



**UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
FRESHMAN ENGLISH PROGRAM**

**REFLECTIVE WRITING PROJECT STUDY
FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Data Collected: April/May 2013
Study Dates: June 3-6, 2013
Report Posted: January 17, 2014

I. Overview	2
II. Process	2
III. Assignments	4
IV. The Papers	6
V. Assignment Genre	8
VI. Recommendations	10
VII. Implementation	10
Appendices	
A. Sample Assignments	12
B. Reflections	23

I. Overview

In Spring 2010, the Freshman English Program instituted a new requirement of “reflective writing projects – in lieu of a final examination, instructors were directed to offer an “assessment form that encourages self reflection on the part of students through a comprehensive examination of the writing students have done throughout the semester.”

In Spring 2013, responding to a sentiment among its instructors that the Reflective Writing Project was not producing strong student writing, the Program collected reflective writing projects (both assignment prompts and two writing samples) from 102 sections of ENGL 1004, 1010, and 1011 across all six University of Connecticut campuses, and in the summer a team of five graduate students under the Director of Freshman English read those materials with an eye to both evaluating the efficacy of the RWP and providing direction to instructors.

The study group found that, while it is essential that students get chances to reflect on the work they are doing as writers, the traditional end-of-semester reflection is often too bound up in *evaluation* which, understandably, jeopardizes the more critical and open-ended assessments that most benefit student writers. We think reflection works best as either a low-stakes component of ongoing work (like a process note or an in-class reflection) or as an integrated component of a larger, revised paper that functions much more like a traditional FE assignment.

Reflection can (and should) include reflection on the *content* of the semester’s work and the ideas and questions that drive that work. Often this is best done in the context of the other course readings. Even when discussing “writing” in a more formal way, student should consider the following: rather than compare one’s work to “good” academic writing, one might simply consider one’s work as just academic writing. *How does it work? What characterizes this writer’s approach and the “moves” that she makes?* Assignments should try to keep the intellectual work of the semester (course themes, key concepts, etc.) active even in reflective work; academic writing is not merely a set of formal characteristics to be commented on.

II. Process

Near the beginning of the semester, the Freshman English Program sent e-mail notifications to all students in Freshman English courses informing them that the study was taking place, that their writing would be anonymous, and that they could request to have their writing removed from consideration. No students requested to be removed from consideration.

Two students were chosen at random from each of the **103 sections of ENGL 1004, 1010, and 1011** across all six University of Connecticut campuses in Spring 2013 using course rosters in StudentAdmin; instructors were then notified to collect the reflective writing of those students by the end of the semester. The papers were submitted by instructors either electronically (to the Freshman English Gmail account) or in hard copy (to the Freshman English office or to regional writing co-ordinators).

Turnout on the study was strong; we received at least one student paper from **102 sections** (99% response). We received assignment prompts from **99 sections** (96% response), meaning there were three sections where we had papers, but no prompts. There were several sections where we received only one paper because the selected student did not complete all the assignments in the course, and we were not able to select an alternate student in time.

After receipt of papers and assignments, they were stripped of names of both instructors and students, which were replaced with random codes based on the courses they originated from. (For example, an instructor of ENGL 1011 might be designated "Instructor 11AD" and their student, "Student 11AD-1.") This was done in order to remove biases that could be generated by personal knowledge of an instructor, and to fulfill ethical obligations regarding the use of student work.

The study was performed over three days in June 2013, conducted by six personnel:

- Professor Scott Campbell, Director of Freshman English
- Melissa Bugdal, Graduate Assistant
- Jared Demick, Graduate Assistant
- Steven Mollmann, Graduate Assistant
- Christiana Salah, Graduate Assistant
- Jarred Wiehe, Graduate Assistant

On the first day, the whole study group read a random selection of five papers from five different sections/assignments, in order to discuss methodology and calibrate what the goals of the reading were. After that, the group divided up into random teams of two, each assigned the assignments and papers from fifteen sections at random. The teams then read all the papers, scoring them, and discussing the scores, bringing noteworthy papers to the attention of the whole group for further discussion. The process was repeated daily, with the teams shifting each day. For more details on the scoring, see below.

