TEACHING GENRE FOR TRANSFER:
RHETORICAL GENRE STUDIES IN A
SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by

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I dedicate this research to my students whose curiosity fuels my teacher fire.
Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

While Writing Studies scholars such as Angela Rounsaville and Elizabeth Wardle consider the applications of genre and transfer in first-year composition (FYC), few scholars are considering how to apply these topics in middle and high school ELA classrooms. Instead of relying on the prescribed state standards to guide the teaching of writing at the secondary level, this project proposes a pedagogy based on Rhetorical Genre Studies, an approach to genre that finds its genesis with Carolyn Miller and David Russell and has since been extended to questions of transfer by Rounsaville and Wardle. By identifying problems in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms associated with writing instruction and by offering a brief history of how standardized testing has influenced writing instruction, this project establishes a need for reexamining our writing practices in the secondary context.

By offering a nuanced perspective of the challenges of going outside the prescribed secondary curriculum and by closing with applications that could be piloted by other secondary instructors, this project encourages pre-service programs to revise their training methods, and challenges all writing teachers to question the reasons behind our practices as we endeavor to prepare students to be more than test takers.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of genre as more than a form or a type was a threshold concept for me when I first read Carolyn Miller's "Genre as Social Action," and learning it was indeed troubling. I felt frustrated that no one in my undergraduate courses nor anyone in the journals/blogs/professional literature for secondary English had mentioned the idea. Of course, after I read the article, I saw the concept all over—covered in lit reviews, mentioned in passing by scholars discussing other aspects of writing, and in some books that the NCTE was promoting. For comp/rhet scholars, the idea was a given. But somewhere along my path, I had never understood the implications of rhetorical genre for teaching writing. I do not think I am alone.

At a grade level meeting one day last year, a friend of mine who also teaches sophomore English pulled out a file folder from her sophomore English teacher. She rattled off some of the writing assignments she had been given: write a poem, write a newspaper article, write a book review, write a letter to the author. My friend said that for every literary analysis essay they wrote that year, they also did one of these, as she called them, "creative writing" projects. We discussed how neither of us used those type of writing assignments in our classrooms, and we both decided that standardized testing led to the removal of this real-world writing from our curriculum.

Hunter Brimi's study of the effects of standardized testing on writing instruction in Tennessee leads him to assert that the writing assessment in Tennessee has led to a narrowing of the curriculum. According to Brimi, writing prompts have been a part of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program since the mid-1990s (56). Before that,

students were assessed in reading comprehension and math periodically. In the mid-1990s, students in grades 4, 8, and 11 were assessed using a standardized prompt: narrative in 4th grade, expository in 8th, and persuasive in 11th. As of 2017-18, every public school student in the state of Tennessee in grades 3-11 will be assessed using a standardized expository, narrative, or argumentative writing prompt.

Literacy studies scholar George Hillocks traces the impetus for standardized testing further and places much of the blame on the recommendations in one fear-mongering document from 1983: *A Nation at Risk* (4). Hillocks's 2002 survey of writing assessments in 37 of 50 states almost twenty years after *A Nation at Risk*'s publication, found varying implementations of the standardized testing recommendations. Hillocks's primary question about these assessments was how they affected writing instruction:

> States are investing millions of dollars, thousands of teacher hours, and hundreds of thousands of student classroom hours in mandatory writing assessments. If the investment of all this money and time is having a positive effect on student achievement, it may be worthwhile. If assessments limit the kinds of writing taught or the ways they are taught, or the thinking that good writing requires, then the assessments may be of questionable value. (17)

Composition scholars such as Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer have also considered the effects of testing on writing instruction. Applebee and Langer's "Snapshot of Writing Instruction in Middle and High Schools" was published as a follow-up to an earlier survey of writing instruction in secondary schools. In reference to the effect that standardized testing has had on writing instruction in the intervening years, Applebee and Langer made the following remarks:

> In the earlier study, carried out during 1979-80, pressure from external exams was nonexistent. Norm-referenced standardized tests were used to assess the progress of individual students, but they were not tied to the curriculum and did not carry high stakes for schools and teachers. In the current study, for better or for worse,

external examinations are driving many aspects of curriculum and instruction. (20)

While Brimi, Applebee and Langer, and Hillocks all question the influence of these assessments on secondary and primary classrooms, assessments featuring writing are not new. Long before the advent of the TCAP essay in Tennessee, even as far back as the late 1800s, college instructors and administrators across the United States bemoaned the writing skills and abilities of their incoming students, leading to entrance exams and changes in curricular requirements. According to James Berlin's survey of writing instruction in 19th century American colleges, the biggest change in the teaching of writing occurred because of a confluence of issues: a growing middle class presence in colleges, diversion of funds from private schools to public ones with a focus on business and agriculture, and curricular models that deemphasized classical education. Berlin writes that

> The situation came to a head at Harvard in 1891. In seeking a solution to the difficulties of teaching writing, the Board of Overseers appointed a committee of three from outside the college, representatives of the world of affairs, to investigate English A, the required freshmen writing course. These three men— Charles Francis Adams, E. L. Godkin, and Josiah Quincy—with no training or experience in the teaching of writing, took the first and most important step toward shaping the teaching of writing at high schools and colleges for years to come. (60-61)

Of course, this scenario sounds eerily familiar to secondary teachers—people "from outside" with no "training or experience" make changes that affect the curricular and pedagogical choices for many of us. Unfortunately, the reports of this committee still affect writing instruction today. Berlin examines the changes in the American collegiate system in his survey and considers the scientific culture of the time as well. He identifies the narrowing and specializing of the college into departments as a cause of the rise of

current-traditional rhetoric. If persuasion and poetry are confined in speech and literature departments, then according to Berlin, "Exposition, 'setting forth' what is inductively discovered [. . .] becomes the central concern of writing classes. This is also, of course, the kind of writing most valued by the technologically oriented business community" (Berlin 63). This privileging of one kind of genre-less, acontextual writing—the expository essay—at the post-secondary level affected the writing instruction at preparatory school; similarly, a pedagogy of current-traditional rhetoric dominated secondary and post-secondary writing classes of the time. One can easily trace this pedagogy from the end of the 19th century to today's secondary English courses. Though there have been revolutions of writing pedagogy at the post-secondary level, few pre-service teachers receive sufficient instruction in writing pedagogy, leading many secondary teachers to teach based not on findings from composition studies scholarship but on the practices learned from their own experience. Frequently these experiences are characterized by current-traditional rhetoric, often defined as a pedagogy focused on correctness, style, and a general audience. This lack of training in composition pedagogy for new teachers is a concern for Brimi in his study of secondary teachers' responses to the TCAP writing assessment. In his conclusion, Brimi presciently writes, "If the test becomes more of an emphasis[. . .], then the void caused by a lack of formal training may be filled by the test's objectives as delineated by the scoring rubric" (72). Once again, the work of a few, sometimes those without any curricular expertise, affects the curricular choices of an entire generation of teachers.

One potential solution to this problem of curricular narrowing and privileging of expository writing could have been the Common Core State Standards (2010-), which deemphasized expository in favor of argumentative writing. But though the final writing standard attempts to empower teachers to teach writing beyond a writing assessment, expecting students to "[w]rite routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences," there is intentionally, albeit unfortunately, no mention of how students are instructed in writing. Without guidance from state boards of education, teachers who are less secure in their writing pedagogy will rely on the textbooks, the rubrics, and even the other standards to determine how to instruct their students. In fact, the preceding standards that focus on "development," "organization," and "style" ("Writing: Grade 9-10.") continue to privilege a pedagogy based on current-traditional rhetoric; these terms almost obscure good writing in their vagueness. Likely, secondary ELA teachers will continue to teach based on their prior experience or the common trends rather than composition theory and scholarship. In fact, constraints to teaching ELA in secondary classrooms greatly affect teacher *and* student development. Three factors—state/federal mandates for curriculum, standardized testing, and teacher training—combine to stagnate the development of writing pedagogy for secondary ELA teachers.

While teachers of secondary students are aware of the pressure to "teach to the test," we know that we should instead be teaching for students' transfer of skills from one context to another. This approach, however, runs counter to the culture of testing in our

schools, where teachers are evaluated based on the scores of those standardized tests. As secondary teachers, to teach beyond the test requires us both to interrogate our current practices and to align our curricular choices with the best practices and theories of our field. Theories of genre, activity systems, and transfer are frequently applied to pedagogy in composition journals. Scholars have considered how to apply genre pedagogy to secondary curricula, but the scholarship on genre theory and transfer has been focused primarily on undergraduates in FYC or ESL graduate students (Tardy; Swales; Bawarshi and Reiff; Downs and Wardle; Rounsaville).

This research causes me to wonder what might happen if we taught genre analysis in the secondary English classroom to traditional students instead of focusing only on formulaic essay structures that will help them score higher on a test? Would students have an easier time assimilating to the writing expected of them in college, in various disciplines, or in their workplaces if they had a more *generic* view of all writing, with exposure to and experience in learning both about various genres as well as how to learn a new genre of writing? How do we work with the current assessment model in secondary schools? Or rather, how can we work productively against that model? Though much of the scholarship in the field of composition studies has focused on the First Year Composition course, that research can be and should be scoured to find possible solutions to questions about secondary instruction. Instead of relying on the prescribed state standards to guide the teaching of writing at the secondary level, I propose a pedagogy based on Rhetorical Genre Studies, an approach to genre that finds

its genesis with Carolyn Miller and David Russell and has since been extended to

questions of transfer by Angela Rounsaville and Elizabeth Wardle.

CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teaching for Transfer

While "transfer" is a relatively new subfield of education, teachers, and other stakeholders have always been concerned that students can use what they learn at the next level (Devitt; Nowacek; Rounsaville; Russell; Soliday; Tardy; Wardle; Yancey). Unfortunately for many years, teachers, administrators, and scholars have taken for granted the assumption that knowledge and skills transfer easily.

Since the inception of the First Year writing course—the only required course for Harvard students in the late 19th century according to Berlin—the course has been justified as an inoculation against bad writing. However, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle propose a new course to replace First-Year Composition: Intro to Writing Studies or Writing about Writing. In this proposal, Downs and Wardle address the "assumption that writing instruction easily transfers to other writing situations—a deeply ingrained assumption with little empirical verification" (556). Downs and Wardle argue that continuing to teach FYC as a course for "how to write in college" perpetuates misconceptions that hinder students' writing and the field as a whole (553). By reorienting the course as an introduction to the field, Downs and Wardle hypothesize that "Intro to Writing Studies might create more natural gateways to WAC and WID programs than FYC typically does now" (554). Downs and Wardle acknowledge that writing knowledge can transfer but "that most current incarnations of FYC do not teach for [transfer] as explicitly as is necessary" (557). Similarly, ELA teachers at the secondary level are expected to be the sole instructors of writing for all subjects or

departments, regardless of students' successful transfer of skills from one course to another.

