Outcome: Adopt effective writing process strategies – invention and drafting.)
• Freewrite a description in class. It will be messy. The idea is: Just start writing. They should not worry about correctness or excellence – this is how we start writing. Write without fear. I will provide some images that do not seem to have much action/excitement. We will revise these descriptions later with Noden’s brush strokes. (Adopt effective writing process strategies – invention.)

• Introduce Harry Noden’s brush strokes: the participle, the absolute, the appositive, adjectives shifted out of order, and action verbs as the devices we will use to add interest to our written artwork (4). (The reading in Kolln & Gray will have addressed the grammar constructs used here.) Provide handout for students to use as a guide. Create example sentences on the board as a class. Note that identifying the strokes by the technical names is not essential but might be the kind of thing to show up as a bonus test question. (Outcome: focus, develop, and organize ideas.)

• Homework: Read Burroway, Chapter 2 on “Image” for further treatment of creating image in writing (I will provide this via pdf). Add brush strokes to their descriptions to provide some action/excitement to the otherwise dull image. This assignment will be worth 10 points for completion and 5 points for using at least 3 brush strokes, for a total of 15 points. During the next session we will refer to our descriptive writing rubric and discuss how well students feel they have achieved our goals for descriptive writing.

Session 2 – Review brush strokes and share the original and revised descriptions as students are willing, or share some revised sentences if that is all anyone is comfortable with. (Collect these for grades and to review and become more familiar with student writing.)

• Revisit descriptive writing rubric and discuss how well students feel they have achieved our descriptive writing goals. Discuss how our choices of descriptive techniques and
words and phrases can color the atmosphere of the piece. (Outcome: Adopt effective writing process strategies – analyzing your own drafts.)

- Provide copies of a dull description to revise. Divide class into small groups. Assign each group a “feel” (scary, dramatic, humorous, suspenseful, mundane, etc.) to provide to the image using brush strokes and word choices. Afterwards, analyze as a class how they accomplished some of these feelings/atmospheres. This will not be a graded assignment. It is an in-class exercise to explore how rhetorical choices can affect writing – creating the feel or the angle of vision of a piece. (Outcomes: Team with others to accomplish goals; Writing process strategies – analyzing; Focus, develop, and organize ideas; Interpreting texts from different points of view.)

- Assign reading: Zinsser Ch 2 & 3 on Simplicity & Clutter (I will provide these via pdf). Take it with a grain of salt, as it is a bit forceful – the idea is to understand conciseness. (Outcomes: Communicate effectively in written and oral forms; Focus, develop, and organize your ideas.)

Session 3 – Continue discussion of word choice and using description effectively. Introduce idea of conciseness and choosing description wisely. We do not want to lack description, but we do not want to overwhelm or bore the reader with details.

- Provide a “minimal” passage, and the same passage excessively expanded with brush strokes. Have students work individually or in groups to dial back the brush strokes. They should revise the passage to one they think has enough description to pique the reader’s interest but does not sound ridiculous and over-the-top. (Outcome: Focus, develop, and organize ideas.)
• Revise the passage together as a class using each person’s input from their own revision process.
• Revisit the descriptive writing rubric to make sure it suits all that we have discovered in today’s discussion and exercise and to determine as a class whether our in-class activity measures up against our rubric.
• Assign reading for next session: Kolln & Gray, Chapters 9-11 on “Controlling the Message” with cohesion, sentence rhythm, and the writer’s voice (138). (Outcome: Focus, develop, and organize ideas.)
• Students should begin selecting a topic for the descriptive assignment – a person, place, or event that they are interested in enough to write about substantially.

**Week 3 – Controlling Emphasis (Kolln & Gray, Chapters 9-11), angle of vision, and rhetorical devices**

**Session 1** – Based on reading in Kolln & Gray Chapters 9-11, discuss sentence structures. Play with sentences together as a class.

• Together as a class, change sentences in a provided paragraph to achieve a desired flow. This will not be graded but will be used as an interactive demonstration on the value of varying sentence structures within a passage.
• Discuss descriptive essay. Provide assignment and rubric.
• Students must have topic selected by session 2 this week.
• Rough draft of one piece of the assignment will be due by session 3 this week. (Outcome: Writing process strategies – drafting.)
Session 2 – Discuss audience and purpose and how these inform our decision-making processes, emphasis, tone, word choice, details used, etc. Connect this with learning to write with varying degrees and manners of description from flowery to efficient. (Outcome: Understand how to address specific audiences.)

- Consider Paul to the Galatians as a teacher/leader reprimanding those heading for trouble vs. his grateful, poetic tone to commend and thank the Philippians vs. Luke’s respectful and practical account to Theophilus vs. the prophets’ use of shocking, vulgar language and dramatic metaphor to get the attention of stubborn Israel. (Outcomes: Understand how to address specific audiences; Interpret and apply Scripture.)

- Provide handout on audience and purpose (ReadWriteThink).

- Revisit the “correctness of sentences” exercise from first day of class as example of audience and purpose, and the choices we make with those in mind. Why is it important to make those choices? (Ultimately, so our writing/communication can accomplish the goals we set out to accomplish. Important in our lives outside of the classroom as well.) (Outcomes: Communicate effectively in written and oral forms; Understand how to address specific audiences.)

- If there is time, begin prewriting in class, with teacher available to help answer questions. This is an opportunity to start getting ideas down on paper and breaking through the “getting started” anxiety.

Session 3 – Review; address questions or trouble spots. Check in with students’ progress and process while writing rough drafts. This is largely a work/preparation day. (Outcome: Adopt effective writing process strategies.)
• Confirm that each student has rough draft for at least one piece of the descriptive writing assignment. 10 points for rough draft, 0 points for no rough draft.

• Allow students to work on revision or on other pieces of the assignment in class, partner up and read/workshop a classmates’ rough draft if they choose, ask individual questions of the teacher, etc.

• Nearly final drafts will be due for workshop next week in session 3. (Explain that nearly final means the student would be comfortable turning this draft in for a grade, knowing they have revised and edited to the best of their own abilities, but will have the added benefit of peer workshopping.)

**Week 4 – Reflective work and peer workshop, and audience and purpose continued**

Session 1 – Discuss the value of reflective work for integrating learning into their own reality. Spend time tying the assignment into their context. It is likely that almost everyone will be asked to write something technical at some point in their lives, on the job, or to get a job. For those who plan to teach or preach, description and interest will be a key part of their ability to communicate what they wish to communicate. Knowing your audience and purpose is a key skill in life, whether in the workplace or in understanding how to reach people for the purpose to which God has called them. (Outcomes: Proficiency in reflecting critically; Communicate effectively in written and oral forms; Understand how to address specific audiences.)

• Explain reflection/process memo piece of assignment and discuss questions to consider for this part of the assignment. The instructions and assessment for this are included within the Descriptive Writing Assignment and Rubric. (Outcome: Proficiency in reflecting critically.)
• Look at examples of reflection/process memo.

Session 2 – Work day for students. Meet in computer lab. (Outcome: Focus, develop, and organize your ideas.)

Session 3 – Workshop drafts due. Bring one copy for me and one for peer workshop. Peer workshop in class. Each student will have at least two peer reviewers, and each student will review at least two peer papers. Failure to participate as both author and reader in peer review will render student ineligible to revise and resubmit their graded paper for a higher grade, if necessary. (Outcomes: Team with others to accomplish goals; Writing process strategies – analyzing drafts of others.)

