Assessment Institute 2024

Ideas, Research, & Writing: Understanding Composition on a Human Level

Presented by:

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Objectives

- **Discuss** the importance of personal exploration through writing to create research questions and theses

- **Demonstrate** critical reading and writing strategies to help students dissect academic texts

- **Examine** the correlation between consistent self-exploration through writing and improved grammar skills

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The Joyful Challenges of Ideas and Research

- Meeting the tough yet pleasing skills of composition

- "Writing composed in the first-year course is and can be an agent that changes, intra-acts with, and emerges in tandem with students' perspectives, emotions, and knowledge" (Lindenman et al., 2024, p.54).

- The power of exploring Self *before* research

- The power of trust when critiquing research

# The Origins of Written Pieces

Productive Topics

- Form topics through honest reflection and prewriting

- Arranging topic choices on Discussion Boards, determining the purposes and meanings of each one

- Responding to students about the best choices and heartfelt possibilities

- "Rarely can authors simply begin writing without predrafting. Even with opinion pieces on topics with which the author is exceptionally well informed, predrafting in the form of notes and outlines can help authors organize their thoughts and ideas" (Leidner & Birth, 2022, p. 2).

The Power of Conversation

Talks in Seminars

- Learning about topics through chat forums

- Brainstorming in mini lessons, emphasizing the quick yet meaningful callings of topics

- "A think-aloud process can help students see that writing is an iterative process interwoven with a thinking process" (Sowell, 2024, p. 1).

- Utilizing the worldly focus of careers and interests when delving into written ideas

- The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again" (Emerson, 1837, p. 1140).

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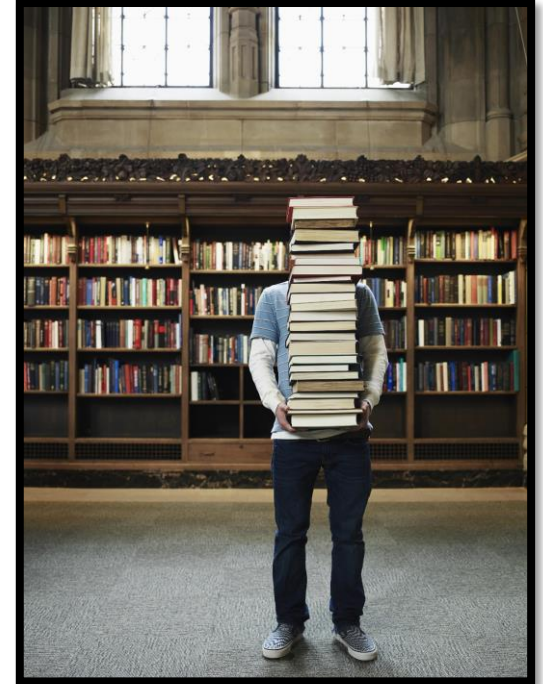
Thesis-Driven Composition

The Will to Craft Effective Writing

- Modelling a thesis statement for clarity and comprehension

- Thesis: The Upton School District must include more classics into the curriculum because they will help students appreciate the history of ideas, build effective annotation skills, and perceive the relationships between future careers and canonized literature.

- Helping students analyze a concise major premise and a minor premise

- Guiding students in seminar activities, directing them to build thesis parts and a working thesis

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The Stimulus of Reflection

Discussion Boards as Creative Platforms

- Asserting values and beliefs, sharing thesis-driven reasoning

- Example: "The community problem I wish to address is the large number of stray and uncared-for cats in my neighborhood. Why are there so many stray cats in my town? My target audience is the people in my town. Spaying and neutering cats and properly caring for them could solve the problem. The reason this solution is needed is because it is animal cruelty to allow so many cats to exist and populate endlessly without proper care and love. Cat owners should spay, neuter, and properly house their cats because it is cruel to the cats, it is dangerous for the people (they might get attacked by a large number of feral strays), and it helps control the population of strays."

- Allowing peers and the professor to observe the rough reflections, seeing the origins of a thesis and the need to reflect

- Understanding the presence of ethos, pathos, and logos

The Essay's Transitional Paths

Topic Sentences, Points Ahead

- Meeting the challenges of paragraphs through thesis-driven messages

- Understanding transitions as building blocks of a written argument

- "Transitional words such as 'however,' 'therefore,' 'nevertheless,' 'similarly,' etc, are often used to connect sentences. One must be attentive to the potential of non-sequiturs to arise not only within sentences but also across sentences" (Leidner & Birth, 2022, p. 4).