In their acknowledgment of the problem of FYC and transfer, Downs and Wardle refer to the wider scope of transfer in educational research, specifically educational psychologists David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon who survey the research on transfer and conclude that transfer is neither general nor automatic:

> Thinking at its most effective depends on specific context-bound skills and units of knowledge that have little application to other domains. To the extent that transfer does take place, it is highly-specific and must be cued, primed, and guided; it seldom occurs spontaneously. ("Cognitive" 19)

Perkins and Salomon continue to debunk this persistent fallacy that knowledge will automatically transfer across contexts, naming that fallacy "the Bo Peep theory":

> The implicit assumption in educational practice has been that transfer takes care of itself. To be lighthearted about a heavy problem, one might call this the "Bo Peep" theory of transfer: "Let them alone and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them." … Unfortunately, considerable research and everyday experience testify that the Bo Peep theory is inordinately optimistic. ("Teaching" 23).

This second article, however, focuses on two types of positive transfer Perkins and Salomon have found. The first is "low road" transfer, which relies on two situations appearing very similar; "high road" transfer involves an application of knowledge or skill to an entirely different context ("Teaching" 27). According to the authors, teachers can prompt transfer through techniques called "hugging" and "bridging" that cue and prompt students through reflective thinking to transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another ("Teaching" 28). To improve students' transfer from one grade level to another, secondary ELA classroom teachers should consider how best to prompt that kind of reflective thinking.

Continuing in this view of transfer, Rebecca S. Nowacek, in *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act,* describes her semester-long study of several students enrolled in an interdisciplinary set of courses. Through her analysis of their class discussions, writing assignments, and interviews with the students, Nowacek puts forth a metaphor for students' transfer of knowledge and disciplinarity as one of students as "agents" and teachers as "handlers" of those agents. She highlights the potential for transfer yet recognizes the obstacles to it or the lack of value placed on such transfer based on instructional, disciplinary, and personal limitations. Nowacek explains that though these students did, in fact, perform both low-road and high-road transfer, as categorized by Perkins and Salomon, that transfer could only be successful if it was effectively "sold" to the evaluator. Even in a set of courses where professors planned together and attended each other's lectures, the successful transfer of skills and content was not a given. If the evaluator did not recognize or did not value the transfer, even if it was a true transfer of information or skill, the student-as-agent's attempt at transfer was "frustrated" (40). Nowacek's research highlights both the potential and the obstacles to students' transfer of knowledge from one genre, concept, or course to the next. Transfer will not happen easily or surreptitiously. Vertical planning among secondary ELA teachers as well as horizontal planning with teachers in other content areas can prevent this frustrated transfer Nowacek observed. But this difficulty for teachers to recognize students' attempts at transfer suggests that teachers have an obligation to seek to understand the disciplinary differences between subjects and to help students bridge those differences.

Angela Rounsaville connects these concepts to Anne Freadman's "uptake" in her article "Selecting Genres for Transfer: The Role of Uptake in Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge," claiming that transfer and uptake combine to elucidate what really happens when a student encounters a new genre. In her discussion of a student interview about his encounter with a new genre, Rounsaville articulates using the "lens of uptake" that "identifying sticking points to transfer—such as the use of evidence—is a powerful way to hone in on the strands and repository of memory that a writer uses to makes meaning out of a new genre or writing task."

If we at the secondary level are to prepare students effectively for a world of writing both in and out of school, we must not only be intentional about the genres we assign to students but also be careful to interrogate students' unsuccessful attempts at a new genre, looking for those "sticking points to transfer" that may illuminate a teaching opportunity.

Threshold Concepts

Jan Meyer and Ray Land have written of threshold concepts in disciplines as "transformative," "irreversible," "integrative," and "sometimes troublesome" (373-374). These concepts are "portals" through which students must pass in order to see the world as a member of that discipline (373). While not directed at secondary teachers, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know* offers teachers a wealth of writing studies scholarship organized by concept with short subsections that address key concerns and anticipate potential pitfalls both in the instruction and in the production

of writing. These "threshold concepts," borrowing language from Meyer and Land, represent ideas that students of writing and *teachers* of writing should engage with, but often these concepts can be "troublesome" because the concepts transform their understanding of writing as both a task and a field of study.

Threshold concepts such as "Learning to write effectively requires different kinds of practice, time, and effort" (4.3) or "Habituated practice can lead to entrenchment" (5.3) represent the areas of consensus among writing scholars and a site of further research in writing studies. The authors hope that the collection of concepts will aid writing scholars in communicating what writing scholars know to be true with administrators, colleagues in English literature, and those in other disciplines. But as Meyer and Land recognize in their research, this knowledge can be troublesome. Threshold concepts can complicate and problematize students' prior understanding, and a failure to understand these concepts can also prevent newcomers from progressing in the discipline. What this collection offers to all teachers of writing—both postsecondary and secondary— is a starting point for the knowledge of the field. Unfortunately, many secondary teachers do not have a good grasp of these concepts, and if they have a methods course, the focus is split between teaching literature and teaching writing, sometimes with more emphasis on the literature.

Genre Theory

One of the sub-concepts in *Naming What We Know* states that "Genres are enacted by writers and readers" (39). The discussion found in this section focuses

primarily on the North American view of genre first codified by Miller. In her seminal

article "Genres as Social Action," Miller shows the need for genre study because of the

limitations of current theories, discussing open versus closed genre classification systems.

Miller proposes a pragmatic or rhetorical definition of genre as opposed to one based on

form or substance (152). Miller advocates for this view as one way to understand

discourse:

> To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of
> recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note,
> the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the
> inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon, is not to trivialize the
> study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are
> immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves. (155)

Miller expands on the concept of "rhetorical situation" used by both Lloyd Bitzer and

Kenneth Burke, but she redefines "exigence… as social motive" rather than Bitzer's

exigence as "defect" or "danger"(156-158). In her final section, Miller presciently

recognizes as implications and applications that "[f]or the critic, genres can serve both as

an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular

speakers and writers; for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to

participate in the actions of a community" (165). Too often, as Wardle has noted,

teachers of all levels provide students with acontextual, arhetorical writing assignments,

which she terms "mutt genres" (774). Is it any wonder that high school and college

students alike struggle to transfer the skills they have dutifully learned to succeed in those

mutt genres to discipline-specific writing assignments and tasks? As Miller notes, genre

is both social and rhetorical, and when we disconnect writing from the true context,

students are dependent on teachers to delineate steps and formulae for their success.

Miller's reconsideration of genre as social and rhetorical was novel, and as Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff explain in *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy,* which serves as both a reference guide and a springboard for further research and application of genre theory, Miller's view of genre "has had a profound impact on the study and teaching of writing" (3). Bawarshi and Reiff's historical progression leads to their view of genre as a "rich analytical tool for studying academic, workplace, and public systems of activity" (104). Their section on academic research highlights a scholarly debate about the explicit instruction of genre between Aviva Freeman and Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb. In "Show and Tell," Aviva Freedman claims that explicit instruction of narrative structure is not necessary for school children to write narratives, nor is the explicit instruction of legal briefs for law students necessary for students to acquire that new genre. Bawarshi and Reiff point out, however, Freedman's concession that "the research evidence from genres studies is 'scanty and suggestive rather than conclusive'" (111). Williams and Colomb argue that earlier studies "confirm the effectiveness of explicit teaching within contextualized learning" (112). Of course, Freedman, Williams, and Colomb all call for more research, and Bawarshi and Reiff describe several studies—including their own forthcoming study about first-year writing students' experiences with genre knowledge and transfer—that address this idea of genre acquisition. The ongoing research in Rhetorical Genre Studies bodes well for further insight into the actual, lived experiences of novice writers learning a new genre.

Charles Bazerman has written extensively about genre theory, frequently, as in one of his writing textbooks *What Writing Does and How it Does it*, recognizing genres

as sets within systems within larger activity systems ("Speech" 311). This view of

activity theory applied to systems of genres has been discussed and theorized most

notably by David Russell, who synthesizes Engeström's ideas of activity theory and

Bazerman's genre systems theory in a systems analysis of a hypothetical cell biology

course ("Rethinking"). Russell claims that "[b]y tracing the intertextual relation of a

disciplinary or professional genre system to an educational genre system, through the

boundary of a classroom genre system, the analyst/reformer can construct a model of the

interactions of classroom with wider social practices" ("Rethinking" 505). Russell

defines genre as "operationalized social action" (512). He claims that "written genres

help mediate the actions of individuals with others in collectives (activity systems) to

create stabilized-for-now structures of action and identity" (514).

Russell's synthesis of genre systems, activity theory, and rhetorical genre theory

forms the basis for his analysis of the activity system of a classroom's written genre

systems ("Rethinking"). In this analysis, Russell proposes at least two activity systems

interacting with the cell biology course, which functions as its own activity system. Cell

biology is one, with researchers as the primary subjects, cells as their primary motive,

and with advocacy groups (patients' rights, animal rights, et cetera), drug companies,

government research agencies, and related disciplines as "boundary activity systems"; the

research university is the other, with primary subjects/agents as administrators and

connecting activity systems as legislative congress, families, secondary schools, and

various publics (526-7). Russell places the cell biology course at the intersection of these

two activity systems with students and teachers as the primary subjects. Russell claims

that while cells are the primary object/motive in the course as well as in the system of cell

biology, the genres used by both of these groups to mediate these systems differ because

the goals of each system are different. Russell then considers the contradictions and

"double binds" encountered by students and teachers in the course because of the

conflicts produced by the intersection of these three activity systems. Through this

systems analysis, Russell provides a framework for analyzing the classroom genres as

"linked intertextually to written genres of the university activity system" (530). Russell

proposes three applications of his theory involving "student agency and identity,"

"students' arhetorical approach to writing," and "student motivation for writing" based on

the goals of university activity system (546). With this understanding of genres within

systems, secondary ELA teachers should explore the systems invoked by the genres we

ask students to write.

  In *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, David Russell returns to his application of

activity theory and genre systems in an analysis of high school teachers and their attempt

to evaluate portfolios in the state of Kentucky. Though this style of assessment has

largely been abandoned in favor of on-demand, high-stakes essays, the analysis Russell

performs and the discussions these teachers have about writing across their curriculum

provide insight into the tacit knowledge and perceptions of genre that teachers have.

Russell identifies three systems at work in this situation, which he classifies as genres: "a

genre of assessment performance, a classroom genre, and some genre of 'real-world'

writing" ("'Kind-ness'" 225). After establishing both his theory and the situation, Russell

analyzes a discussion among a group of high school teachers from different disciplines

who were in the process of training to score portfolios of high school students. This discussion focuses specifically on genre and generally on what is appropriate for the portfolio because, as Russell notes, these discussions and this scoring have implications for what these teachers will teach in their respective classrooms and what they will advocate for inclusion in a student's portfolio. As participants in two distinct activity systems, one of teaching and one of assessing, and being asked "to put themselves imaginatively" into a third activity system of "real world" writing, the teachers wrestle with what Russell calls the "breadth versus depth of genre" (236-7). One teacher, an English teacher, struggles to recognize the literary analysis students write in his class as "real-world" or at least as an antecedent genre, and Russell notes that this misperception was one the "state sponsored professional development programs…tried to correct" (233). Russell reveals how much easier it is for the technology teacher and the social studies teacher to trace their classroom genres to "real-world" genres (232). In his follow-up interviews, Russell finds that teachers have begun to change their teaching after these experiences and discussions surrounding the breadth and depth of genre. Russell advocates for this assessment because it "encourages writing in 'broader' and 'deeper' genres" and that through it "genre became, in some cases, a tool for teachers to expand their notions of the role of writing in teaching, for curricular expansion rather than curricular 'crowding out'" (239). Unfortunately, due to budget and legislative changes, Kentucky no longer utilizes this assessment model. However, universities continue to push for WAC and WID in order to maintain these conversations and hopefully encourage transfer of learning from one context to another. Perhaps secondary ELA

departments can lead the way in advocating writing beyond their classrooms with an emphasis on "real-world" genres.