• Final revisions due next week at the beginning of Session 1.
Works Cited


White, Keith. “Re: A Request for Information.” Received by Elaina Halverstadt, 20 Nov. 2019.


Commonplace Book Assignment

Throughout this semester, you will be expected to keep a notebook designated as a commonplace book. This will be used to collect and analyze passages you encounter throughout the semester, as described below.

What you need to do:

1. Each week you will record one sentence or passage that you encounter in print, whether in leisure reading, in an advertisement, textbook, newspaper, magazine, or even on social media, that stands out to you for some reason or another as being particularly effective or meaningful.

2. Following each passage, you will write a paragraph analyzing what makes this passage “work.” To help you do this, consider and answer the following questions:
   - What message does this passage convey?
   - Why does this passage appeal to me? (Is it funny, clever, emotional, imaginative, etc.? Really think about this one. It is an important step in understanding what forms your idea of “good writing.”)
   - What elements create this appeal? Does it create humor or imagination with its word choices, with vivid imagery? Is it clever because it is concise and straight to the point? Does it use unexpected words or ideas next to each other?
   - Does this passage include any of the “brush strokes” or other grammar and style elements we have discussed up to this point in class?

That’s it!

But what if I get it wrong??

This is a low-stakes assignment in order to keep the pressure low and give you some freedom to think through these creatively. Taking time to stop and think about what attracts you as a reader is an important step toward understanding what makes writing “work” and what makes it “work” for you. This will help you as you begin to make more decisions in your own writing throughout this course and beyond. It is also a chance to see the elements we are learning in action in the real world around you, which is, admittedly, much more fun than being told to learn it through textbooks and worksheets!

So don’t sweat it!

I will collect and review these occasionally, and we will discuss several students’ entries in class each week. Each entry will be worth 5 points with 2 bonus points available for each extra entry, up to 40 points for the semester.\(^1\)

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Can’t Stop the Feeling – Justin Timberlake

Ah, yeah, ah, yeah  
I got this feelin' inside my bones  
It goes electric, wavy when I turn it on  
All through my city, all through my home  
We're flyin' up, no ceilin', when we in our zone

I got that sunshine in my pocket  
Got that good soul in my feet  
I feel that hot blood in my body when it drops (ooh)  
I can't take my eyes up off it, movin' so phenomenally  
Room on lock, the way we rock it, so don't stop

And under the lights when everything goes  
Nowhere to hide when I'm gettin' you close  
When we move, well, you already know  
So just imagine, just imagine, just imagine

Nothin' I can see but you when you dance, dance, dance  
Feel a good, good creepin' up on you  
So just dance, dance, dance, come on  
All those things I shouldn't do  
But you dance, dance, dance  
And ain't nobody leavin' soon, so keep dancin'  
I can't stop the feelin'  
So just dance, dance, dance  
I can't stop the feelin'  
So just dance, dance, dance, come on

Ooh, it's something magical  
It's in the air, it's in my blood, it's rushin' on (rushin' on)  
I don't need no reason, don't need control (need control)  
I fly so high, no ceiling, when I'm in my zone
Halverstadt 70

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction – Rolling Stones

I can't get no satisfaction
I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no

When I'm drivin' in my car
And a man comes on the radio
He's tellin' me more and more
About some useless information
Supposed to fire my imagination

I can't get no
Oh no no no
Hey hey hey
That's what I say

I can't get no satisfaction
I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no

When I'm watchin' my TV
And a man comes on and tells me
How white my shirts can be
But he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke
The same cigarettes as me

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When I'm ridin' round the world
And I'm doin' this and I'm signin' that
And I'm tryin' to make some girl
Who tells me baby better come back maybe next week
'Cause you see I'm on a losing streak
This Is Me
(from "The Greatest Showman" soundtrack)

I'm not a stranger to the dark
Hide away, they say
'Cause we don't want your broken parts
I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars
Run away, they say
No one will love you as you are

But I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Another round of bullets hits my skin
Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in
We are bursting through the barricades
And reaching for the sun (we are warriors)
Yeah, that's what we've become

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And I know that I deserve your love
There's nothing I'm not worthy of
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
This is brave, this is bruised
This is who I'm meant to be, this is me
Bad Blood – Taylor Swift

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey

Did you have to do this? I was thinking that you could be trusted
Did you have to ruin what was shiny? Now it's all rusted
Did you have to hit me, where I'm weak? Baby, I couldn't breathe
And rub it in so deep, salt in the wound like you're laughing right at me

Oh, it's so sad to think about the good times, you and I

---
Did you think we'd be fine? Still got scars on my back from your knife
So don't think it's in the past, these kinda wounds they last and they last.
Now did you think it all through? All these things will catch up to you
And time can heal but this won't, so if you're coming my way, just don't

---
Hey
Band-aids don't fix bullet holes
You say sorry just for show
If you live like that, you live with ghosts (ghosts)
Band-aids don't fix bullet holes (hey)
You say sorry just for show (hey)
If you live like that, you live with ghosts (hey)
Mhmmm
If you love like that blood runs cold
Where is the Love? – Black Eyed Peas
(partial)

What's wrong with the world, mama
People livin' like they ain't got no mamas
I think the whole world's addicted to the drama
Only attracted to things that'll bring you trauma
Overseas, yeah, we try to stop terrorism
But we still got terrorists here livin'
In the USA, the big CIA
The Bloods and The Crips and the KKK
But if you only have love for your own race
Then you only leave space to discriminate
And to discriminate only generates hate
And when you hate then you're bound to get irate, yeah
Madness is what you demonstrate
And that's exactly how anger works and operates
Man, you gotta have love just to set it straight
Take control of your mind and meditate
Let your soul gravitate to the love, y'all, y'all

People killin', people dyin'
Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
Can you practice what you preach?
Or would you turn the other cheek?

Father, Father, Father help us
Send some guidance from above
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
Where is the love (Love)

Where is the love (The love)
Where is the love (The love)
Where is the love, the love, the love
Elaina’s Grammar Narrative

To begin with, I would say I have a very favorable attitude toward grammar. I appreciate it and its importance in writing and communicating well. I am confident in my ability to use acceptable grammar, and to find and correct glaring mistakes most of the time, but I would not say I am confident enough in my in-depth understanding of grammar to deputize myself to the grammar police. (Nor do I want to be the giver or the receiver of grammar abuse.) I have been fortunate that grammar has come naturally enough to not be an issue for me and, if anything, that has made me increasingly aware and curious about what causes some people to struggle with grammar while others find it easy to acquire. Before this class, I had never thought about what a person’s grammar narrative might be. I appreciate this exercise all the more for drawing my attention to the need to be sensitive to different students’ experiences with grammar, not just their knowledge about grammar.

My history with grammar has been a good one, I would say – uneventful – and it blends into my history with writing. I received good grades in my ELA classes. I can remember several times that my teachers read my work aloud as an example to the class. I remember writing a piece for our church devotional, and our pastor telling me with great sincerity that I should write more. I remember writing a mock blog post on Facebook, and a friend telling me I should get that blog going for real right away. I remember my college English/literature teacher telling me that I do this or that “as well as any student” he’s seen and admitting to being nit-picky on my work because my not struggling with bigger issues of grammar (and content) allowed him the freedom to nit-pick. These things have formed a positive experience, which makes me thankful that grammar has never been an issue, and that my relationship and history with it has been mostly uneventful.