- Helping students realize gaps through responses on Discussion Boards

The Streams of Development

Completeness and Correctness

- The Discussion Board's critical function: helping students develop and revise the draft

- "To engage your intuitive skills in revising the paper, it can be helpful to think of your paper as a 'textile,' as a woven fabric, paying attention to the warp and weft of the text" (Leidner & Birth, 2022, p. 5).

- Recognizing higher order skills as opportunities and possibilities

- "Eternity is in love with the productions of time" (Blake, 1793, p. 151).

- "What is now proved was once only imagin'd" (Blake, 1793, p. 151).

- Editing with effort and precision, finding the mistakes

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A More Revised Piece

Example: Building an Argument

Affordable housing will allow businesses to attract and hire qualified employees, which will ultimately make them successful. This is only possible if workers have housing that they can move into without becoming financially unstable or causing the business to raise salaries to unsustainable levels. When housing is unaffordable, businesses struggle to hire qualified candidates. This will ultimately cause businesses to either leave the area or fail to provide adequate service to the community. Boston is a prime example of this problem. According to the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (2017) "Of the survey's 87 respondents, over 72% of companies say they have found it "Extremely or Somewhat Difficult" to recruit and/or retain talent in the past five years. In addition, over 67% claim home prices and rental costs have affected their ability to recruit qualified candidates". As we can see, housing costs play a big factor in where workers decide to work. If we want to attract and retain quality people, then we need to make it affordable for them to live here. Families must be able to move to the area if we want businesses to be successful. As new businesses and families come to McCordsville, we will need to start thinking about the workers who will serve the community and how they will manage to live in the community.

Embracing the Audience

The Differences at Stake

- Acknowledging audience by understanding online peers

- "Online courses draw a variety of students: rural and urban; poor and rich; from various age groups; with various domestic circumstances; from deeply conservative to the deeply liberal; and the religious to the atheistic" (Hei-Jew, 2005, p. 12).

- Knowing audiences in the essay to be more directive

- Helping students craft an audience in chat forums

- Understanding how the thesis impacts an audience

Tackling Literacy

The Value of Notes

- Encouraging people to take notes during seminars

- Teaching ways to interact with texts, such as in-text commentary and annotated summaries

- Annotating to advance comprehension

- Annotating directions to gain clarity, building lists or small paragraphs

- "Depending on the students' educational needs, writers' checklists can be adapted to include fewer or less complex steps and expectations or rubric requirements, as deemed necessary to support individuals with diverse learning needs, including accommodations or modifications" (Jagaiah, 2019, p. 104).

The Impact of Annotation

Source: Rifkin, J. (2009). *The Empathic Civilization.* Penguin Group, p. 105.

Preparing for Adventure, Step 1: The Self-Inventory

What do I know?

- Research questions with the five W's not only help with outside research, but with inner research, too.

  - *WHO is my audience?*

  - *WHAT is my purpose?*

  - *WHERE is this topic happening?*

Passion and excitement fuel the desire to explore and adventure into new research and perspectives (Warner, 2019).

Preparing for Adventure, Step 1: The Self-Inventory

- The Rhetorical Situation and Logical Appeals are tools students need to map out the next steps (Threadgill & Paulson, 2018).

- Such tools also help educators provide initial guidance for the students before getting too far in the writing process.

Sample Brainstorming Questions

- *What common ground do you anticipate that you will share with your audience?*

- *How would you describe your community's setting?*
- *What are some relevant details about the city, state, or areas where the problem exists?*
- *Will the solution be implemented in a school, a workplace, or an organization, or somewhere else?*
- *What are key elements of the setting that affect the problem?*

- *How will you use the ethos appeal?*
- *How will you ensure your audience trusts you?*
- *What is at least one rival hypothesis you will need to address and how can you overcome that challenge to your argument?*