Genre for Transfer

Mary Soliday's work in *Everyday Genres* continues this discussion of genre's breadth and depth. Similarly to Russell, Soliday defines genre as "a social practice through which writers interact with readers" which "links the expectations of individual readers and writers to those of larger social groups" (2-3). Soliday begins her argument for teaching genre as opposed to an apprenticeship model, thus situating herself within genre theory. Soliday reminds readers that "Genre study critiques the assumption that writing exists independently of its situation and that we could overtly teach forms such as the college essay so students can smoothly apply them across situations" (4). Her WAC program at City College of New York utilized doctoral "writing fellows" who assisted professors in other disciplines to improve their students' writing. Through her analysis of the interactions of these fellows and the results of their involvement with professors and courses, Soliday affirms that "genre is not a recipe for writing we can effectively list on the assignment sheet: instead, because it is a social practice, readers and writers make everyday genres interactively" (3). Soliday considers two rhetorical terms in the context of discipline-specific writing: stance and evidence. She begins by describing how teachers and students view stance in writing with words like "'position,' 'perspective,' 'point of view,' 'bias,' 'opinion,' 'focus,' 'engagement,' and 'voice'" more common among faculty; and "'bias,' 'opinion,' 'fact,' and 'voice'" more prevalent among students

(38). Soliday acknowledges that students often receive mixed messages, citing both Janet

Giltrow and Wardle. They have both written on the conflict created by professors when

discussing authorial stance in writing assignments. Giltrow expounds on this issue in

"Meta-genre":

> But when such terms are habitually and repeatedly used in the absence of
> instantiations—as they are in academic contexts—they may only reinforce
> insiders' mutual understandings while estranging newcomers from this
> consensus. And this may be especially so when students hear the same
> wordings in different disciplinary contexts. (196)

Through the work with the writing fellows, one professor of education addressed this

issue of rhetorical stance first by breaking up her longer "research paper" assignment into

two and then addressing stance directly in class, explaining the motive of the assignment

and connecting it to the larger goal of her course: to "empower early-childhood

educators" not "to become researchers but to use insights from research in the

workplace" (42). This approach, based on Soliday's analysis of students' writing, worked

to help students effectively take a stance in this discipline's genre. Furthermore, Soliday

(like many others) takes issue with the arhetorical "college essay" that lacks a clear genre

because, without a clear rhetorical situation, students struggle to identify an appropriate

stance. Through analysis of a psychology assignment prompt that "directly solicits" a

college essay, Soliday observes that students who were more successful based on the

feedback of the professors actually "produced case-study essays, which the prompt also,

though indirectly, requests" (66). Soliday writes that "A novice needs steady exposure to

the language that experts and peers typically use to establish their relationship to

evidence and to readers" (69). Soliday continues by discussing evidence as what counts

for the audience and encourages instructors to reveal the motive of assignments to

students as the education professor did with her research paper assignment. Soliday uses her experience and research in this WAC program to conclude that "A more deliberate approach to teaching genre as a social action" can improve student writing outside of FYC (105).

Soliday is not alone in her advocacy of genre knowledge as a tool for transfer. Rebecca Nowacek considers the role that genre knowledge plays in transfer: "Genre knowledge can be a complex and even contradictory cognitive space with the potential to mediate the three other categories of writing-related knowledge [content, mechanics/style, and writing process/analytical approaches] and thus a powerful resource for students attempting to transfer writing-related knowledge" (100). She concludes that though logistics affect both the potential and the value of transfer of genre knowledge, "the more pernicious challenge may be uncovering the rhetorical domains of disciplines and helping students to see connections between the formal conventions and rhetorical dimensions of genres" (124). In her implications section, Nowacek acknowledges the limitations of even an interdisciplinary set of courses such as the one featured in her research, and she offers less radical proposals for encouraging transfer in FYC courses that build up students' meta-awareness of genre, beyond the formal conventions.

It is this meta-awareness of genre that Devitt calls for in *Writing Genres*. In her proposal, Devitt differentiates between teaching genre acquisition and teaching genre awareness: "The goals of teaching genre awareness are for students to understand the intricate connections between contexts and forms, to perceive potential ideological effects of genres, and to discern both constraints and choices that make genre possible"

(198). She acknowledges a need for further research on whether genre awareness leads to genre acquisition when students approach a new genre, but she argues that "conscious awareness of anything makes mindful living more possible than it would be otherwise" (202). On top of her argument for genre awareness, Devitt provides a reason for teaching specific, possibly antecedent, genres in FYC:

> Faced with academic writing tasks in their majors, students can draw from the five-paragraph theme, personal narrative, analytic essays, or ethnography, if those genres are in their repertoires. But they cannot draw from analytic essays or ethnographies if they have never acquired those genres and will instead have to draw from genres that may have less relevance to the specific situation. (204-5)

Devitt does not provide a recommendation for particular genres; instead, she encourages instructors to base their decisions on their goals for the course and their institutional situation (or "system" to appropriate a term from Russell).

Though the genre as a social action in theory does not directly lead to pedagogical practices—with some researchers such as Aviva Freedman even arguing that it precludes its own pedagogy—many scholars, including Bawarshi and Reiff, Devitt, and Bazerman, propose critical approaches that put theory into practice. If successful writers are the goal and transfer across disciplines is the problem, critical genre awareness may be the solution. Or as Bazerman writes, "genres identify a problem space for the developing writer to work in as well as provide the form of the solution the writer seeks and particular tools useful in the solution" ("Genre" 291). By teaching students a critical genre awareness, we provide them not only with a wider bank of genres from which to pull but also a richer view of writing that can transform their view of our courses, education, and the world.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS CAN LEARN FROM A SECONDARY SITUATION

In 1973, the Conference on English Education published a "Point/Counterpoint" in its journal featuring three short articles: "Dear High School English Teacher," and two replies from high school English teachers. This short section is representative of a conversation (or lack of a conversation) between secondary and post-secondary teachers of writing that has been ongoing for the last 100 years or more.

The first essay by college instructor Patricia M. Reinfeld reads as an indictment of all high school English teachers. In her opening, she provides what appear to be direct quotes from students in her community college classes who confess their lack of writing experience due to a deficit of writing in their high school English classes. Reinfeld characterizes both high school English classes and high school English teachers as feckless, arguing that colleges "should *receive* literate writers from the high school" not have to make them (56). Reinfeld offers no allowances, calling the constraints on high school English teachers excuses:

> The excuses for not [giving feedback on writing] that high school teachers make—too many classes, too many students, too many levels of ability, too many things to cover, too many other duties—all seem to amount to "too much like work," based on the thoroughness with which *nothing* is done in so many high school English classes. (56)

Reinfeld's tone feels harsh to this high school English teacher, but her concerns about the lack of writing in English classrooms are still compelling. As we have seen in the case of the Harvard 1897 committee, however, these complaints about the level of preparedness, specifically in student writing, are nothing new.

High school English teacher John H. Bennett replies in the same issue and strikes back, saying that "Most professionals are aware that the teaching of writing is more complex than Mrs. Reinfeld states" (57). Bennett concedes that "the teaching of writing is the most difficult and time-consuming job" that a secondary teacher has and ponders, "Is it any wonder that it gets stuck in last place?" (57). Both he and Rosemary Kennedy (another high school teacher who replies to Reinfeld's essay) admit that Reinfeld makes some valid points, but Kennedy counters that "there is too desperate a need for clear thinking and writing, taught at any level, to permit us in the high schools to fight with the college bunch" (59). These differences in perspective continue to lead to similar debates almost 45 years later. But more than placing blame, effort should be made on both sides to understand the other's situation. We have a lot of growing to do in secondary ELA classes; we have a lot to learn from composition and rhetoric scholarship. However, an awareness of the realities of the secondary situation might offer those same writing scholars who bemoan the types and quality of instruction at the secondary level with an opportunity to provide both support and correction that will improve both areas of writing instruction.

The various stakeholders in secondary instruction provide both limitations and opportunities for teachers and students. The federal government mandates testing and provides or withholds funding dependent upon those test results. State boards of education establish committees for setting standards, contract with testing companies to write and grade student tests, provide limited training for district administrators, and rate/rank schools and teachers based on the students' test results and school

administrators' evaluations. At the district level, superintendents and school boards select curricula, allocate funding for instructional materials, and provide training for teachers. At the school level, administrators set teachers' schedules, assign extra-curricular duties, enforce district policies and curricula, and evaluate teachers' plans, instruction, and environment. In the community, parents, community members, and business owners have a vested interest in the education of students; these future employees are expected to possess skills and knowledge that will ensure their success in real-world situations and environments. Finally, post-secondary institutions in the community serve multiple roles. Not only do the students of our secondary institutions continue their education at these institutions where they are expected to take the knowledge and skills from their secondary education forward, but also these institutions educate and train future teachers for the school system. Moreover, scholars at the postsecondary level conduct research on the primary and secondary testing, curricula, students, and more. This research has the potential to influence secondary teachers beyond those trained at the scholars' institutions through conferences, textbook development committees, and surveys of classroom practice.

Writing Instruction Then and Now

Applebee is one scholar whose research frequently centers on the curriculum of secondary English classrooms, specifically focusing on writing instruction. Through NCTE, Applebee has published several surveys of classroom practice. In the first large-scale study, published in 1980, Applebee et al. describe the impetus for such a project

stemming from new findings in various disciplines all relating to the teaching of writing.

Those researchers (as well as the public at large) were largely ignorant of the actual

writing practices in secondary contexts. This study by Applebee et al. provides a baseline

for the kind of writing instruction (or lack thereof) present in American secondary

classrooms—English and five other content areas—in the mid-20th century. Reinfeld's

claims seem to have some merit based on these findings.

The concluding chapter of Applebee et al's study focuses on the writing process.

While the writing process as a theory of composition saw its peak at the postsecondary

level during this time, Applebee's study seems to suggest that very few secondary

teachers were teaching any sort of process approach to writing during this time. In the

findings chapter, Applebee et al. report the following:

- "Two-thirds of student reports on prewriting activities noted instructions related to form (length and layout of the paper). Other sorts of instructions were rare." (153)
- "About a third of the English teachers reported regular use of writing models." (154)
- "In writing for English, only 23 percent claimed to make changes that went beyond spelling, mechanics, usage, or vocabulary choice." (154-55)

Nearly thirty years later, in conjunction with Judith Langer, Applebee published a follow-

up survey of writing instruction in secondary classrooms. In one section of their report,

they compare the findings of their new survey to Applebee's earlier survey:

As a set, these activities reflect a much more sophisticated understanding of writing instruction than was evident in 1979—80 [. . .] Only 32% of English teachers in the earlier survey, for example, reported making regular use of model responses, compared with 85% in the present study; only 37% reported brainstorming activities before writing, compared with 91% spending time on generating and organizing ideas in classrooms today. (Applebee and Langer 21)

While to some, composition studies is now post-process (Kent), these findings show that

secondary classrooms are firmly embracing the teaching of writing as a process, and in

this narrow focus on writing process, seeing such vast improvements in the teaching of writing offers hope for more improvement in writing instruction not only in English classrooms but in content areas as well. Though the changes take time, with better teacher training—not just for English pre-service teachers but all would-be teachers—writing instruction can be changed and improved.