However, I have often questioned why it hasn’t been more eventful. I have often lamented that the last time I remember being taught grammar formally was in middle school. So, while I am thankful that I have been able to acquire grammar – and I am sure it helped that most of the people around me (including, of course, teachers) used grammar effectively – I also struggle with feeling a little bit like a fraud because I cannot necessarily explain to another person the rules I am following, only that I just know the right or wrong way to do a particular thing (much of the time, but not always). But mostly, I think I’m just lucky with grammar. In some ways this sounds arrogant to me. In other ways, it keeps me humble. Ultimately, I would say my overarching concern toward grammar these days is this: If I am not fully confident in the rules and reasons behind grammar, how can I presume to become the authority on it in a writing classroom?
Guidelines for Descriptive Writing Rubric

When we create our rubric together as a class, we must discuss and include at least the following items.²

- Sensory details
- Vivid language
- Varying sentence structure
- Evokes images and senses
- Figurative language
- Precise language
- Visual Ease (Helps the reader see what I see without requiring them to work too hard)

² *most of these items adapted from:


Informative (and Surprising) Essay – Sample Rough Draft

August 10, 2016

Is Massage Therapy a No-Brainer?

The practice of massage for medical purposes is believed to have ancient roots. It dates back definitively over centuries of related practices, over time developing into the modern profession of massage and bodywork. Unfortunately, in more recent decades the association of the term massage parlor with prostitution damaged and complicated the public’s understanding of this growing profession. These days however, the distinction between a massage parlor and a professional massage therapist has become common knowledge once again, and one might seek a professional massage for relaxation or pain relief in a salon or spa, a medical office, or an independent massage and bodywork practice (Benjamin).

In this age of technology, when such a significant portion of our time is spent hunched over various electronic devices, there is an undeniable need for the pain relief and relaxation that are understood to be benefits of a good massage. The problem is it is often hard to find someone among friends and family who is willing to provide this service. Typically, each friend or family member feels as tired or sore as the next, and is likely more interested in receiving a massage than giving one. Thus begins the game of I’ll scratch (or rub) your back if you’ll scratch mine that we learn to master in childhood, just as surely as riding a bike or bargaining for another helping of dessert. Therein lies a common notion of what massage means. Since most of us have experienced some sort of backrub that has relieved stress or eased the pain of sore shoulders, it stands to reason that the willingness to provide this service to individuals in need of relaxation would hold the potential for a useful and lucrative occupation. Additionally, since most of us have experienced good backrubs and not-so-good backrubs, it also stands to reason that some
training in technique, to offer an enjoyable massage experience, may be warranted. Many people, even those enrolling in massage therapy training programs, believe that this interpretation fully encompasses the art of massage – a simple and straightforward learning of manual techniques, born out of a willingness to offer a sought-after service for relaxation and pain relief. As a massage therapist, licensed by the state of Ohio, I can attest through personal education and experience that massage therapy is a much more complex profession requiring advanced knowledge and training. In order to practice massage effectively and safely, a therapist should undergo multifaceted schooling and training to gain a thorough understanding of the human body and pathology, carefully governed ethics, and an adaptable set of techniques.

Massage therapy is often sought as a means of relief from tense or sore muscles, but beyond knowing how to manipulate muscles in a way that feels good and promotes relaxation, a massage therapist must also have a comprehensive awareness of how the human body works. For instance, in consideration of the complex range of motion of the shoulder, a massage therapist could affect far greater physical change in a troubled joint if he or she has a thorough understanding of the muscles it comprises. A therapist who knows where each muscle of the arm begins and ends, how each one moves the arm, and how to determine which muscles are causing restriction or pain in the patient’s shoulder, will be able to identify the particular issue and take steps toward correcting it with massage. This ability requires an education on the intricacies of anatomy and physiology, musculoskeletal anatomy, and anatomical kinesiology, to understand the physical structure and function of the human body. Another example in which a massage therapist would need to draw on this formal education is in the case of a patient suffering from symptoms of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Rather than undergo surgery in the palm and wrist, the patient could be treated with regular massage to the affected structures to relieve the entrapped
nerves that cause the pain of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. An adept massage therapist will also examine the potential of nerve entrapment by other anatomical structures, such as an overly tense Pectoralis Minor - a small muscle buried deep in the chest that attaches at the shoulder, and has been known to cause symptoms similar to those of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Therefore, a well-educated and licensed massage therapist has greater potential to correct structural issues without the need for invasive (and costly) medical procedures, rather than to provide only temporary relief of discomfort. Such is the compelling draw for many patients to this type of alternative treatment option.

Along with a comfortable knowledge of anatomy and physiology, a therapist needs an education on human pathology as it relates to massage therapy to understand when massage could cause a patient more harm than good. For example, along with affecting the patient’s muscular system, many techniques of relaxation massage also have a great impact on the body’s circulatory system by manually encouraging blood flow in the veins. This has the immediate effect of increasing the body’s circulation. In the case of a patient with kidney disease, this increase in circulation can, in turn, increase the body’s demand on the already overtaxed (diseased) kidneys, which are responsible for filtering the blood that is circulated through the body. Another example of potential harm from massage is in the occurrence of whiplash, which can cause partial dislocations in the spine. In this case, the pressure and manipulation of a massage has the potential to cause further dislocation of the vertebrae, and greater health issues for the patient. Therefore, a patient suffering from whiplash should always check with a physician or chiropractor qualified to perform x-rays on the spine before seeking massage as a treatment for pain. However, in the aftermath of a minor car accident when a regular massage patient finds herself in pain, her massage therapist is often the first person she thinks she should
see. It is then the massage therapist’s responsibility to understand the potential dangers of massage to particular patients, and to take the precaution of requesting a medical history prior to providing bodywork, as well as to obtain a medical history to determine any such risks prior to providing bodywork. Without this, a massage therapist has the potential to inadvertently inflict harm upon another individual.

In addition to knowing when not to give a massage for health and safety concerns, a massage therapist also needs to know how to relate to a patient ethically. A therapist needs to be well acquainted with the ethical and moral guidelines of a practice in which the patient willingly makes himself physically vulnerable to the therapist in trust that his therapist will “do no harm” (AMTA), in any sense of the word. In Ohio, where massage therapy practice is indeed governed by state law, the massage therapist’s code of ethics is built into the law. This law requires that patient information and verbal disclosures be kept private and protected. Just as a medical office is bound by rules and regulations to protect the private information of their patients, a massage therapist is bound by ethics, and in some states by law, to protect the privacy of his or her patients. This applies not only to whom a massage therapist has treated, but also to what ailments were treated, and to anything the patient may have said during the course of treatment. A patient who wishes not to have her familial frustrations running the local gossip mill after sharing them behind closed doors with her massage therapist may appreciate having a therapist who is licensed, and bound by explicit laws and a code of ethics.

With all else to be considered for creating an environment in which massage therapy accomplishes what it is intended for – wellness, relaxation, and pain relief – it stands to reason that learning techniques for massage is also a necessity. However, this need for formal
instruction goes beyond learning what feels good and relaxing to a patient, and encompasses techniques for searching out trigger points in muscles, which often refer pain to other parts of the body, as well as range of motion techniques and palpation skills to locate the muscles and body structures in need of release. There is also the matter of discerning techniques that stimulate blood flow, those that manipulate muscles, and those that promote calm and relaxation, along with when and how to use each of these techniques appropriately. Therefore, even in the notion of learning techniques to offer massages that feel good is not as simple as it initially seems.