As we only had three days to read nearly 200 papers, we made an adjustment to our reading practices on the third day. All the remaining unread papers were divided into three different groups, each assigned to a different team of readers. The reading teams read all the assignments, but not all the papers, identifying a set of assignments whose papers they wanted to read together. The study group was interested in reading papers

written in response to assignments that asked questions of genuine inquiry and critical engagement, writing about texts and not processes. The papers that were generally skipped over were those whose assignment prompts seemed to be asking for teleological narratives of growth/development, of which the study group had already seen a wide range of examples. This means that though all 99 assignments were read by the study group, not all submitted papers ultimately were.

III. Assignments

The study group marked the assignments to determine what kind of work they were asking of the students. One of the aspects we looked at was whether or not the prompts required revision or not. Of the ones where we were able to assess this, 34 (35%) were drafted and revised, whereas 62 (64%) were not. (One had an *optional* drafting component.) Arguably, this indicates that 1) these assignments should not be counting toward the Freshman English requirement of 25-30 pages of polished prose and that 2) the assignments do not connect to the course's stress on "the value of revision as a means of achieving depth of understanding in reading and coherence, clarity, and control in writing." Though there are assignments where revision might not be necessary (a short reflection on process, for example), there were many where it seemed as though the drafting process would have been beneficial.

Assignments were also categorized on "textual deployment." This was done in terms of four categories:

- **No texts:** The assignment did not require engagement with any texts.
- **Drafts only:** The assignment required students to cite their own writing in the course, but nothing else.
- **Drafts plus comments or other course materials:** The assignment required students to cite their own writing as well as revising/grading comments by the instructor, feedback from Small Group Tutorials, draft cover letters, or other writing about the student's writing generated during the course.
- **Outside texts:** The assignment required students to cite something not directly related to their own writing. This could be an assigned reading (such as essays by David Bartholomae or Thomas Recchio about academic writing), the Freshman English course description, or materials the student had to locate themselves.

Of the ones where we were able to assess this from the prompts (91), 13 (14%) did not require any textual engagement in the assignment prompt. 30 (33%) required only the use of drafts, while 25 (27%) required "drafts plus..." Finally, 23 (25%) required the use of "outside texts."

The study team also scored the prompts on a scale of 1-4. As with the papers, each prompt was read and scored by two readers. The scoring for prompts was the same as used in the 2009 GEOC assessment of Freshman English courses:

1	2	3	4
<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	<i>Minimal proficiency</i>	<i>Moderate proficiency</i>	<i>Excellent/ Outstanding</i>
Not at all an appropriate FE assignment	Assignment needs some revision to be an adequate FE assignment.	A solid model of an FE assignment, if unclear or undefined in some respects. Puts texts to use.	An exemplary model of an FE assignment, though not be definition exceptional.

The average paper received a 2.0 on its prompt score. (We did not rate prompts when we did not have them, but in addition, prompt scores were not given for assignments that were in-class work or worksheets because the scale seemed inapplicable.)

Overall, we found that strong prompts (especially prompts that resulted in stronger writing) did the following:

- Gave space for a project of genuine “dialogic inquiry,” allowing students to create new knowledge about academic writing, about the course theme, &c.
- Facilitated a discussion in opposition to that of skill-based mastery.
 - Required critically engagement with materials (e.g., ask students how their writing problematizes or complicates institutional standards, not measures up to them).
 - Engaged with opinionated or provocative texts (e.g., Bartholomae, Freire, Sommers, Elbow) as opposed to prescriptive ones (e.g., Hacker, course descriptions).
 - Avoided questions about strengths/weaknesses, *telos*, skills mastery, &c.
 - Did not ask for *künstlerroman*s (developmental narratives).
 - Did not posit the Freshman English course as a requirement to be skipped, or required students to muster a “defense” of their own work.
- Asked students to characterize their work rather than simply recount it, deemphasizing process and emphasizing language use.
- Provided contexts for the work of the assignment.
 - Indicated how students can put their own writing in dialogue with other texts (as in ‘normal’ papers, students can default to talking about each text in its own isolated paragraph).
 - Maintained an intellectual connection with the course theme.
 - Indicated audience and discourse community.