Applebee and Langer's study considers more than writing instruction. In the first study, writing assessments, especially standardized writing assessments, were rare. According to Applebee et al., the College Entrance Examination Board (now the College Board) had recently added a writing sample back to its national exam, the SAT (7). But most states did not assess student writing on a large scale. Langer et al. viewed such absence of written assessment as an indication that states deemphasized writing.

However, external pressures (e.g. No Child Left Behind) on secondary teachers have increased in the last thirty years. While this increase has led to more assessments that feature a writing component, the amount of tests and the type of tests teachers are held accountable for has likely slowed the progress of writing instruction in secondary classrooms. According to Applebee and Langer, "on balance the teachers' responses suggest that high-stakes tests are having a very direct and limiting effect on classroom emphases" (Applebee and Langer 18). As noted in the introduction, Tennessee has seen a dramatic increase in standardized testing, even since the mid-1990s. When I first began teaching in Tennessee in 2010, sophomore English was the only English course that had an End-of-Course exam, and it was only multiple choice. Students were assessed in writing at the junior level, but the assessment had not changed in several years, and many

teachers throughout the state developed formulaic structures that guaranteed students would "pass" the writing assessment. Even my father who taught sophomores and juniors in Geometry during that time had to help students practice for the writing assessment; he was given lessons from the junior English teachers about these formulaic structures that would ensure students' "success" on the task. The school system in which we taught conducted regular diagnostic "benchmarks" that all teachers in the school helped to score. The emphasis on writing was indeed high, but all teachers focused on very surface-level ideas and repetitive, formulaic writing. Students, and teachers, often believed that a high score on that one-and-done writing assessment certified their writing ability.

In the eight years that I have taught in Tennessee schools, the standardized testing has more than doubled. Now, students in three of the four English courses take a standardized test at the end of the year; students take the ACT both as juniors and as seniors during the school day rather than as an optional assessment on a Saturday; and the only tests that have been discontinued are the PLAN (a pre-ACT) and the stand-alone writing assessment for juniors. All English and history state assessments include at least one writing task. Indeed, the increase in high stakes testing for both students and teachers has had a limiting effect on curriculum beyond English classrooms, bearing out in Applebee and Langer's survey of more than just English classrooms. Applebee and Langer share a response from an eighth-grade history teacher who writes that he/she "used to do a research project but [doesn't] do it anymore because of the emphasis on tests. Research projects are so much more time intensive—go to bare bones to prepare for tests" (Applebee and Langer 19). This type of response is evidently characteristic of

many instructors who participated in Applebee and Langer's study. In my local context,

my colleagues in science have shared how they have removed extended writing

assignments from their curriculum due to the increase in tests; Tennessee administers

both a biology and a chemistry multiple-choice test each year. All of these anecdotes

point to a limiting of writing both as practice and process in content areas. But what

about the assessments that do contain writing? If those assessments contain writing,

surely students are writing in those classes, right? Unfortunately, the examinations that do

assess writing inherently privilege a more formulaic approach. In fact, Applebee and

Langer report that "[o]n another question, some 55.1% of English teachers reported

frequent practice in timed, on-demand writing, another seeming response to the writing

tasks that are included on some high-stakes tests" (Applebee and Langer 19). As an

example of the emphasis on formulaic instruction, Applebee and Langer describe a

particular writing assignment from a history course where students are provided with a

primary source and instructed to use it in their writing. While this assignment seems more

complex, Applebee and Langer point to its flaws:

> Although the task requires students to work with new material, the underlying
> task remains one that begins with a restatement or summary of points that have
> been developed in previous classes or in the textbook, and then using the new
> documents to illustrate (or "richly support") those points. There is also a tendency
> in tasks of this type to generate formulaic writing. In this particular case, the
> admonition to "discuss three" causes of the French Revolution points strongly
> toward a five-paragraph theme, albeit one to be elaborated with new details drawn
> from the accompanying primary source document. (Applebee and Langer 25)

Even when we think we are doing better, such as by asking students to work with

sources, we often continue to lead students to use those formulaic structures they are

taught early on. It is no wonder instructors at the postsecondary level shake their fists at

students' five-paragraph essays in their FYC courses and beyond. This tendency toward formulaic writing is not limited to one department, but instead, according to Applebee and Langer, "teachers in the schools we studied were quite aware of the dangers, if resigned to the necessity" of teaching more formulaic writing for students' success on tests (Applebee and Langer 25). And why do these tests have such a pervasive effect on writing instruction? In the case of Tennessee, since 2012, student test scores in one form or another have affected teachers' "Level of Effectiveness" score, which can affect job security if not pay in some counties. The stakes are indeed high.

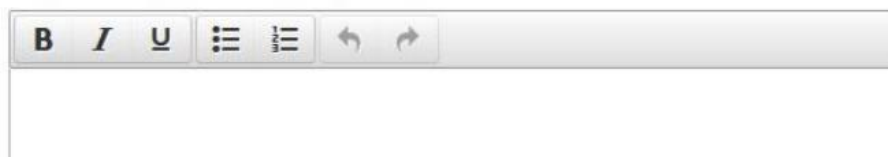**Analysis of Standardized Writing Assessments**

While not every test students take has a direct effect on their grade or their college options, many do. For the teachers, the consequences for poor test scores are much more significant. For the sake of this discussion, I would like to share a sample of writing prompts from a variety of assessments. I hope to illustrate that while assessments of writing take many forms, they have similar flaws. Beyond the high stakes these writing assessments represent, they deserve closer analysis because they often influence textbook development, classroom instruction, and students' *and* teachers' perception of good writing.

Created as one of two federally funded consortiums to assess the new Common Core State Standards, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) currently serves as the primary assessment for a handful of states. The consortium periodically releases some test items on its website both to share what the

assessment will look like as well as to provide teachers with potential prep material; however, a quick search on Teachers Pay Teachers, a site where primary and secondary teachers can upload documents for other teachers to purchase, shows almost 900 lessons and assignments crafted in the style of PARCC. One released item on the PARCC's assessment website, the "2015 Released Items: Grade 11 Performance-Based Assessment Research Simulation Task," contains three short articles followed by a writing task (Figure 1).

Perhaps one of the most significant events to impact the study of the moon's origins occurred when astronauts were actually able to visit the moon, beginning with the Apollo missions. Write an essay that uses references to **all three** articles to explain the significance of the lunar missions to the study of the moon's origins. Your essay should

- describe knowledge researchers had about the moon before humans were able to visit it;
- discuss the kinds of evidence scientists can now draw upon thanks to the lunar missions;
- explain how analysis of data and samples from the lunar missions has changed over time; and
- suggest what role evidence from the lunar missions will likely play in future studies of the moon's origins.

Figure 1 PARCC Grade 11 Task

This task, similar to the one mentioned in the Applebee and Langer study, asks more of students than earlier writing assessments. The addition of primary source material acknowledges that writing does not occur in a vacuum but is often in response to other

pieces of writing. In many ways, the primary source materials also function as models, for students could follow the conventions of the excerpts of the informational short texts provided. However, the four bullets in the writing task could prompt students to write in a formulaic structure. Most of the verbs of the task *explain, describe, discuss* are expository in nature. Students have been conditioned, through years of current-traditional pedagogy, to use formulaic structures in expository writing. And if the language and design of the prompt encourages that kind of thinking, students will write in formulaic structures.

Even more problematic is the Pearson-developed rubric the contracted graders are asked to use to assess each student response. The rubric contains generalized language because it is used for grades 6-11 *and* for two types of writing tasks: the literary analysis and the research simulation task (Figure 2). Considering the developmental changes that occur between sixth and eleventh grades, one would think that the rubrics would scale up or down to match the developmental level of each writer. Instead, phrases like "textual evidence" and "accurate analysis" are so broad that they must be separated from the actual genres of writing asked of students.

GRADES 6-11
CONDENSED SCORING RUBRIC FOR PROSE CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE ITEMS
(Revised July 29, 2014)*

Research Simulation Task and Literary Analysis Task

Construct Measured	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1	Score Point 0
Reading Comprehension of Key Ideas and Details	The student response demonstrates full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing an accurate analysis and supporting the analysis with effective and convincing textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a mostly accurate analysis, and supporting the analysis with adequate textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates basic comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a generally accurate analysis and supporting the analysis with basic textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a minimally accurate analysis and supporting the analysis with limited textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates no comprehension of ideas by providing inaccurate or no analysis and little to no textual evidence.
Writing Written Expression	The student response • addresses the prompt and provides effective and comprehensive development of the claim or topic that is consistently appropriate to the task by using clear and convincing reasoning supported by relevant textual evidence;	The student response • addresses the prompt and provides mostly effective development of the claim or topic that is mostly appropriate to the task, by using clear reasoning supported by relevant textual evidence;	The student response • addresses the prompt and provides some development of the claim or topic that is somewhat appropriate to the task, by using some reasoning and text-based evidence;	The student response • addresses the prompt and develops the claim or topic and provides minimal development that is limited in its appropriateness to the task by using limited reasoning and text-based evidence; or • is a developed, text-based response with little or no awareness of the prompt;	The student response • is undeveloped and/or inappropriate to the task;
	• demonstrates purposeful coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it easy to follow the writer's progression of ideas;	• demonstrates coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it fairly easy to follow the writer's progression of ideas;	• demonstrates some coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas usually discernible but not obvious;	• demonstrates limited coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas somewhat unclear;	• lacks coherence, clarity, and cohesion.
	• establishes and maintains an effective style, attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.	• establishes and maintains a mostly effective style, while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.	• has a style that is somewhat effective, generally attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.	• has a style that has limited effectiveness, with limited awareness of the norms of the discipline.	• has an inappropriate style, with little to no awareness of the norms of the discipline.
Writing Knowledge of Language and Conventions		The student response to the prompt demonstrates full command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be a few minor errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage, but meaning is clear.	The student response to the prompt demonstrates some command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that occasionally impede understanding, but the meaning is generally clear.	The student response to the prompt demonstrates limited command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that often impede understanding.	The student response to the prompt demonstrates no command of the conventions of standard English. Frequent and varied errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage impede understanding.

Figure 2 PARCC Rubric RST and LA Task

Last year I scored fourth-grade student responses to the PARCC literary analysis task.

While graders are hired to provide a consistent scoring experience for the states, the

rubric inherently privileges specific features, reminiscent of current-traditional rhetoric

and its emphasis on clarity, concision, and correctness. And though the rubric references

"conventions of the discipline," the prompts often appear to belong to no discernable

discipline. Further, for the fourth graders' responses, the back-graders frequently implied

in correspondence that length equaled development. This national assessment affects

writing instruction in substantial ways. Pearson, the company who has developed and

assessed the PARCC tests, holds a major market share of the textbook world. Pearson

ensures that writing instruction materials in a majority of American secondary classrooms

will continue to privilege those same features.