While at first glance the profession of massage therapy appears to be a matter of willingness to fill a need, a closer look would suggest that this need requires far more than a willingness in order to fill it. The need for lasting change rather than temporary relief in massage patients demands a strong command in in-depth understanding of the complex workings of the human body. The potential for bodily harm present in the manipulation of body systems requires a general practical understanding/awareness of pathological conditions. The sensitive nature of a patient/therapist relationship necessitates defined and governed ethics; and the multi-faceted demand of affecting change on the body requires an in-depth understanding of the skills involved in the skills used to producing an enjoyable and effective massage. With this in mind, should a massage therapist be required to have a certain level of career-focused schooling, and should this schooling and profession be regulated by state laws, as it is in many states today? The answer, it seems, depends on whether we are seeking a therapeutic experience with lasting change, or just looking for someone willing to give a backrub.
Images for Week 2 Description Exercise

Images from: *Train* magazine, November 2019 issue 11 Volume 6

Image from Burroway *Imaginative Writing*, p. 87
Brush Strokes

Participles – ing verbs

Gripping her aching head in her hands, she trudged down the steps into the noisy kitchen.

Smiling, the little boy accepted the warm cookie from his mother’s hand.

Absolutes – a noun + an ing or ed verb that “adds to the action of an image” (Noden 6)

Muscles tight and teeth clenched, she walked into the testing center and took her seat.

Palms sweating, the young man anxiously awaited an answer from the girl of his dreams.

The runner scanned the area, heart racing, ready to blaze past the next competitor to come into view.

Appositives – “a noun that adds a second image to a preceding noun” (Noden 8)

Their favorite restaurant, an unassuming hole in the wall, served the best homemade pasta in the state.

This year’s team, a rag-tag bunch of misfits scraped together to meet the district’s minimum requirements, took the whole town by surprise when they took first at state.

Adjectives out of order – adjectives, set off by commas, used after the noun, rather than before

The autumn leaves, crisp and vibrant, clinging to the trees for just a while longer, captivated her gaze as they made their way along the winding road.

He looked up at the tall man, lean and sinewy, wondering if it would be okay to say hello.

Action Verbs – verbs that communicate action; no passive voice, less being verbs.

Her salty skin was washed by the cool, crisp water. Vs. The crisp, cool water washed over her salty skin.

The little boy was acting shy. Vs. The boy’s chubby cheeks flushed with red and he retreated into the folds of his mother’s long skirt.

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3 The concept of brush strokes and their definitions are from:
Dull Description to Revise with Brush Strokes

It was just before sunset on a slightly cool fall day. She could feel a gentle breeze and see the sun reflecting on the river below. The bridge they stood on was showing its age. She looked down at the water, and he put his arms around her. She turned her head to look him in the face. As she looked at him in this moment, she tried to make sense of what was happening.
Overly Descriptive Passage Activity

Read the following passages. The first is a minimal description in need of more imagery. The second is excessively descriptive and needs to be dialed back. Your job is to find the middle ground. Bring the excessive description under control to make the imagery most effective without being over-the-top.

Minimal Passage

The teenage girl watched the elderly man walk past her on the path. The winter weather was bad, and the sidewalks were slippery. The girl worried about the old man, who she noticed was her neighbor. She decided to help him home. Just as she reached out to get his attention, he slipped, and she caught him before he fell. She offered to help him home, and he happily accepted.

Overly Descriptive Passage

Twisting her neck as far as she could, the teenage girl with the blue eyes, deep and clear, a tiny wisp of a girl, not more than 95 pounds, watched the elderly man, bent and wrinkled with age, walk past her on the path. Wind whipping and snow swirling, the day’s unexpected weather, a harsh turn of forecast even for the middle of winter, threatened of destructive frostbite and painful falls. The sidewalks, white and no longer visible, were becoming slippery with ice hiding underneath the newly fallen heavy, white snow; a treacherous condition. The girl, still watching the old man in his brown fedora wobble along, unsteady on his cane, bit the edge of her lip, a habit of hers when she worried. Trying to keep warm, she shivered and bounced slightly in her boots, heavy and warm snow boots she had had for years. The old man, familiar and frail, was her neighbor. Wind howling around her, she made the decision to follow the white-haired man, worried that he might slip in the blistering, icy weather. Just as she reached out, her petite but steady arms to get his attention, hoping to let him know her plans to walk him home, his four-footed steel cane with the soggy tennis balls on each foot slipped out from under him like a buttered toad. Arms flailing, the old man began to fall, without hope of regaining his balance, and the girl, thankful that she had made the decision to walk beside her neighbor, caught him before his feet came out from under him. Once she had steadied him, she wiped her brow and said, “Mr. Brown, I would like to walk you home, if that’s okay with you.” His tense shoulders relaxed ever so slightly, and his friendly eyes crinkled into a smile as she took hold of his free hand and the two of them braced themselves against the icy wind, northward bound, to their quiet and welcoming street.
Simple-Sentence Paragraph

(Work together as a class or in small groups to revise this paragraph with varied sentence lengths and structures. Examine how this impacts the rhythm and readability of the paragraph.)

We took a family vacation in November. First, we drove to Indiana. We visited some family there. We also swam in the pool at our hotel. Then we drove to our Uncle Stan’s house in Ohio. He has a lot of fun things to do. We went on his zip-line. We rode dirt bikes. We also canoed and kayaked in his pond. Then we went up to my Grandma’s house. It is also in Ohio. We slept there for a few nights. We also had Thanksgiving dinner with my Grandma, my aunt and uncle, and my cousins. We had so much food. I got to help cook! We worked together to clean up. We had so much fun visiting, eating, and watching movies. It had been so long since we saw all of that family. We love them so much.
Descriptive Writing Assignment

For this assignment, you will write two brief descriptive pieces about a person, place, or event of your choosing. Along with your essays, you will include a short process memo explaining how you worked to accomplish the goals of this assignment, describing things like your specific word choices, grammatical structures (brush strokes) you used, and other choices you made to accomplish your purpose in these pieces. You will not be required to research your topic, but you will need to spend significant time thinking and writing about your topic, so choose something of interest to you. You will choose either a person, place, or event and complete all three items listed under that category:

Person

1. A descriptive write-up about your person for a magazine or newspaper feature piece. You may make up the magazine to suit your feature, if necessary. For example, if you wish to write about your mom, you may invent a magazine that would feature inspiring moms. Just give me a sentence or two before your essay with a little bit of helpful background information. This piece is your chance to use descriptive language to paint a vivid picture.

2. A letter of recommendation for this person to a school or employer. Again, you may invent the details of the job or school they are trying to get into. Just give me this background information briefly before your letter. This piece is your opportunity to demonstrate your ability to select the most necessary details and description for your audience without bogging them down.

3. Process Memo. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you have understood your goals for this assignment and tried to put them into action. This will help me better understand your pieces. Here you can help me see how you have tried, what seems to have worked, and what you might have struggled with.

Place

1. A feature for a travel brochure. This piece is your chance to use descriptive language to paint a vivid picture.

2. A recommendation report to a supervisor on why this would be the ideal location to use for an upcoming business event. You may invent the details of the employer, business, event, etc. and include that background information in a brief sentence or two before your recommendation report. This piece is your opportunity to demonstrate your ability to select the most necessary details and description for your audience without bogging them down.