- Defamiliarized students' own work by putting them in a discourse they might otherwise be familiar with (e.g., taking the texts out of chronological order, treating texts as objects instead of experiences, shifting into a new genre).
 - Modeled generic shifts (e.g., when asking students to write reviews or their own assignment prompts, have students read instances and discuss them as a class).
- Gave a clear route for the process of the assignment.
- Required precision (i.e., quotation or paraphrasing of very specific moments in both student writing and assigned texts). No Freshman English paper should have no citations
 - Didn't ask students to talk themselves "as writers," but rather to talk about their writing.
 - Didn't ask students to perform disparate tasks (e.g., talk about both your experience as a writer and what you thought of the course texts).
- Were mindful of the relationship between task and page length.

IV. The Papers

After our initial calibration, the study group suspected that students might be doing exactly what the assignments called for, even if that was not exactly in line with Freshman English guidelines for a strong paper. We therefore decided to evaluate papers on two different metrics so as to be generous to the students. The first of these was "Success," which was defined as the paper's ability to meet the requirements of the assigned prompt. As with assignments, this was a scale of 1-4, and the rule of thumb was the 1 = D/F, 2 = C, 3 = B, and 4 = A (note that this is not the 4-point GPA score). The second metric was "Quality," which was against a more generalized or idealized version of a Freshman English paper, derived from the 2009 Assessment. The same scale was used.

As stated above, the study group did not read all the papers due to time constraints. Assignments whose papers were not scored received an average of 1.48. It should be understood, then, that the average scores below do not represent all papers collected, but only all papers *read*.

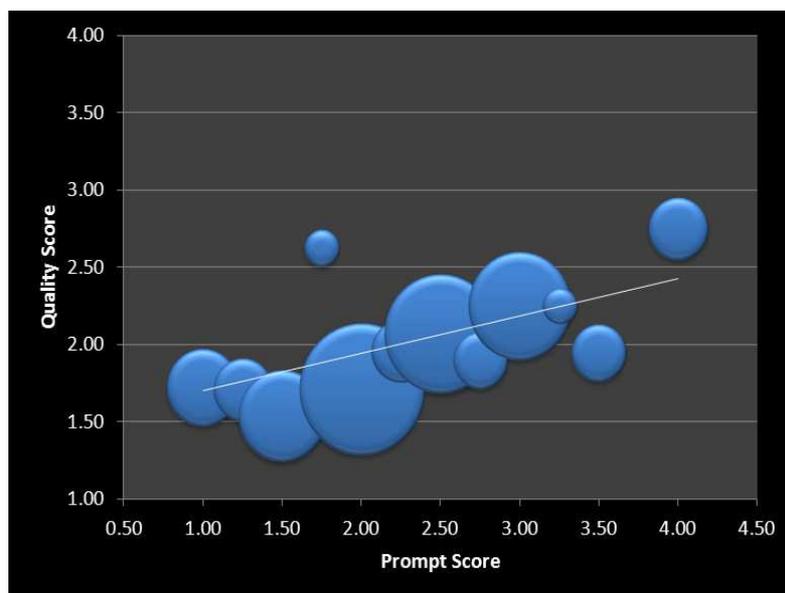
In terms of "success," the average score on all scored papers was 2.7, indicating students' ability to meet their instructors' requirements were typically in the low "B" range. However, the average "quality" score was 1.9, indicating a low "C". (Contrast this the 2009 GEOC assessment, where final papers received an average holistic score of 2.2.) Although the numbers we discuss here are somewhat imperfect records of a process that has inherent biases built into it, we see the numbers as indicating a concerning gap between what it means to comply with the requirements of an assignment and what it means to achieve something with writing.

	# of Courses	Assignment Scores	# of Papers Read	Success Scores	Quality Scores
ENGL 1004	4	2.4	7	2.8	1.9
ENGL 1010	49	2.1	63	2.7	1.9
ENGL 1011	43	1.9	50	2.8	2.0
ALL COURSES	96	2.0	120	2.7	1.9

As one can see, there was no significant difference between instructor assignments or student performance between ENGL 1004, 1010, and 1011 courses.