Tennessee, initially a PARCC state, backed out of the Common Core State

Standards Initiative in 2014 and began developing its own version of the end-of-course

tests, called TNReady. The state has not released examples of the writing tasks to the

public but has instead provided a "testing blueprint" that contains a description of each

type (Figure 3). The blueprint differentiates between "argument,"

"informational/explanatory," and "narrative" writing, and similar to the PARCC

Research Simulation Task, all writing tasks provide students with one to three passages to

which students must refer or in the case of the narrative task, extend. These distinctions

mirror the writing standards for the Common Core that focus on modes of writing. While

the standards discuss writing for various audiences and acknowledge the complex nature

of writing, the blueprint does not seem to recognize the complexity in writing. The

blueprint breaks the writing tasks into modes of writing and then breaks down each

category even further by the passages included. And while these tasks could be identified

by discipline or even purpose, they are instead divorced from their real purposes and

rhetorical contexts. Is it any wonder that secondary teachers attempt to provide students

with similar experiences in their classrooms?

Writing Mode	Passages Used	Description of Tasks
Argument	**Literary:** Stories, dramas, or poems called for by the grade-level reading standards	• Students read two literary passages that are related in a meaningful way (e.g., theme, plot). • For argument, the task asks students to develop one or more claims about the passages and organize reasons and evidence in support of the claim(s). • The reasons and evidence should be drawn from evidence within the passages.
	Informational: History, science, or literary nonfiction texts called for by the grade-level reading standards One text may be an audio/visual presentation.	• Students read two to three informational passages that are related in a meaningful way (e.g., point of view, use of evidence). • For argument, the task asks students to analyze the passages to develop one or more claims and provide reasons and evidence in support of the claim(s). • The reasons, information, and evidence should be drawn from the passages.
Informational/ Explanatory	**Literary:** Stories, dramas, or poems called for by the grade-level reading standards	• Students read two literary passages that are related in a meaningful way (e.g., theme, plot). • The task asks students to examine a topic in the passages and clearly organize and convey ideas about the passages. The task may ask for comparison or integration of a topic or ideas. • The ideas should be drawn from evidence within the passages.
	Informational: History, science, or literary nonfiction texts called for by the grade-level reading standards One text may be an audio/visual presentation.	• Students read two to three informational passages that are related in a meaningful way (e.g., point of view, use of evidence). • The task asks students to examine a topic in the passages and clearly organize and convey information from the passages. The task may ask for comparison or integration of information and will often simulate a short research task. • The ideas and information should be drawn from evidence within the passages.
Narrative	**Literary:** Story, drama, or poems aligned to the grade-level reading standards	• Students read one literary passage. • The prompt asks students to develop an imagined experience or event using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. • The student's narrative should be based on characters and events in the passage.

Descriptions of TNReady Writing Tasks

Revised July 2017

Figure 3 TN Ready Writing Task Description

The SAT's writing prompts typically contain an article that students will analyze. Many

of the prompts ask students to perform a rhetorical analysis without using that genre's

name as outlined in the example below:

> As you read the passage below, consider how Paul Bogard uses
> - evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
> - reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
> - stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.
>
> Write an essay in which you explain how Paul Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience that natural darkness should be preserved. In your essay, analyze how Bogard uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.
>
> Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Bogard's claims, but rather explain how Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience. (https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sample-questions/essay/1)

This particular style of prompt acknowledges both audience and purpose in the passage

but does not specify an audience in the prompt. In fact, the SAT prompts read like scaled

down, more accessible versions of their sister program, Advanced Placement. Across all

levels, writing assessments seem to have shifted from expository to argument but still

present writing as mostly arhetorical, emphasizing mode rather than situation.

In the same way that FYC instructors loathe hearing from instructors in other

disciplines that students do not know how to write because it implies that FYC is the only

place students should learn to write, secondary English instructors are often the only

instructors assigning extended writing or providing feedback about writing assignments.

By examining more recent surveys such as Applebee and Langer's, college instructors

can grasp a more realistic idea of the type of instruction students have received prior to

entering their classrooms. But this knowledge is incomplete without awareness of the entire context, including the demand of various stakeholders on the time and attention of secondary instructors—even those who know best practices for writing instruction. Despite what scholars of composition and rhetoric studies or even what secondary teachers know about writing to learn, according to Applebee and Langer, "Given the constraints imposed by high-stakes tests, writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond—as a way to construct knowledge or generate new networks of understandings (Langer, *Envisioning Knowledge, Envisioning Literature*)—is rare" (26).

Why does the teaching of writing in secondary ELA classrooms not mirror that at the postsecondary level? Teaching writing is only one third (or one quarter, depending on the teacher) of a secondary ELA teacher's load. In the CCSS, writing is one of four major strands of standards: reading literature, reading informational text, writing, and language. An effective writing pedagogy that emphasizes process over product, provides time for revision and feedback, and encourages reflective thinking throughout takes time—both inside and outside of class—that could be used for literature, informational text, and language standards. Moreover, while many pre-service ELA teachers take English education courses, the courses must cover writing, literature, and grammar. This lack of training and the competing demands on an ELA teacher's time inside the classroom both lead to a diminished role for writing in our classrooms. For this trend to change, secondary ELA teachers must be open to changing their classroom practices, especially in writing, to match the researched best practices advocated at the postsecondary level.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT SECONDARY ELA TEACHERS CAN LEARN FROM WRITING STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP

In this spirit of collegiality and empathetic understanding, secondary ELA teachers have much to learn from writing studies scholarship. In its 60+ year existence, researchers in the field of composition/writing studies have explored a number of topics, conducting research within FYC classrooms, studying students' writing and teachers' responses to that writing, and exploring writing within professional and extracurricular contexts. Composition/writing studies scholarship has much to offer secondary ELA classroom teachers, and a better understanding of the theories that the field of writing studies agrees upon might also help us to constructively question our pedagogy as well.

College/Career Readiness

Whether through a state-mandated curriculum or a state-approved textbook, many secondary teachers build their lessons to meet the demands of a group of outside stakeholders who frequently have little to no background in the scholarship of the content area. This situation also holds true for secondary ELA teachers who often fall victim to the trap of teaching students to be ready for the next level—or worse, for the test— without often knowing what will be expected at that next level, whether college or career. Recently, a group of writing teachers from multiple organizations—the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project—collaborated to develop a *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* to guide secondary ELA teachers in developing courses and

assignments that will enable students to adopt productive attitudes toward writing. In

direct response to the increased amount of testing and even the term "college ready"

applied to students based on test scores, the Framework does not prescribe a list of

assignment types or even standards; instead, they propose a list of eight "habits of mind"

as essential outcomes for students who will go on to write in a variety of disciplines or

contexts:

- Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and
- representing ideas.
- Persistence – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility – the ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the
- consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition – the ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge. (*Framework* 1)

While this list is certainly idealistic, the message from these college instructors and

secondary teachers seems to contradict the idea that if students can pass a state or

national test, they are deemed college ready. Those kinds of attitudes imbued in an

assessment model can hinder students' growth as writers. Paired with this list, the

Framework contains a section that offers potential experiences for students to develop

"rhetorical knowledge," "critical thinking," "writing processes," "knowledge of

conventions," and "the ability to compose in multiple environments" (*Framework* 1).

This section of the document provides more practical pedagogical guidelines and does

not prescribe assignments or texts. Even the "Knowledge of Conventions" section does

not specify MLA, APA, or any other handbook; instead, the goal is for students to build an awareness of conventional standards, the histories that led to them, their individual strengths and weaknesses, and when and why writers should follow them. This framework serves to encourage secondary ELA teachers to provide rich writing instruction, especially in direct opposition to a model dictated by flawed, standardized assessments.

Audience Expectations

Audience, one of the most influential components of a rhetorical situation, is all but ignored in the secondary ELA classroom. Too often, we prevent students from writing to anyone other than the teacher, and when they write to us, we are the evaluator of their work, not a reader. The artificiality of that construct forces us to develop various artificial frameworks, rubrics, rules, etc. Even worse, without a careful reflective approach, we are unaware of the biases we engender and the features we privilege. Because we do not provide students with instruction or practice in attending to audience, our students struggle to consider writing assignments or writing in general in a rhetorical context.

Linda Flower and John Hayes have studied the cognitive processes that expert and struggling writers use when beginning a writing task. In their early work on their cognitive process model, Flower and Hayes note that "[o]ne of the hallmarks of the good writers was the time they spent thinking about how they wanted to affect a reader," and that "[t]he poor writers, by contrast, often seemed tied to their topic" (27). We as

secondary ELA teachers may be aware of these differences between expert and novice writers, but the implications for teaching based on these findings have not led to a universal acceptance of foregrounding audience in our writing instruction or using the potential reader as a tool for invention.

Conventional, yet Flexible

Conventions for a writing situation vary by level of formality, style guides, generic expectations, and more. Often, however, secondary ELA teachers limit students' experiences to just a few varieties of writing situations, restricting what our students think is "acceptable" in written expression. Depending on a teacher's familiarity with style guides, a student could go through his/her entire secondary career thinking that MLA is the only style guide and worse may not understand the reason for specific conventions. When that student encounters a new style guide, even within an academic setting, he/she may struggle to reconcile this new information and may be unable to transfer the knowledge of one style guide to another. This particular situation focuses only on the surface level issues, illustrating the problems with an overemphasis on "correctness."

Composition and Writing Studies have plenty to say about an overemphasis on correctness and style and its damaging effects on students and student writing. An emphasis on "correctness" instead of a balanced view of conventions also affects our view of writing assessments. In "Assessing Writing Shapes Contexts and Instruction," a subsection of a larger threshold concept outlined in *Naming What We Know*, Tony Scott and Asao B. Inoue describe how the term assessment "encompasses a range of activities,

from responding with revision in mind to evaluation or grading of final products to large-scale programmatic assessments" (29-30). Of course, these writers focus on assessment at the postsecondary level, but secondary ELA teachers can also learn from this threshold concept. We know that assessment in many ways drives our instruction, but what we don't often think about is how "assessment or evaluation applies specific values and also encourages writers to adopt those values" (30). Summarizing the work of Gould and Hanson, Scott and Inoue assert that "whatever is emphasized in an assessment produces what is defined as 'good writing'" and that "[l]ikewise, what is not emphasized becomes less important and may not be considered characteristic of good writing" (30). Though secondary ELA teachers may easily grasp this threshold concept, applying this knowledge to our own classroom assessments proves more challenging.

Even more importantly, we should help our students recognize the power structures involved in not only the assessment model but also in our own classrooms. In 1972, the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication published *Students' Right to Their Own Language*, a resolution in which they "affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" (710). This statement, though more than four decades old, has serious implications for secondary ELA classrooms and the type of "corrections" we make on students' writing. It is one thing to teach edited written English; it is another to teach that form of English as "standard," making all other dialects sub-standard. Beyond the idea of dialect, many secondary ELA teachers consider the breaking of conventional rules akin to

blasphemy. Unfortunately, secondary ELA teachers remain rigid in their understanding of voice and language to the detriment of their students and against the research of their field.