3. Process Memo. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you have understood your goals for this assignment and tried to put them into action. This will help me better understand your pieces. Here you can help me see how you have tried, what seems to have worked, and what you might have struggled with.
Event

1. A narrative account of the event. This piece is your chance to use descriptive language to paint a vivid picture.

2. A description fitting for a history book/report or a police report. This piece is your opportunity to demonstrate your ability to select the most necessary details and description for your audience without bogging them down.

3. Process Memo. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you have understood your goals for this assignment and tried to put them into action. This will help me better understand your pieces. Here you can help me see how you have tried, what seems to have worked, and what you might have struggled with.

You have some leeway and creative license in the exact audience and venue for each of these pieces, but the idea is that one should be descriptive in a colorful, attention-getting way and the other should be descriptive in a concise, effective, technical writing kind of way.

Process Memo

The two pieces you write about your person, place, or event should be accompanied by a process memo reflecting on the process of writing this assignment. This is your opportunity to explain what you were trying to do in your writing, even if it did not succeed as well as you would have liked. In this memo, reflect on:

- What were you trying to accomplish in your piece? Give examples from your writing of how you tried to accomplish it. Especially focus on what elements of our learning in this unit you tried to address.
- What did you find challenging or struggle with in this assignment? What might not have turned out the way you wanted it to?
- What elements of your writing are you particularly proud of or happy with?
- Any other thoughts you may have about this assignment, what we’ve learned, or the process of writing it.
Rubric

— Includes all assigned elements: imagery piece, technical piece, process memo, and sufficient background information. **20 points**

— Content – imagery piece: Uses 3 or more of the brush strokes discussed in class; uses details to evoke the senses; includes details and a thorough picture of the topic, demonstrating time and effort spent thinking through multiple aspects of the topic that an interested reader might want to know. **10 points**

— Content – technical piece: Addresses details that might be of importance to the audience; does not include excessive details; uses meaningful words to avoid wordiness; and uses details and description to promote a particular angle of vision, but not focused on evoking the senses. **10 points**

— Organization – imagery piece: Demonstrates a clear flow of thoughts and ideas, with evidence of an intentional structure. **10 points**

— Organization – technical piece: Demonstrates a clear flow of thoughts and ideas, with evidence of an intentional structure. **10 points**

— Tone and style – imagery piece: Employs tone and style appropriate to the audience, purpose, and genre **10 points**

— Tone and style – technical piece: Employs tone and style appropriate to the audience, purpose, and genre **10 points**

— Grammar and Usage – imagery piece: Demonstrates signs of proofreading and editing. Contains relatively few distracting surface errors. **10 points**

— Grammar and Usage – technical piece: Demonstrates signs of proofreading and editing. Contains relatively few distracting surface errors. **10 points**

Total – 100 points
Purpose and Audience Analysis

**Purpose:** the reason for communicating with someone.

Define the purpose by answering questions such as the following:

- What does the author want to accomplish?
- What is the reader supposed to do next?
- What does the author want to happen as a result of your text?

The purpose for communication will fit into one of the following general categories:

- to express ideas
- to inform someone
- to explain something
- to explore a topic
- to persuade someone

**Audience:** the person/people being communicated with.

To learn more about an audience, answer questions such as the following:

- What do you know about audiences’ age, gender, geographical location, education, professional position, and so forth?
- What does the audience already know about the issue or idea?
- What is the audiences’ current point of view on the issue or idea?
- What background does the audience need on the issue or idea?
- What will the audience want to know about the issue or idea and why?
- What information will interest the audience?
- What personal information about the audience might influence their position or feelings on the issue?
Example Process Memo

October 19, 2015

This piece, *Confession #1 – I’m not sure when I traded the Backstreet Boys for burp rags*, is meant to serve as the first chapter in my memoir, currently titled *Confessions of a Tired Mom*. This chapter follows a short introduction to the theme of the book, and is intended as an introduction into the present (or rather the present at the time I was writing the first draft manuscript), before introducing the other characters and the story that leads to the present in the following chapters. It is intended to give the reader a fuller picture of the context and expectation of the book, and (I should hope) to “hook” the reader to want to read on and discover how the story reaches this point.

I believe I’ve accomplished this by dropping the reader into the middle of the conflict/action (mundane as the action may be) that supports the title and theme of the book.

This piece was born mostly as a result of reflection and realization of the shift in life over the course of fifteen years. I developed it in this way with the purpose of creating a starting point for the memoir it inhabits. It serves as a contrast to the resolution/realization touched on in the introduction, discovered throughout the story, and reflected on in the book’s conclusion (that is, more or less – in short and trite – that life is what you make it. Though I do hope the journey to reaching that conclusion is far more interesting than the cliché itself).

I’m fairly proud of the opening descriptive action, and maybe the last line of the chapter. I think (hope) it captures the feel of the book and the daily life of the intended audience, and also draws the reader’s interest to the story.
I find myself particularly struggling in the last few paragraphs, trying to create a meaningful conclusion to the chapter but also leave the introduction open to the story that follows. Also, it’s nearly impossible to talk about the Backstreet Boys without sounding cheesy and juvenile – although I suppose juvenile is partially the point.

In summary, I might say the great hope for this piece is to create a voice and an expectation for the story that is fun and fresh – maybe at times surprising – and so familiar and relatable that the reader feels I am telling her story…but with a pleasant addition of funny bits she’s never heard before.
Peer Workshop Review Questions

Reminder: Be respectful and constructive. Include your positive comments along with constructive suggestions. We are here to help and encourage one another, not to criticize.

Imagery piece

Does it use 3 or more of the brush strokes discussed in class? (please identify and indicate on the draft as well.)

Does it use details to evoke the senses?

Does it include details that create a thorough image of the topic? Does it tell you a lot about the topic so that you feel as though you are familiar with the subject when you finish reading?

Technical piece

Does it address details that might be of importance to the audience? (You may wish to note these on the draft as well.)

Is it free of excessive details, using meaningful words to avoid wordiness? (You may wish to note these on the draft as well.)

Does it use details and description to promote a particular angle of vision without a focus on evoking the senses?

Both pieces

Do the thoughts and ideas flow in a way that is easy to read and understand?

Do you feel the tone and style are appropriate to the audience and purpose?

Make note of any grammar or usage issues that are distracting or confusing. You may also mark comments and note errors directly on the draft.
Resource Guide for Teaching Technical Writing
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Technical Writing Teaching Philosophy/Curricular Objectives

My philosophy for teaching technical writing (TW), and for teaching in general, is largely informed by the need for balance between all aspects of life—in this case between academic education and real-world functionality. I believe that all challenges, whether inside or outside of the classroom, should be recognized and utilized as opportunities for learning and growth, and that students should be guided to view life and learning in this way as well. Finding this balance, I believe, will help them to better understand the ongoing connection between education and experience. My goal is to guide students to view real-world experience as education and classroom education as experience, with the goal of understanding that both education and experience are ongoing throughout all stages of life.

This underlying philosophy drives my efforts to help students not just to learn the material or to survive the class, but to learn how to firmly attach its value to the real life they currently live, and to that which they hope to live. To help toward this goal, I assign periodic reflection questions that direct students to explore how each topic relates to their own life, plans, and experience. I also make myself available to come alongside students who are struggling, either with the topic of the class or with the value of the educational experience. For this reason, I offer partial credit even for most late work and require all course assignments to be completed in order to encourage students to participate in each assignment for the educational value it offers. This is a principle I learned from a college professor whose teaching practices have heavily inspired my own teaching philosophy.