- *What evidence supports that this is the best solution?*
- *What research will you need to conduct?*
- *What is one source you have found that will help you support your claims?*
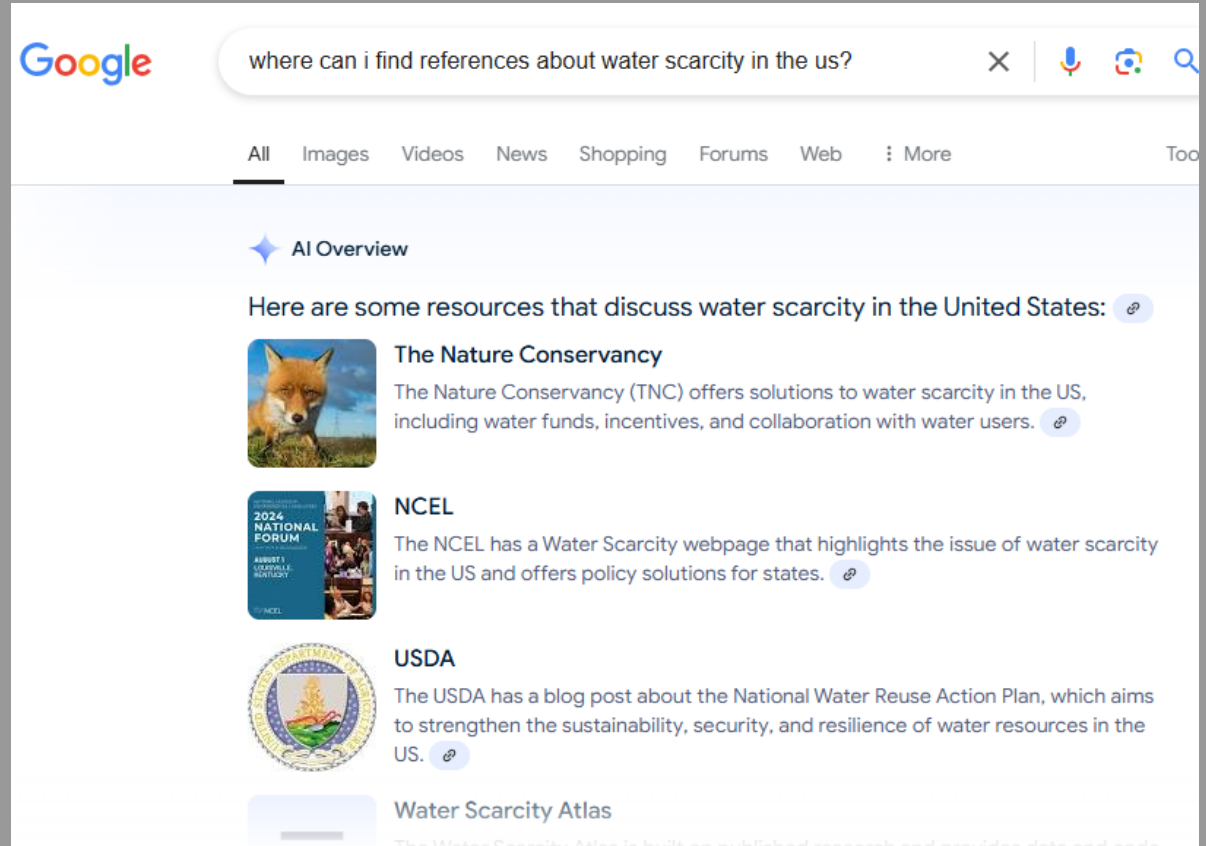
Step 2: Forging One's Own Research Path

Being able to find the right information at the right time helps people participate in government, learn, create, earn a living, and realize their dreams. At times, it can save lives. (Markey, 2023, p.1)

- Library Power
  - Hyperlinks with author's name, publisher, subject
  - ASK!
- Search Word Tricks
  - Time Frame
  - Boolean Boost
  - Synonyms
  - Quotation Marks

(Purdue Global, 2024)
Photo by Heidi Fin on Unsplash

Forging On: Can AI Map Out My Research Plan for Me?

AI may help students with their initial search for useful sites, such as government publications or newspaper publications.

(Google Search, 2024)

Forging On: Can AI Map Out My Research Plan for Me?

- While AI can lead to useful things, it can also utilize information from completely informal and erroneous sources (Ohlheiser, 2024; Verma, 2023)
- Students struggle to "trust BUT verify" (Hetrick, 2024)

Sample [Fake] References

- Smith, J. (2021). Water Scarcity in Developing Countries: A Comprehensive Review. Journal of Sustainable Development, 25(4), 112-135.
- Environmental Protection Agency. (2019). Water Conservation Strategies for Communities. Retrieved from https://www.epa.gov/watersense/water-conservation-strategies-communities