Unfortunately, we as secondary ELA teachers often don't realize that the type of writing we have students perform can have unintended consequences, which researcher and writing studies scholar Chris Anson discusses in his section of *Naming What We Know*: "Habituated practice can lead to entrenchment" (77). This section serves as a warning to teachers, administrators, or even stakeholders who do not recognize the potential ramifications of practicing for a standardized test repeatedly, especially at the expense of other writing experiences. Anson speaks to this specific situation when he explains that when students are "[p]laced in a new situation where the audience, purpose, genre, and other aspects of writing may be very different from those required in five-paragraph themes, such writers may resort to their habituated practice and fail to meet the expectations of their new rhetorical community" (77). Secondary ELA teachers are all too often blamed for this situation, but are we not to blame? For the integrity of our writing curriculum, we owe it our students to give them rich writing experiences with real audiences and varied genres. If we teach students how to analyze rhetorical situations and develop critical rhetorical awareness, we arm them with the tools to successfully approach new writing tasks both in and beyond our classroom..

Instead of teaching students rules that we all know are not hard and fast but are fluid and dynamic depending on the rhetorical situation, we would do well to teach our students both how to recognize conventional guidelines within a situation and why

following conventions is (most of the time) in their best interest. If students are writing for a variety of audiences and in a variety of real genres, this method of identifying conventional rules inductively will transfer more readily from one level to another.

Genre Confusion

As noted earlier, transfer and First Year Composition have a troubled history. Wardle advocates for a reflective critique of FYC for its failure to help students transfer writing knowledge into their writing in the disciplines. In describing a typical approach to FYC, Wardle contends that "In my own work I have found that FYC teachers often mistake the genres of English studies for genres-in general" (Wardle 769). While Wardle is discussing writing assignments like *the research paper* or *the position paper*, I would argue that secondary ELA teachers are even guiltier of perpetuating this misconception, and who can fault us? In middle and high schools, writing is typically only assigned or assessed in English classes. Other disciplines have abdicated their role in developing their students as writers in their own their field, and English teacher attempt to do it all, poorly. We don't have the disciplinary knowledge or the experience writing in those contexts to provide students with a full experience. Aside from telling students about APA format instead of our standard MLA, we rarely expose students to genres outside of our discipline. Wardle's research assistant describes the instructors' assignments as "mutt genres," which Wardle defines as assignment types that "mimic genres that mediate activities in other activity systems" (Wardle 774). These assignment types, even ones that attempt to help students bridge the gap between FYC and the writing of their discipline

are so far removed from the true context and "activity system," to use Russell's term, that "within the FYC system their purposes and audiences are vague or even contradictory" (Wardle 774). But Wardle does not only critique the genre choices of FYC instructors, she condemns the entire system:

> If students are taught decontextualized "skills" or rigid formulas rather than general and flexible principles about writing, and if instructors in all classes do not explicitly discuss similarities between new and previous writing assignments, it stands to reason students will not see similarities between disparate writing situations or will apply rigid rules inappropriately. In other words, one reason for lack of transfer is instruction that does not encourage it." (Wardle 770)

Instead of prescribing a change in practice or genre type, Wardle suggests a new course design, and while secondary ELA teachers may not be able to redesign our courses completely (we do have state standards to fulfill), we can be honest with ourselves and our students about the types of writing we ask them to do to fulfill those state standards. We can de-emphasize the five-paragraph essay. We can offer students an opportunity to write for audiences other than us as evaluators. We can teach students how to approach a new writing situation with composition's theoretical principles undergirding our practice.

Similar to the developers of *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,* the authors who collaborate in *Naming What We Know* consider the rhetorical situation to be a key concept in writing studies. In "Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms," Bazerman summarizes the work of Miller, Bitzer, and Russell, explaining that awareness of the rhetorical situation is even more important in writing than in speech. Bazerman describes how sometimes subconsciously we make judgments about the situation we find ourselves in, relying on past experiences and genre recognition to help us frame an appropriate response. But Bazerman acknowledges that students often

struggle to recognize rhetorical genre because their school experiences encourage them to focus on correctness and grading. Students are not encouraged to probe their own thinking or seek to understand why they do what they do.

This lack of genre metaknowledge or a limited view of literary genres—especially from the ELA teacher—can hinder students' understanding of writing as situated and public. Bill Hart-Davidson, another Rhet/Comp scholar, follows up Bazerman's overview of the rhetorical situation and identifies the troublesome aspects of this concept: "no single text is a genre" and "[g]eneric forms are open to hybridization and change over time" (40). As writers encounter these concepts, they may struggle to balance them with the common conception of genres as static. Similarly, many ELA teachers may incorrectly perceive genres as rigid and static rather than influenced by the social context and influencing future instances of the genre. For students to have rhetorical awareness of writing, secondary ELA teachers themselves must first have a rhetorical awareness of genre, especially an awareness beyond literary genres. And if secondary ELA teachers can understand these concepts and help their students understand them as well, those students are less likely to encounter struggles transferring knowledge of writing from one context to another.

However, despite an awareness of genre as fluid and social, we cannot assume students will transfer this knowledge from one context to another. One of the obstacles facing student writers is a lack of sufficient understanding of their own past experiences. Andrea Lunsford describes how students, teachers, professors, and professionals for better or worse "draw on personal knowledge and lived experience in creating new texts"

(54). While Perkins and Salomon's work on transfer certainly speaks to this threshold concept, our role as curators of curricular content demands that we consider how the assignments and experiences we give our students will help or hinder their future writer-selves. Secondary ELA teachers have an opportunity to teach students how to "[analyze] the current rhetorical situation" rather than "simply rely on a strategy or genre or convention out of habit" (Lunsford 55). But if secondary ELA teachers offer students a range of experiences without inviting metacognition, students may not successfully reuse that knowledge in future contexts without priming. Teachers must first model and then instruct students to seek out the similarities and differences in each new writing task. We may be unable to control the type of instruction students receive after they leave our classrooms, but once again, if we offer opportunities for students to flex their metacognitive skills surrounding the writing experiences they face in our classrooms, they will be much more likely to make these kinds of transfers on their own.

However, students will not use strategies, genres, or conventions they have not experienced or at the least been exposed to. Another threshold concept from *Naming What We Know* speaks to this idea: "Learning to write effectively requires different kinds of practice, time, and effort" (Yancey 64). The overarching concept here may be simple for secondary ELA teachers to agree with, but the implications are not so simple. Yancey writes that this concept is "troublesome" for several reasons, and one that speaks to our discussion here is that we sometimes "believe that when we learn to write in one genre, we have learned to write in all" (65). In line with the other writing scholars here, Yancey refutes that saying that "to write in any genre, we need practice in that genre and in the

conventions defining that genre" (65). Writing is never easy, and we set ourselves up for failure as writing teachers if we imagine teaching writing to have an easy fix. But no matter what the pedagogical design, students (and their teachers) need to write often in varied genres for different audiences and purposes.

These four threshold concepts in writing studies barely scratch the surface of what writing studies scholarship has to offer secondary ELA teachers in their writing instruction. However, this information is not often readily accessible to us; we often bear an outsider status in the RCWS field. And even though we are tasked with teaching writing as part of the larger secondary ELA curriculum, many of us are not writers ourselves. We rely instead on our limited training or our own experience in school. Whether or not secondary ELA teachers build their writing instruction on a foundation of Rhetorical Genre Studies, we should not assume that we can prepare students for every writing situation they will encounter in the future. We should teach our students that there is no such thing as writing in general. We should teach students more than literary genres. We should provide students with heuristics that help them transfer their writing metaknowledge from context to context. We should teach students for transfer.

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW GENRE AWARENESS CAN BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WRITING

A pedagogy focused on a different kind of mastery—one that encourages and prompts transfer from one context to another—could be one solution to the many challenges facing secondary ELA teachers in the age of standardized testing. A course design built around genre awareness could not function on its own. If we intend to grow students' rhetorical genre awareness, the conditions and overall climate must be specially cultivated for this particular crop, if you will bear with my overused analogy. From a process approach, which tills the writing ground, to a workshop model, which as a greenhouse protects new growth from harsh evaluative forces, the attitudes about writing and the time devoted to it during class can nourish and enrich a student's rhetorical awareness. These ideas we want to propagate and transfer can flourish if we encourage our students to be their own gardeners.

Process over Product

Teaching writing as a process is not a new concept for secondary ELA teachers as evidenced by Applebee and Langer's study showing the increased attention to pre-writing, revision, and mentor texts or models. Donald Murray would be pleased that his advice to teach writing "as a process, not a product" has in many ways been taken up, but Murray may not be as enamored with how it is applied. Whether teachers teach writing as a process or teach *the* process is a different matter entirely, and one that the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* addresses.

In his introduction to *Post-Process Theory*, Thomas Kent writes that "Post-process theorists hold—for all sorts of different reasons—that writing is a practice that cannot be captured by a generalized process or a Big Theory" (1). Though certainly scary to admit that there is no one single solution to our teaching woes, post-process theory can also be liberating. The theorists in his collection, according to Kent, "hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated" (1). That last tenet certainly applies to the argument we are making here. If writing is situated in specific contexts, then we as writing teachers cannot teach generalized advice and expect student success from one writing experience to another. Kent acknowledges that

> no one would deny that lots of codifiable shortcuts exist—our knowledge of conventions, our ability to manipulate genres, our facility with words— that help us communicate more efficiently during the act of writing. However, knowing these shortcuts does not mean that we hold a Big Theory, nor does it mean that we know a repeatable process that can be employed successfully during every writing situation. (Kent 2)

To be post-process, secondary ELA teachers must acknowledge that one size does not fit all, even *the* writing process. We must, however, value the process, the struggle, the negotiations that take place while students are thinking and writing more than we value a finished product, and our grades and commentary must reflect that.

Workshop Model

Extending Donald Murray's recommendation to treat writing as process, not product, Lucy Calkins developed a writer's workshop model that exploded in popularity among primary school teachers in the 1980s. Harvey Daniels has been a proponent of the

workshop model at the secondary level for many years, and in 1988 co-authored

Community of Writers with Steven Zemelman. The book attempts to bridge a gap

between change in theory (product focus to process focus) and change in practice by

exploring how secondary schools can implement the workshop model despite less

flexibility and larger class sizes than primary schools. Zemelman and Daniels anticipate

resistance among secondary teachers. They describe the "process approach to writing" as

"an inherently holistic, inductive, nonmechanistic approach that requires large chunks of

class time for writing and responding to writing" (8). Even more so in today's standards-

obsessed educational atmosphere, writing in a workshop model requires more time and

less structure than secondary teachers can often embrace with 30 students per class and

six or more classes per year. However, Zemelman and Daniels effectively argue, "If I, as

a teacher, spend the class period telling you rules for good writing, I am doing something

profoundly different from what I do if I engage you as an active participant in a writing

workshop, a growing community of writers" (12). In fact, this approach allows for a more

seamless integration of best writing practices in the secondary ELA classroom. As

Zemelman and Daniels conclude, "These are not minor differences of pedagogical styles;

they are the essence of the matter" (12). Zemelman and Daniels provide a compelling

introduction for secondary teachers who wish to implement a workshop approach in their

writing classrooms, but while the authors consider inquiry projects and real audiences for

writing, the focus is more on modes of writing instead of a rhetorical approach to writing

that recognizes the situated-ness of writing. Besides the artificiality of separating writing

into modes, the workshop models of Calkins and Daniels falls short of representing writing beyond the classroom.