These principles inform my philosophy and objectives for technical writing in particular as well. At the heart of human interaction is communication. So often, and increasingly so as technology continues to advance, this communication will be written communication. This is an inescapable reality for every student that will ever walk into my classroom. As such, the same necessity that drives any English or writing course I teach drives my teaching of technical writing—the necessity to be able to write well.

Students will need this skill for any form of writing they will be required to do in the workforce, and especially technical writing. Therefore, the mechanics of writing, style, and tone will be examined in the process of every assignment I give in a technical writing class, or any class I teach. I believe that issues with these skills need to be addressed with individual students to give them as much chance as possible to learn these essential life skills before they leave my classroom. While not all students will appreciate or take advantage of this opportunity, I believe it is my duty to make this help available to them and do my best to help them understand the value of taking advantage of this help. On the other end of this endeavor, I review these learning objectives with students throughout each course and do my best to provide feedback on all assignments that helps students to recognize all that they have achieved through facing each challenge. This is toward the goal of helping students to see the importance of facing challenges head-on for the value of the education and experience that will result from the effort.

While philosophies on technical writing can vary from considering it a strictly instrumental writing form to a heavily-biased political tool, I believe technical writing as a form leaves room for its use on a very broad spectrum. However, in my classroom I find it most important to give students the foundation to be able to write well under different circumstances and life demands. This begins with good writing mechanics and practices and is built upon with a genuine understanding of the purposes, functions, unique requirements, and the value of technical writing to life. I believe that understanding the purpose and function of technical
writing, and that of particular genres of technical writing, will provide students the framework to create successful documents, such as resumes and business letters, when life demands it, without being limited to following a template and hoping they have done so correctly. My goal is to instill a confidence in students that their writing can do what it needs to do in any situation. With this goal in mind, every lesson includes time spent as a class analyzing what each piece of writing needs to accomplish and why, along with how it can accomplish its purposes. Each lesson also includes time spent connecting the practice to a real-life situation in which a student is likely to need such knowledge and skills in their unique life course.

In this and every writing form, my teaching philosophy and objectives are built around giving students a foundation that allows them to think critically through life’s situations and demands in order to apply the principles of effective communication confidently in any and all circumstances. Furthermore, I believe that one of the most important functions of an individual in society is to be able to work effectively with others, whether coworkers or supervisors, and learn to be comfortable presenting information among others. Therefore, a significant portion of my technical writing course is built around group work and an oral presentation. This is toward the goal of teaching students that important documents often require multiple minds and skill sets to create with excellence – they should learn to see this as a strength in effectiveness rather than a weakness in individuality. When students complete this class, an overarching objective is that they would be proficient and confident in technical communication both as individuals and in cooperation with others, all to the goal of helping produce students and future workers who are well-rounded both in their functioning in society and in the tools they have in their individual “toolboxes” with which to do their work.
Technical Writing Class Syllabus

Instructor: Elaina Halverstadt
Phone: (620) 862-5252 x 111
Email: elaina.halverstadt@barclaycollege.edu
Office Hours: TBD

Required Text and Materials


*Students need to bring blank paper or a notebook, a pen and pencil, and their textbook to every class session. If additional materials will be required for a class session or an assignment, I will inform students of this requirement well in advance.

Course Description

In this course, we will examine technical writing: what it is, why we need it, and how it differs from other forms of writing. We will learn and practice the basics of good technical writing with assignments designed to familiarize students with genres of technical communication they are likely to encounter in the workplace and provide opportunities to practice writing in these genres – all while practicing impeccable grammar and the clear, concise writing to be expected in technical communication.

Course Objectives

Students will demonstrate an understanding of:

- The significance of technical writing to the workplace
- Differences between technical writing and other forms of writing
- Basic forms of persuasion and how to employ them in technical writing
- The proper mechanics to be applied in all technical communication
- The role of technological literacy in technical communication
- The importance of collaboration in technical communication
- Numerous technical writing genres and formats

Students will demonstrate proficiency in:

- Applying appropriate style and tone in technical writing
- Using proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage in writing
- Creating various types of technical communication from start to finish, including document design
- Using basic technological applications necessary to technical writing and document design
- Employing basic forms of persuasion
- Proofreading and editing for clarity and accuracy
- Collaborating, working as part of a group, and presenting information (written and verbal)

**Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to attend every class session. Think of it as your job – you need to show up and participate every day you are scheduled to be here. However, I understand that life happens, so students will be allowed up to three absences before course grades will be impacted. Four absences or more will result in a reduction in your final grade and more than eight absences may result in removal from the class.

If you are absent from a class session, you are responsible for getting caught up with any notes and discussion you missed. And, as with any job, you need to let me know when you will not be attending class.

**Electronics**

Cell phones need to be silenced and put away during class. Use of cell phones during class may be counted as an absence, as the distraction prevents your mental presence in the classroom.

Laptops or Notebooks may be used for notetaking in class, although I would prefer students put forth the mental and manual efforts to take notes with pen and paper. Using any electronics during class for anything other than notetaking or tasks directly related to class participation will be treated the same way as cell phone use.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism or cheating in any form will not be tolerated (period). These behaviors will result in a minimum penalty of a failing grade on the assignment or test in question, up to a failing grade for the entire course and the full penalty for academic dishonesty, as detailed in the student handbook.

Furthermore, like paper money without gold to back it, a high score that you didn’t earn means nothing. It will bring with it nothing of value to take with you into life outside the classroom, and it is not worth the sacrifice of your integrity.
Course Work

This class is designed around four main assignments, with reading, in-class activities, reflection questions, and occasional, smaller “daily work” assignments to build in a fuller understanding of the technical writing world. I may also choose to employ reading quizzes if student responses and participation in class (or lack thereof) warrant them. The total points available for this class are subject to change if I assign reading quizzes or assign additional daily work (these changes will always be in favor of students’ opportunities to improve overall course grades), but the major components of the class are scored as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales Letter Assignment</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume and Cover Letter Assignment</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction Manual/Tutorial Group Project</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation Group Project</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Questions</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Work</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Memo Assignment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>740</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Group Work, Presentations, and Revisions

In this class, we will explore and practice different levels of collaboration, as well as both written and verbal presentations of information. Both group work and presentations can be intimidating and frustrating until we learn to view them as opportunities to improve on skills we will be asked to use in the future.

Collaboration will give students the opportunity to give and receive valuable input on their work and their classmates’ work before handing it in for final assessment. This is designed to prepare you for collaboration in the workplace and foster an appreciation for the use of multiple individuals’ talents to produce one excellent piece of work.

Class presentations will provide students opportunities to learn techniques for presenting information and to become more comfortable presenting in front of a group.