Step 3: Assessing One's Research Findings

- Avoid the abstract! (Oehrli, Peters, & Deeke 2022)
- Students often need help understanding the "why" behind the assumptions they make when critiquing sources (Graff, 2022)
- When educators guide students in effective reading processes, students are more likely to challenge themselves and develop strong reading stamina (Kessinger & Love, 2022)
- Requiring students to share highlights from the article, even just one part of the article, in their own words sparks the ability to critically apply research to their writing (Oehrli, Peters, & Deeke 2022)
- Utilizing input from peers may help broaden student understanding of how potential evidence may be prioritized or perceived (Graff, 2022)

Much of the information we encounter on the Internet presents itself as true without offering any obvious way to judge its veracity. Factor in the influence of "confirmation bias," our willingness to accept something as true as long as it aligns with our existing beliefs, and we have an online atmosphere that makes it very difficult to discern what is true and what is not.
(Warner, 2019, pp.139-140)

Step 3: Practice Assessing Research
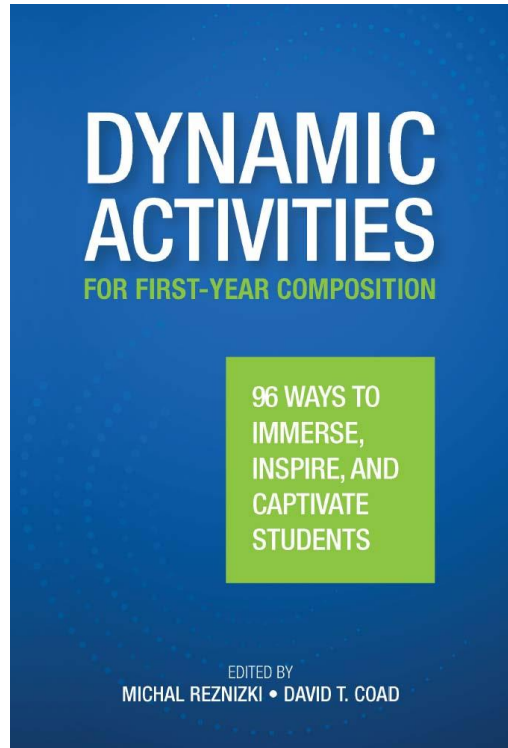
Activity Sample: "Rhetorical Analysis with Commercials"

- Select commercials that utilize some degree of storytelling (Super Bowl commercials work well)
- Break class into groups to discuss rhetorical situation and effectiveness of the different commercials
- Challenges students to see real-life application of foundational critical thinking

Good writers question everything.
(Warner, 2019, p.142)

Avoid Paths to Echo Chambers

Preparing the current and next generations of students to understand and respect each other, and to accept differing viewpoints is paramount (Gunn, et al., 2022, p.191).

- It is very tempting for students to study evidence solely for their own perspective.
- Assign students to equally research the different sides of their topic's "debate" challenges them to consistently critique and consider multiple viewpoints (Gunn et al., 2022)
- Watch out for mixing the paraphrases and the rebuttals! (Warner, 2019)
- Peers can also help students see their position from an opposing perspective, even encouraging them to "imagine" being an advocate for the opposition (Reznizki & Coad, 2023)

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Step 4: Gathering the Discoveries

- Academic language can often be a stumbling block for students new to such reading challenges (Warner, 2019).
- Many students struggle to synthesize research in their own writing. Instead, they'll choose to "cherry-pick" a quote to insert somewhere and move on (Foster & Fyn, 2022)
- Challenge students to use their own words to explain how sources connect and/or "converse" with one another (Reznizki & Coad, 2023)
- Aids like a source chart or critique guide can help students focus on the primary elements of the article, a much better start for lower-level students new to academic research (Foster & Fyn, 2022)