Written fifteen years after *Community of Writers*, Heather Lattimer's *Thinking Through Genre* provides genre-based workshop units for secondary ELA teachers, and this is in keeping with disciplinary trends. This workshop model with an emphasis on genre study provides for a tangible and comprehensive plan for teachers with room to innovate or modify depending on students' needs and the school environment. While Lattimer's stated goal, to "enable her students to master the genre" they are reading and writing (4), might seem to place her among those advocating for genre acquisition, her true goal of helping "students learn how to learn" situates her among those advocating for teaching for transfer. Her workshop model provides rich genre analysis even as she acknowledges that the four or five genres that she and her students research cannot compare to the genres "they might encounter over the next fifty, sixty, or seventy years" (5). Lattimer also advocates for genre study to be intermingled in self-sponsored writing, a reasonable way to reach reluctant writers in between more teacher-guided units (9). Perhaps the only drawback to Lattimer's unit plans would be her focus on literary genres.

The integration of reading and writing in her units of study places Lattimer alongside the likes of Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher, whose forthcoming book *180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents* focuses on their attempt to increase the volume of student reading and student writing in one school year. Using a workshop model, these two leading literacy teacher-scholars developed units of writing that utilize real-world genres. In the argument unit that Gallagher recently shared

in a lecture at Lipscomb Academy in Nashville, Tennessee, students write a Yelp review, a letter to an elected official, and a newspaper op-ed. While Kittle and Gallagher do not address genre awareness in their book, the use of authentic writing situations provides students with more engaging and relevant writing tasks.

Each of these later iterations improves upon the previous. A workshop model provides many benefits both for students and teachers of writing. Students' writing lives are enhanced and increased through attention, time and space, and sheer volume. Students can develop better writing practices for day-to-day writing. These practices, especially with prompting from future writing instructors, set students up for productive and streamlined writing processes. As students develop a better understanding of their own individual writing processes, they will be able to improve them through that reflective attention. Finally, through features like a writer's notebook and author's chair, students can develop an appreciation for the power and beauty of language.

As noted earlier, however, a workshop model in a secondary ELA classroom requires much front loading and more time than most secondary ELA teachers give to writing. Another issue—the severity of which depends on the demands of the teacher's situation—is the inadequacy of a workshop model or an inquiry-based model in preparing students for timed writing tests. Teachers who must perform under threat of dismissal for state testing may resist a model that does not immediately pay off in terms of success on a standardized test. While tenured teachers may have more freedom to flout the demands of testing, students may still feel pressured to perform well on these tests for college admission or because of the effect on their own grades. An approach to teaching writing

in this age of standardized testing must, for better or for worse, take into account these new demands.

Genre Awareness, Not Mastery

Teaching students how to write through genres does not have to lead to formulaic, status-quo-maintaining instruction. If the object of the lesson is not mastery of the genre, then students and teachers alike can approach the content as anthropologists instead of colonizers. This genre awareness goes beyond rhetorical analysis alone. Students-as-observers consider the audience's expectations, the goals of the writer, the demands of the context; but without an awareness of genre, students are limited in the kinds of patterns they can detect. In order to effectively analyze a genre, students need extended exposure to that genre. If the genre is entirely new to them (e.g. literature review, lab report), they struggle to identify more than surface features because they are not the audience for that genre. Once they become the audience, they can better be the writer of that genre — that's the social nature of genre, the give and take. In the move from reader to writer, students' knowledge of genre plays a much larger role.

Genre Analysis: Purpose, Audience, and Convention

In teaching students to consider purpose within the context of a genre, teachers can show the diversity of purposes for a single genre while also highlighting the common purposes of that genre. For example, while a letter to the editor *typically* posits a reader's displeasure with something printed in that publication, each letter to the editor also has a

purpose specific to the situation. Teaching students to recognize the purpose of the genre as well as the purpose of this particular text expands students' notion of the role of rhetorical genre. As a teacher introduces each new genre to his/her students, this emphasis should provide more context for when to use that particular genre instead of another one, encouraging autonomy in student writing.

Analyzing one's audience as part of starting a new writing assignment, especially in the manner described by Flower and Hayes in "The Cognition of Discovery," is a hallmark of experienced writers. Considering the audience's expectations embedded in the selection of a genre adds a layer of complexity and sophistication not often found in student writing. For instance, if a student has the choice of a writing a blog versus submitting an op-ed to a local newspaper, the selection of either genre will limit or expand the writer's potential audience. Providing choice and opportunities for students to reflect on the effect their choices have on audience teaches a different kind of skill than a traditional unit built on opinion writing. If the focus is on the transfer of audience analysis, then whether they can write a successful op-ed is not as important as whether they can successfully explain their choices and the effect of those choices.

Finally, a traditional lesson on convention (or even more broadly, a traditional approach to grammar and conventions) can never cover every possible situation students might find themselves in. Students already tend to focus on the surface features of a text when trying to analyze it. Teaching conventions through genre provides for a more nuanced and more historically accurate understanding of conventions. Teaching MLA or APA as if the guidelines are written in stone sets students and teachers up for frustration

either when students switch to a discipline that uses neither or when the associations inevitably choose to revamp their conventional guidelines. One way to lay a foundation of deeper understanding regarding conventions in genre is to start first with a convention students know (e.g. parenthetical citation or email headings) and then show them the historical evolution of that convention. As students cognitively embrace the idea that conventions result from the evolution of that genre, they will be open to the natural changes in the genre. Furthermore, this unconventional approach to conventions can connect genre to the expectations of the genre's typical audience, a more integrated approach that deepens students' understanding of conventions as part of the broader, social nature of genre.

A Potential Introductory Sequence of Assignments

What does this approach look like in a secondary ELA classroom? For the last two years, I have attempted to infuse genre analysis into the very beginning of my writing instruction, giving students a heuristic to use with each new writing task. With an eye toward teaching for transfer, what follows is an overview of three short writing lessons and assignments that have provided this sophomore ELA teacher with a way to teach genre analysis and quickly show my sophomores the breadth of real writing in their world.

Assignment 1: Email to Teacher (adapted from Christine Tardy)

My students are fortunate to have access to a class set of laptops every day, which means we will use technology more heavily than most ELA classes. Many teachers in

this digital age can attest to the fact that students frequently struggle with the genre of the email to the teacher requesting help from an absence or on an assignment in class or asking for an extension. Students struggle with tone, they struggle with formatting, they struggle with the conventions and power dynamics of email communication in general, but in the heat of the moment, when they need help the most, they are unaware of the effect of their rhetorical choices on their audience. These struggles can have long lasting effects if not overcome.

Part 1: Rhetorical Analysis of the Genre

The teacher curates a sample of emails from students from previous years, eliminating personally identifying information. The emails should show a range of responses with varying degrees of success.

I generally start the activity by identifying one feature, such as the greeting, and highlight the variety of greetings in the emails. I describe a possible rhetorical purpose of the greeting, connecting it to the history of the letter as a historical antecedent genre of the email. I share some of my concerns when I email my boss and explain how my greeting might change depending on the purpose of my email. From there, I ask the students to continue in small groups to (1) identify similarities and differences between the sample emails and (2) begin a list of possible genre conventions.

With a working list on the board, we discuss successful and unsuccessful attempts at each convention, effects of each choice to follow or dismiss convention, and how a change in the purpose or a change in the relationship between the sender and the receiver or a change in the urgency could affect the choices of each sender.

Part 2: Practice in the Genre

Students are given a scenario (e.g. absence because of illness, absence because of a family emergency, request to change seating assignment, an extension on an assignment, etc), and in small groups, they must construct an email to me for that scenario. They then present their email to the class, explaining their choices to maintain formality or throw in a joke, to question or suggest, to follow convention or flout it.

Part 3: Reflection

Students write a short "story of my thinking" reflection that describes what they thought about email before our lesson, how they processed learning new information, and what they will do with the new information in the future. The students may not have mastered emailing their teacher a request for help, but that is not the goal. The students have taken one step on a very long journey toward understanding the rhetorical nature of genre.

Assignment 2: Mission Statement

Email is a very user-friendly genre; students often come in with prior experience learning about writing letters and can transfer those skills from letter-writing to email-writing with very little prompting. A different kind of writing—a more public kind of writing—can test the limits of their awareness of genre. While many teenagers may have seen a mission statement before, they likely have little experience with the genre and aside from being avid consumers of media and material goods, may not consider themselves to be the audience for a mission statement. This assignment reminds students that shorter texts are not necessarily easier to write and that every word matters.

Part 1: Rhetorical Analysis of the Genre

Students are given several examples of business mission statements (e.g. American Express, Ikea, Honest Tea Company, Nordstrom, Patagonia, and Warby Parker) that show a range of business models, values, and ideas. The teacher leads the students in a discussion of the differences in the mission statements despite the similar purpose of each. The teacher discusses how the mission statement must reflect the values of the company and asks students to identify the values implied by each mission statement.

Part 2: Practice in the Genre

This assignment allows for the teacher to demonstrate how a different writing task can emphasize a different part of a writing process. With a small group, students will write a mission statement for a company with which they are well acquainted (e.g. Nike, Starbucks, Walmart, Michael Kors, Apple, etc). In order to prompt the kind of transfer described by Perkins and Salomon, students "must be cued, primed, and guided" ("Cognitive" 19). Before moving into the practice phase of the lesson, students should do some reflective writing about the similarities and differences between the genre of emails to teachers and the genre of mission statements. Because the genre of the mission statement depends so much on the values of the company, students will need to consider the ethos of the company much more than the audience as they did with the email. Brainstorming, listing, webbing, and many other prewriting activities provide students with a way to generate and organize ideas. After students present their group's mission statement, the teacher can share the company's actual mission statement and discuss the

differences and similarities. Before moving on, students will write their own personal mission statement, attempting to share their values and project their best selves.

Part 3: Reflection

Since this assignment features both a group imitative assignment and a personal writing assignment, students could reflect on the difference between writing with a group and writing individually. They can also continue to reflect on the differences between writing an email and writing a mission statement. The more readily that students can articulate the differences between writing tasks, the less likely they will be to rely unsuccessfully on prior knowledge when attempting a new writing task.

Assignment 3: The Police Report

This assignment is a peculiar one that many other teachers may not take up, but I share it with the hopes that other teachers can consider how to use the resources in their buildings and communities to highlight the role of writing outside of the classroom. This final assignment in this short sequence presents students with a genre that functions within a larger system of genres. Though students may not have much experience in the criminal justice system, they often have exposure to these genres from popular tv shows, movies, and even the news. Again the goal is not mastery of a genre in this assignment sequence; my sophomore ELA class is not a criminal justice class. Instead, what I want students to gain from this experience is an awareness of the way the police report fits into the larger system. So I bring in extra support, someone who write police reports for a living: our school resource officer (SRO).

Part 1: Rhetorical Analysis of the Genre System

Our SRO usually begins by narrating his own experience with learning how to write police reports. He emphasizes the need for specific details and the danger in inflammatory language, speculations, inferences, or assumptions—anything other than observable facts. This year, he shared how a man he had arrested for a DUI had been acquitted because one of the statements in his police report was more speculation than fact. The defendant's lawyer used that slip up to argue against the charge.

In telling this compelling story, the SRO demonstrates the partial reach of this system of genres. Later he tells the students that a police report starts as notes that the officer writes down during the call. The finished report can lead to an entire system of legal genres. Not only does the scope of this one document grow, but students begin to see how genres can lead to other genres: notes lead to a police report, which leads to an investigation, which leads to a citation, which leads to a court summons, which leads to a decision by the court. Related genres, from a column in the newspaper to prosecuting attorney's opening remarks, surround this system and influence and are influenced by that one police report.