Group work will include individual evaluations, as I recognize not all group members will participate equally.
Late Work

Late work will be accepted with a 5% grade reduction for each day it is late, up to a 100% reduction, at which point a score of zero will be assigned. However, every assignment must be turned in, whether for credit or not, in order to receive a grade for this class. An “incomplete” will be assigned to all students with outstanding assignments at the end of the semester.
Course Schedule

**Week One**

- **Monday**
  - Intro to class
  - Review Syllabus
  - **Read:** Chapter 1

- **Wednesday**
  - Intro to Technical Writing
  - **Read:** Chapter 6

- **Friday**
  - Intro to Technical Writing process

**Week Two**

- **Monday**
  - Intro to genres in TW
  - Examine and discuss real-life examples of TW

- **Wednesday**
  - Discuss mechanics, style, tone
  - In-class exercise: write a brief memo with proper style and tone (based on discussion)

- **Friday**
  - Intro to audience-based writing, audience analysis, and persuasion
  - **Read:** Chapter 17

**Week Three**

- **Monday**
  - Essential Components of business letters
  - Types of business letters
  - Sales letters
  - **Read:** Chapter 2

- **Wednesday**
  - Sales Letter Assignment
  - Understand product/service selection and “research” process

- **Friday**
  - **Due:** product/service selection and answers to “research” questions
  - Review audience-based writing
  - Audience and Use Profile
  - **Read:** Chapter 3
Week Four

♦ Monday
  ◊ Review persuasion; *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*
  ◊ Review spelling, grammar, usage, and tone
  ◊ Prepare sales letters for workshop

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Due: Sales letter (2 copies) for workshop
  ◊ Workshop

♦ Friday
  ◊ Due: Final draft of Sales Letter Assignment
  ◊ Intro to Instruction Manual/Tutorial Group Project

Week Five

♦ Monday
  ◊ Assign groups
  ◊ Begin group collaboration and topic selection
  ◊ Read: Chapter 21

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Due: Group topic selections
  ◊ Discuss genre – instruction manuals and tutorials
  ◊ Audience and Use Profile

♦ Friday
  ◊ Group work session – Instruction Manual/Tutorial Project
  ◊ Read: Chapter 13

Week Six

♦ Monday
  ◊ Meet in **Computer Lab**
  ◊ Word processors, formatting, role of technology in TW
  ◊ Read: Chapter 12

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Meet in **Computer Lab**
  ◊ Graphics and visuals
  ◊ Collaboration with Google Docs

♦ Friday
  ◊ Meet in **Computer Lab**
  ◊ Group work day in Computer Lab; design elements
  ◊ Read: Chapter 11
Week Seven

♦ Monday
  ◊ Mechanics and editing
  ◊ **Bring:** drafts of group work for editing and revisions
  ◊ **Read:** Chapter 5

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Group work session

♦ Friday
  ◊ Global/multicultural TW considerations

Week Eight

♦ Monday
  ◊ **Due:** Instruction Manual/Tutorial Group Project
  ◊ Share/examine projects as class

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Share/examine projects as class
  ◊ Midterm review

♦ Friday
  ◊ Midterm Exam
  ◊ **Read:** Chapter 15

Week Nine

*Spring Break*

Week Ten

♦ Monday
  ◊ Examine multiple genres of TW
  ◊ Memos; in-class memo assignment
  ◊ **Read:** Chapter 16

♦ Wednesday
  ◊ Email and instant messages
  ◊ **Read:** Chapter 20

♦ Friday
  ◊ Marketing materials
  ◊ **Read:** Chapter 18
Week Eleven

◆ Monday
  ◦ Resumes and cover letters
  ◦ Essentials and basics
  ◦ Goals and philosophies
◆ Wednesday
  ◦ Resume and Cover Letter Assignment
  ◦ Understand objective, job history, and education
◆ Friday
  ◦ Due: Objective, job history, and education
  ◦ Cover letter
  ◦ Tone and style; goal and purpose
  ◦ Audience and Use Profile

Week Twelve

◆ Monday
  ◦ Due: Hypothetical (but realistic) hopeful position at a real company
  ◦ Bring to class: a computer, tablet, or smart phone with internet search function
  ◦ Lightweight research into hypothetical hiring company
  ◦ Begin drafting cover letter
  ◦ Prepare resume and cover letter for workshop
◆ Wednesday
  ◦ Due: Resume and cover letter (2 copies) for workshop
  ◦ Workshop
◆ Friday
  ◦ Due: Final draft of Resume and Cover Letter Assignment
  ◦ Intro to Oral Presentation Group Project

Week Thirteen

◆ Monday
  ◦ Assign groups
  ◦ Begin collaboration and topic selection
  ◦ Read: Chapter 25
◆ Wednesday
  ◦ Due: Group topic selections
  ◦ Discuss genre – oral presentations
  ◦ Audience and Use Profile
◆ Friday
  ◦ Group work session – Oral Presentation Group Project
  ◦ Read: Chapter 7
Week Fourteen

♦ Monday
  ◇ Meet in Computer Lab
  ◇ Types of oral presentations and supporting technology/presentation media
  ◇ **Read:** Chapter 8

♦ Wednesday
  ◇ Meet in Computer Lab
  ◇ Online research techniques and resources
  ◇ **Read:** Chapter 9

♦ Friday
  ◇ Meet in Library
  ◇ Group research day – oral presentation project

Week Fifteen

♦ Monday
  ◇ Mechanics and editing
  ◇ **Bring:** drafts of group work for editing and revisions

♦ Wednesday
  ◇ Final group work session with instructor help as needed
  ◇ **Read:** Chapter 4

♦ Friday
  ◇ Ethics in technical communication

Week Sixteen

*Finals Week*

♦ Oral Presentations due
♦ No final exam
5-Day Lesson Plan – Sales Letter

GRADE LEVEL

College – 100 or 200 level

CLASS STRUCTURE

50-minute sessions, 3 times per week

OBJECTIVES

- Students will know and use the essential components of a business letter in general, and a sales letter in particular, as found in Writing That Works and Technical Communication, 12th edition, respectively.

- Students will practice appropriate tone and proper writing mechanics in professional communication

- Students will gain and understanding of audience analysis and audience-based communication

- Students will learn and employ basic methods of persuasion

- Students will practice dedicating proper attention to style, purpose, and detail in technical communication

DAY ONE – INTRODUCTION TO LESSON

- Introduce essential components of a business letter. Students will have been assigned reading Chapter 17, Technical Communication, 12th Edition at the end of the previous session

- Warm-up – have students list components of a business letter, either from earlier discussions, or their best guesses. Discuss their responses to see if they can collectively pull together all eight essential components. – 10 minutes

- Make students aware of different types of business letters (inquiry, claim, sales, adjustment, interoffice, external, etc.). Ask if they can think of any types of letters they may have seen or might encounter in business. – 5 minutes

- Explain that we will be working toward a sales letter and discuss unique qualities of sales letters. What elements do they think a sales letter might need that other letters might not?
Cover all elements in detail and why they are essential. Analyze some examples of business/sales letters – **15 minutes**

- Ask and answer questions of tone and style. Introduce the concept of audience analysis and discuss why this is important in this type of writing. – **10 minutes**
- Leave time for additional questions or delays.
- **Assign Reading** – Chapter 2, *Technical Communication, 12th Edition*

**DAY TWO – TOPIC SELECTION, RESEARCH, AND PLANNING**

- Introduce upcoming Sales Letter Assignment and plan for working up to it over the remaining four sessions. – **5 minutes**
- **Warm-up** – have students brainstorm and list three or four products or services they use and like enough to recommend to others and begin listing reasons for recommending each item. – **10 minutes**
- Explain that this will be their “research” process, and an important step to persuasion. Ask for an example and brainstorm as a class what might be the selling points of that example product. They may make up small details, such as a 2-year warranty on a blender or performance claims based on personal experience, but may not use outlandish claims such as, “Even the pope uses this hair cream!” No formal research is required for this assignment, but the goal is to create a realistic sales letter. – **20 minutes**
  - Encourage them to begin asking questions such as:
    - Why does this product/service appeal to me?
    - Would it appeal the same to other people? Why or why not?
    - What features make this appealing to the widest range of people?
    - What claims might seem too good to be true?
    - What reasons might someone have that they don’t need this product?
    - How might they benefit from it anyway, if they would just give it a try?
    - What is the risk/reward of trying this product?
    - What action am I asking my audience to take?
- **Assign homework** (verbal explanation and written directions) and give a few minutes to ask questions/start assignment: Students will select the product/service they will use for their sales letter and answer the above questions for that product. This will be their research process. They will bring this response to the next session. For the sake of simplicity, they will all be considering a general audience – consumers across multiple
demographics. They will need to consider this while answering these questions. – 5-10 minutes

**Day Three – Audience Analysis**

- Introduce/review concept of audience-based writing. Ask and answer questions on why this is important. – 5 minutes
- Read through “Guidelines” and introduce “Audience and Use Profile” (pgs. 28-31 in Technical Communication) in class. – 10 minutes
- Explain the general audience we will use for this assignment. Break off into small groups to complete an “Audience and Use Profile” for this audience in class. – 20 minutes
- Gauge class understanding of audience profile and what this means for upcoming assignment. Answer questions. – 5-10 minutes
- Assign reading – Chapter 3, Technical Communication.