One area we investigated was the correlation between prompt scores and quality scores. The 2009 Assessment argues that better paper assignments tended to result in better student writing – was the same thing true here? We did indeed see a correlation between prompt score and paper quality. Clearly, assignments are a key part of successful student writing.

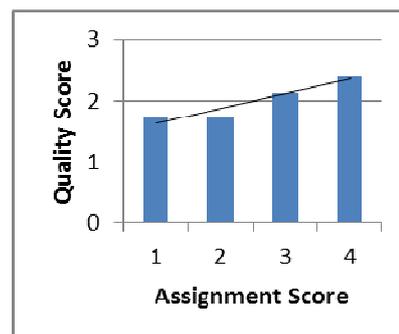
Prompt	Quality	Count
1.00	1.72	9
1.25	1.71	6
1.50	1.54	13
1.75	2.63	2
2.00	1.71	27
2.25	1.96	6
2.50	2.07	22
2.75	1.90	5
3.00	2.25	18
3.25	2.25	2
3.50	1.95	5
4.00	2.75	6



We indicate “count” to make the presence of outliers (such as the 1.75 assignment whose papers received above-average quality scores) more clear. The graph is similarly scaled.

There is a rough correlation between prompt score and paper quality. If one rounds the prompt score to the nearest whole number, this becomes a little more clear:

Prompt	Quality
1	1.72
2	1.73
3	2.13
4	2.39



The instructor’s choices in assignment design seem to have an impact on paper quality. For example, papers that included required revision scored about a half-point higher than unrevised papers.

Drafted?	Quality
Yes	2.22
No	1.76

Similarly, more textual deployment resulted in better writing, but given that the use of outside texts is part of the definition of a “quality” Freshman English paper, this is to be expected:

Textual Deployment	Quality
No Texts	1.49
Drafts Only	1.92
Drafts Plus Comments or Other Course Materials	2.02
Outside Texts	2.20

V. Assignment Genre

One of the tasks the study group set for itself was to classify the genre of the assignment prompts to figure out what approaches were most prevalent. At the time, this was done with some notes, and afterwards, an effort was made to standardize the genre types. Of the 93 paper assignments with a classified genre, a full 49 of them (52.7%) were what we dubbed the “typical reflection.” These assignments asked students to read their own work in usually evaluative terms – to find their own strengths and weaknesses, or to chart their development as writers. Some assignments indicate that students should not follow these patterns, but fail to present positive models or indications of what kind of work that students *should* be doing. There were some deviations or variations within this genre, of course, including tracing a trend through one’s own work or reflecting on the content of course.

No other genre emerges quite so dominantly. Other genres:

- *Create an assignment*: asked students to write their own assignment prompt, sometimes asking them to then fulfill it.
- *Creative*: asked students for a work of “creative writing.”
- *Lens-artifact*: asked students to examine their own writing through the “lens” of an outside writer, such as David Bartholomae. (Arguably, some of the “typical reflections” did this, too, but for more evaluative purposes.)

- *Process note*: asked students to describe their work in creating a paper—cover letters are included in this category. Many FE instructors used such an assignment in addition to the final reflective project; we received only 3 because these were from sections for which this was the final reflection.
- *Request for exemption*: asked students to explain why they should not be taking Freshman English.
- *Satire*: asked students to satirize the academic essay.
- *Standard essay*: assignments with no or little difference from other full writing assignments given in the course.
- *Theme application*: asked students to extend the theme of the course into the reflective essay: for example, a class on representations of Bob Dylan asked students to examine how Dylan had been represented in their own writing throughout the semester.
- *Theorize*: asked students to create a “theory” of academic writing, mirroring prompts sometimes given in 1010 and 1011 (e.g., create a theory of public art using Berger as a guide).
- *Worksheet*: an in-class or take-home response where the student answers a series of questions about their writing; essentially a more prescriptive cover letter or process note.