Part 2: Practice in the Genre

To truly write any genre, a student must inhabit the discourse community—fully aware of the gravity of the rhetorical situation, the danger in mistakes, the awareness of the (for this genre, legal) ramifications—and outside of the discourse community, students are just play acting. So for this practice in the genre, the SRO takes the lead in writing the report, modeling how he articulates what he observes, what he includes and

what he leaves out. After the SRO leaves, the students read a short story where a character is interrogated by a police car (Bradbury's "The Pedestrian") and with a group, they write the police report from the perspective of the car. While I attempt to encourage students to embrace the creativity of this assignments, students often resist the lack of constraints. Perhaps more than their teachers, the students often see their school assignments, the "mutt genres" Wardle describes, as equally creative and disconnected from the true system of genres.

Part 3: Reflection

If the goal of this assignment was for students to master police report writing, then this assignment would be rather disconnected from a traditional ELA curriculum. "Police report writing" does not appear in the standards for any state curriculum. But as an exercise in genre awareness, with some reflection, students can grow in their understanding of how genres work together. Students should specifically reflect on the system of genres, perhaps trying to think of other systems of genres they have experience with (a traditional writing assignment gets a grade, which is entered in the grade book, which is averaged together to produce a report card grade, which is then put on a student's transcript, et cetera).

Reflection

Within three short assignments, students are introduced to several key rhetorical genre concepts: genre is social and rhetorical; genres function in systems; writing is public; writing is situated; genres conventions represent values implied by the

conventions and form; genres change over time. Will students have mastered these concepts? Will they have become threshold concepts for them, changing the way they see writing forever? Probably not in this first sequence. But with extended exposure to these ideas and extensive written reflection, students can internalize these writing concepts.

This approach will work only with extended time for student reflection built on inductive conversations about what students notice in the text, about why students think the author used that word or that feature or even that genre, and about how those choices affect the message, the audience, and future instances of that genre. At times these conversations can feel unproductive. Students may ask the teacher to tell them the answer. They have, after years of schooling, been trained to expect this information dump from their teachers as experts. But if students are to be taught *how to learn how to write* rather than just being taught how to write, the teacher must abdicate her role as expert and join the students as learners. "Metacognition" —one of the habits of mind in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*—will only develop as a habit if students practice reflection regularly and understand how reflection improves their writing processes.

Students should consistently reflect during the process of observing a genre-in-action, of analyzing that genre, and then writing in that genre. Beyond the observing, students should take note of any confusion they have throughout the process. This type of reflection can encourage students to approach writing experimentally with causes leading to effects, with trial and error as a natural part of the writing process.

An RGS Approach to Standardized Testing

Teaching students to approach writing from a Rhetorical Genre Studies perspective offers many benefits in regular, everyday writing situations. But in a world where standardized testing looms large, can RGS help teachers take back control of their curriculum *and* still appease the testing gods? If students understand systems of genres, ask them to identify the systems that a standardized writing assignment comprises. If students understand the social nature of genre, ask them to explore the evolution of writing assessments. If students understand that genre conventions represent the values privileged in the genre, discuss the values privileged by the SAT and their own state's board of education. Using a critical approach to the testing rhetorical situation does not have to make students cynical, but such an approach does provide them with information that is often obscured or hidden to novice writers. Helping students see that standardized testing has its place also encourages students to place an appropriate weight on these tests, possibly preventing unnecessary stress or equally unhealthy apathy.

Final Thoughts

From Devitt to Wardle to Soliday, many researchers seem to confirm Bawarshi and Reiff in finding "the importance of both implicit teaching…and explicit teaching" of genre in order to allow students of all abilities and with all forms of prior knowledge to successfully acquire new genres (117). Devitt's *Writing Genres* contains "A Proposal for Teaching Genre Awareness and Antecedent Genres" as its penultimate chapter. Aware of the potential pitfalls of teaching genre, Devitt calls for genres to be "situated within their contexts of culture, situation, and other genres" (191). In a later iteration of this proposal,

Devitt adds the word "critical" to her proposal, responding to those such as Victor Villanueva who fear that "Writing Across the Curriculum is assimiliationist" ("Teaching" 337). As secondary ELA teachers, how often do we advocate students' challenging conventions in academic genres? In advocating a critical awareness, Devitt grants that specific ideologies are embedded within genres. For instance, the five-paragraph essay "reinforces apparent objectivity and distance from the subject" while the personal narrative "reduces personal experiences to 3-page stories" and "requires students to believe that sharing intimate life experiences is healthy and appropriate" (339). Therefore, Devitt claims, "The first and most important genre pedagogy, then, is the teacher's genre awareness: the teacher being conscious of the genre decisions he or she makes and what those decisions will teach students" (339). This statement lines up with many who advocate a genre-based pedagogy. However, Devitt's commentary about a teacher's genre awareness might also represent a disconnect between what composition theorists believe about genre and what actually goes on in the ELA writing classroom.

Many teacher-researchers have published books advocating for more authentic assignments for students, promoting a varied and rich curriculum (as lines up with TC 4.3). Tom Romano and Heather Lattimer advocate reading and writing workshops that culminate in multi-genre projects. Lattimer admits that though she can usually only cover three or four genres in a year, students will read and write many more types throughout their schooling and the rest of their lives. Her claim that "by teaching students to engage in an inquiry-based approach to genre, I hope to prepare them to navigate their own way through unfamiliar text forms in the future" (5) coincides with research of Devitt working

with undergraduate students in FYC. Romano's sustained work with multi-genre projects in secondary and post-secondary environments relies heavily on students' exposure to various genres before the project. Kelly Gallagher's core beliefs, which he lists in his closing chapter of his book *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling & Mentor Texts*, focus on the ideas of modeling, scaffolding and sequencing assignments, providing opportunities for students to practice, and even avoiding formulaic writing.

So if teacher-researchers like Gallagher (with over 45k followers on Twitter) and Romano (with six books and a number of articles, book reviews, poetry collections, et cetera) and Lattimer (now Executive Director for the University of San Diego's Institute for Entrepreneurship in Education) are writing these texts and teachers are buying them, why are teachers still assigning "mutt genres"? Why are students still writing five-paragraph essays?

We often teach what we were taught—novels we read and loved in school, poems that sounded or felt or moved us in some way, even essays that were thought-provoking. But more often than teaching what we were taught, we teach how we were taught. A couple of methods courses and a semester of student-teaching pale in comparison to 16+ years as a student.

Perhaps the five-paragraph essay persists not because students believe it is appropriate in college but because the genre awareness of secondary teachers is lacking. In the same way that students will use their prior knowledge in new writing situations, regardless of the success of that transfer, teachers may also be guilty of trying to apply

that static form regardless of its efficacy in a new situation. Clearly the training of secondary ELA teachers is partly to blame. Postsecondary institutions have an obligation to prepare pre-service teachers for the varied roles of teaching. I remember the push and pull of theory and practice in my methods courses, so perhaps the education classes are too late to introduce genre theory. If English majors are expected to take seminars in literary theory, they can also take them in writing theory. Then as students move into their English education courses, they will be armed with the theoretical foundations upon which they may build their pedagogical practices.

More research is needed to explore the relationship between the explicit teaching of genre and the transfer of students' writing skills and knowledge. But in the meantime, the explicit teaching will certainly force secondary ELA teachers to expand their writing horizons. And when they do, their instruction can move beyond rules, beyond forms, beyond a five-paragraph theme.

But what does genre analysis do for students? At the very least, genre analysis offers students one more approach to learning how to write. The old adage about teaching a person to fish seems appropriate here. While students will not become masters of a genre with the methods described in this project, they should leave our secondary classrooms with the awareness that writing is situated and social and sometimes even public. This awareness will need to be strengthened and deepened as they continue their scholarly adventures. They may not write perfect prose; they will likely make illogical arguments; they may misapply their genre meta-knowledge at times; and they may even attempt a five-paragraph essay every now and again—old habits die hard—but with the

help of composition instructors, these students will enter their major courses seeking out the activity systems and genres in which the work of their discipline will occur, ready to learn anew how to write.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CHRISTINE TARDY'S WEDDING INVITATION PROTOCOL

Genre researcher Christine Tardy shared an example of an assignment sequence in her lecture

1. Start with something ordinary, yet well known to students - a wedding party invitation.

2. Focus first on rhetorical situation.

3. Then show students a second example of a similar rhetorical situation and ask them to find the similarities.

4. Students will notice form first; ask them to dig deeper, to focus on the demands of the situation.

5. Show them an example that stretches the genre.

    a. Tardy's example featured a pop-up map

6. Ask them to explain why the genre-bending one still works.

7. As you point out the repeated structure, the typified form, and let students draw the conclusions, the awareness of genre becomes more natural.

8. Now they make one. The focus is not on mastery but awareness of the conventions and rhetorical situation.

9. Then they play or parody it.

APPENDIX B: NICKERSON MISSION STATEMENT HANDOUT

Objective: Students will write an initial mission statement for English II, continuing to revise this statement until they are ready to publish it on the classroom bulletin board.

Mission Statement: a formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual

Business Examples:

Our vision and business idea

At IKEA our vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people. Our business idea supports this vision by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.

Our Blue Box Values

At American Express®, we have a mission to be the world's most respected service brand. To do this, we have established a culture that supports our team members, so they can provide exceptional service to our customers.

NORDSTROM'S COMMITMENT

In store or online, whenever new opportunities arise, Nordstrom works relentlessly to give customers the most compelling shopping experience possible. The one constant? John W. Nordstrom's founding philosophy: offer the customer the best possible service, selection, quality and value.
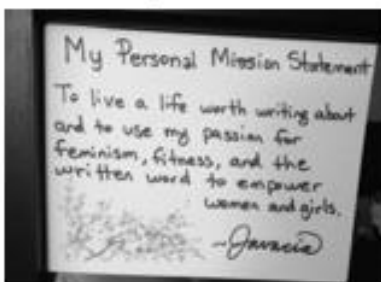

Mission Statement

Honest Tea seeks to create and promote great-tasting, healthier, organic beverages. We strive to grow our business with the same honesty and integrity we use to craft our products, with sustainability and great taste for all.

Patagonia's Mission Statement

Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.

 arby Parker was founded with a rebellious spirit and a lofty objective: to offer designer eyewear at a revolutionary price, while leading the way for socially-conscious businesses.

Personal Examples:

My Personal Mission Statement

To live a life worth writing about and to use my passion for feminism, fitness, and the written word to empower women and girls.
—Javacia

Mission Statement

I will be diligent in my work as I continue to learn more and more in my every day life. My work will make a difference in the world by helping to reduce pollution, fuel dependency, and reduce the abundance of genetically modified organisms which have become all too familiar in every day life.

To create a future not only for myself, but also to pave a frontier for the world to join me. I will lead others the way that I would like to be led: With respect, confidence, and appreciation.

Andrew Christopher Boryk

Possible Genre Conventions:

- _____
- _____
- _____

APPENDIX C: NICKERSON POLICE REPORT HANDOUT

Objective: Students will write a police report as an objective summary of a short story.

A police report is a document detailing a crime or incidence.

Notes from SRO Presentation:

Possible Genre Conventions:

- _____

- _____

- _____

Field Notes from "The Pedestrian":