VOLUME ONE
Reading in the Disciplines and for Specific Populations

TEACHING CRITICAL READING SKILLS

Strategies for Academic Librarians

Edited by
Hannah Gascho Rempel and Rachel Hamelers
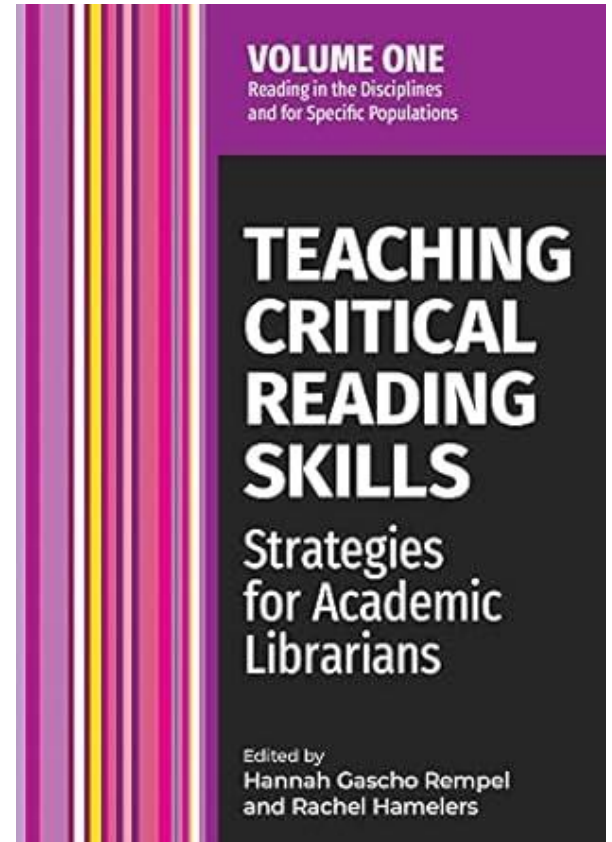
Where Will Your Discoveries Take You?

One of the fundamental skills in making arguments is to be able to accurately convey the arguments of others. (Warner, 2019, p.125)

While bullying occurs everywhere, children with disabilities experience it more frequently. Many student populations with differences are bullied at a higher rate than the general population. In 2013-14, the average of special populations in schools nationwide included 35% learning disabled, 21% with speech or language issues, 13% other impairment and 8% Autism as well as multiple other conditions is smaller groups (NCES, 2016). These numbers suggest the seriousness and importance of considering differences in school settings. Bullying based on perceptions of difference could affect a considerable population considering the variety of unique student concerns. For example, children with autism are 3 times more likely to be bullied than peers. Children with epilepsy and medical conditions like cerebral palsy are more likely to be bullied and called names than their peers (Stopbullying.org, 2018)

(Purdue Global, 2020)

Where Will Your Discoveries Take You?
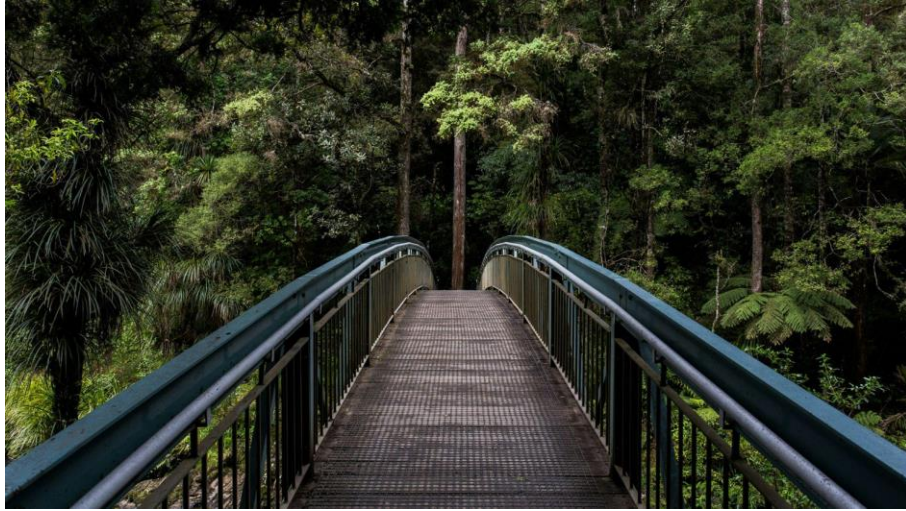
You're not going to be able to bluff your understanding. (Warner, 2019, p.134)

Build Bridges of Understanding with Your Paragraphs

- What kind of bridge are you building?
- What materials will you need?
- Finish the connection between bridge and road!
- Give students a chance to dissect and study the "bridges" of others (Reznizki & Coad, 2023)

The Dynamic Presence of Writing and Research

"There are days when everything I see seems to me charged with meaning: messages it would be difficult for me to communicate with others, defined, translate into words, but which for this very reason appear to me decisive" (Calvino, 1981, p.55)

Transforming students' reflections and thesis-driven writing

Empowering students' confidence and research skills

Embracing language, diversity, perspectives, and the theater of life

Thank you for attending!

"Let's go—much as that dog goes / Intently haphazard."
(Levertov, "Overland to the Islands," 1979, p.55)

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