**Day Four – Persuasion and Mechanics**

- Discuss ethos, pathos, and logos. Introduce or review. Ask and answer questions on these concepts. – 10 minutes
- Review 2 or 3 short examples of persuasive writing as a class to identify and classify persuasive elements. Have students give further examples or ideas for these modes of persuasion. – 15-20 minutes
- Discuss importance of spelling, grammar, usage, tone. Review 1 or 2 student examples to assess and correct as a class. Highlight importance of doing this correctly, based on issues/successes in the examples. – 15-20 minutes
- Assign Sales Letter: Students will bring two copies of their sales letter to next session to be workshopped with peers before final due date.

**Day Five – Workshop**

- Students will bring two copies of their sales letters to class. One for instructor to review briefly and give credit for being workshop-ready. The other to workshop with classmates, in groups of two or three to allow for discussion/collaboration. – Whole session
- Provide guidelines for students to assess peer papers, based on assignment evaluation.
- Assign final draft of Sales Letter Assignment to be turned in next session.
Instructor’s Introductory Information – Sales Letter Assignment

The learning outcomes of this assignment are as follows. Students will demonstrate a clear understanding and application of the following elements addressed throughout the class sessions leading up to this assignment:

- Essential components of a business letter in general, and a sales letter in particular
- Appropriate tone and proper writing mechanics in professional communication
- Audience analysis and audience-based communication
- Basic methods of persuasion
- Proper attention to style, purpose, and detail in technical communication

This assignment will be the culmination of a lesson plan preparing the students to implement these practices and will be assessed according to the essential components of business letters as discussed in Gerson’s *Writing That Works* and the guidelines for sales letters and audience analysis and persuasion provided in Lannon and Gurak’s *Technical Communication, 12th Edition*. Assessment will be based on demonstrated understanding of these principles and appropriate tone and form, not on level of persuasiveness, though constructive feedback will be provided on rhetorical elements as well as technical elements.

The bulk of the assessment for this assignment will use the 5-Trait Rubric found on page 21 of Gerson’s *Writing that Works*, adapted to a 7-point scale, for a total of 35 points. The remaining 15 points will be assessed on the essential components of a business letter (Gerson, p. 26), guidelines for sales letters (Lannon & Gurak, p. 396), and a few additional considerations of tone and form (listed below, on the assignment evaluation description). These will be assessed on a scale up to five points each based on how many of these elements the student successfully included (all = 5 points, half = 2.5, etc.) (See the Sales Letter Assignment for this rubric.)
Sales Letter Assignment

Your assignment is to write a sales letter to be mailed out to consumers for a product or service of your choosing. For this assignment, you will select and market a favorite product or service you currently use or have used. (I recommend selecting something you feel strongly and positively about to give you more incentive to want to “sell” it.) You will analyze your intended audience, design a brief and compelling argument for your product, and include all the essential elements of a business letter as discussed in class. You will have already completed many of these steps in the activities leading up to this assignment. If you have given enough attention to these activities, you should already have everything you need to begin composing your sales letter.

Your Sales Letter Assignment will be evaluated as follows, for a total of 50 points:

**Essential Components of a Business Letter- 5 points**

- Writer’s address
- Date
- Reader’s address
- Salutation
- Text
- Complimentary close
- Signature
- Typed name

**Components of a Sales Letter- 5 points**

- Attention-grabbing opening
- Clear, and quickly getting to the point
- Explains benefits to the audience
- Persuasive (*ethos, pathos, logos*)
- Honest (you may make up minor details, as this is not a research project, but they must be realistic – no outlandish claims)
- Call to action

**Additional Considerations- 5 points**

- Is your argument appropriate to your audience?
- Does your letter maintain a positive, professional tone?
- Is your letter brief, meaningful, and considerate of the reader’s time?

**Mechanics- 35 points**

- Gerson’s 5-Traits Rubric (available [here](#))
Multicultural TW Class Activity

In class, students will examine several examples of technical writing, written in English but produced in other countries/cultures, or by international companies/writers (examples will be provided by instructor). These may include TW from any number of genres – instruction manuals, procedures, recipes, business or sales letters, etc. The students will examine these pieces and identify the challenges with them, including translation awkwardness and preferences in style, formatting, tone, visuals, design, etc., and whether these challenges or preferences might result from differences in cultural preferences. This will be done individually or in small groups and discussed as a class to highlight the implications of cultural preferences and worldviews on technical writing and the need to be aware of, and sensitive to, these differences.

Discussion will also include reflection on where students might encounter multicultural TW interactions and what kind of misunderstandings might occur if we fail to recognize cultural differences in those interactions (idioms will not make sense, being quick and concise and straight to business might seem rude, etc.). Discussion of interpersonal issues in multicultural TW will be heavily informed by the discussion in Lannon and Gurak’s *Technical Communication, 12th Edition*, pp. 96-101, which students will have been assigned to read prior to this class session. Students may also find useful tips for multicultural workplace interactions on American Management Association’s website, at: https://www.amanet.org/articles/multicultural-communication-tips/

This activity will be completed in class and will not be a graded assignment, but will address the following learning outcomes:

- Students will gain an awareness of inter-cultural communication differences that go beyond language translation.
- Students will recognize that writing in different cultures will reflect different cultural habits and attitudes.
- Students will reflect on the difficulties with making value judgments on writing created within a culture that holds different values, standards, and worldviews.
- Students will examine the likelihood that they will encounter cultural differences in their working lives.
- Students will discuss the necessity to understand that these differences exist and to be sensitive to them as they encounter opportunities to interact multiculturaly.
Additional Assignment Examples

From John R. Gallagher at publish.illinois.edu:


(The first two assignments offer great attention to what employers are looking for and to preparing job search documents. The third offers an opportunity to practice writing policies. These may require modification for high school or for lower level college courses.)

From Marcea K. Seible on readwritethink.org:


(This assignment includes a five-session plan with useful links to a rubric, planning sheets, instructions on conducting a usability test, and more.)

From Dr. Gian Pagnucci on dhc.chss.iup.edu:


(This assignment might need to be modified for lower level TW courses, but it offers students the chance to practice TW while finding creative ways to connect it to the “real world” and creating a future assignment (project) of their own.)
Additional Resource Links

Resources on understanding and teaching technical writing:


EIA’s Writing Style Guide – a great guide for clean concise writing:


Resources on document design and formatting in Microsoft Word