The below table gives the data on each genre of assignment, sorted by descending average quality score:

Genre	# of Prompts	% of Prompts	Avg. Prompt Score	Avg. Success	Avg. Quality
Lens-artifact	5	5.4%	3.2	2.9	2.6
Creative	2	2.2%	2.8	2.6	2.3
Process note	3	3.2%	2.7	3.0	2.2
Standard essay	4	4.3%	1.3	3.0	2.1
Theme application	7	7.5%	2.8	2.9	2.1
Other	11	11.8%	2.1	2.8	2.0
Create an assignment	2	2.2%	3.0	2.6	2.0
Theorize	3	3.2%	2.1	2.6	2.0
Satire	2	2.2%	2.6	2.3	2.0
Typical reflection	49	52.7%	1.9	2.6	1.7
Worksheet	3	3.2%	1.3	2.8	1.5
Request for exemption	2	2.2%	1.5	--	--
Total	93	100%	2.1	2.7	1.9

VI. Recommendations

Though serious consideration was given to the idea that the reflective writing requirement could be abolished altogether, the study group ultimately decided not to go that way, deciding that the potential value of reflective of reflective writing is sufficient to encourage its continued use in the Freshman English classroom. The study group recommends that instructors implement:

1. Low-stakes projects of *self-reflection* to take place throughout the semester, AND
2. OPTIONALLY, a final, drafted project incorporating *reflection on writing* (not necessarily *self-reflection*) or a smaller reflective writing task could cap the course.
 - a. Final, drafted essay assignments must be critical projects with a dialogue between more than one text and the possibility of genuine inquiry wherein the student makes a unique contribution to an ongoing conversation.
 - b. Smaller reflective assignments can take place as final tasks, but even if unrevised should probably involve in-class conferencing or brainstorming, allowing for some revision, but not expending as much class time as a full unit. Depending on whether a full scale of grading options seems possible given the assignment, these might be graded (with a low point value), count as part of a homework/ participation grade, or be unevaluated entirely.

Definitions:

- *Self-reflection*: writing about one's own writing, the product and the process, in precise and local ways. Low stakes, and should ideally be ungraded.
- *Reflection on writing*: writing about papers as "texts"; examining the product of writing in historically, culturally, and critically situated terms. May be graded.

VII. Implementation

In a memo distributed to Freshman English instructors at the beginning of the semester, Professor Campbell advised the following:

1. *If you feel that the RWP you currently use is productive and valuable for your course, feel free to continue using it. We will be learning more about the RWP throughout the year, and we have no interest in discouraging you from doing what you do well. However, many instructors (and students, too) indicated dissatisfaction (and some confusion) with the RWP requirement, and, in part because of that, we are revising the guidelines to include the following three points.*
2. *All FE courses should have a reflective component. Reflection on one's writing (and on writing more broadly) is a key part of becoming a confident and able writer.*

Reflection, however, need not wait until semester's end. Indeed, many instructors use reflection (in the form of process notes, introductory letters, in-class review, etc.) at various points throughout the semester. In other words, the "Reflective Writing Project" need not always be a project. It is just as often a component working alongside other projects. (Yes, we may have to change the name.)

3. *Reflection on a student's own work/process often functions best as ungraded or low stakes writing.* When we ask students to "reflect" for a grade, we risk posing reflection as an insincere or calculated response.
4. *If reflective writing is part of a formal assignment, this writing should engage with a task that is something other than evaluation ("I am indeed an excellent academic writer") or personal growth ("I have learned so much").* Usually this means engaging with course content and connecting one's reflection with a question or prompt that reaches beyond this local context. You might, for example, ask students who have read and written about David Foster Wallace's "Authority and American Usage" to revisit their projects to include an analysis of how authority operates or is established in one of their own previous papers.

In essence, these changes mean more flexibility for you. Some instructors may prefer to use reflective writing as an added (but low stakes or ungraded) component to an already existing project (as with a portfolio cover letter). Others may prefer to use reflective writing as a central part of an intellectual project that involves other texts and writers and becomes a revised, graded course paper.

Appendix A. Sample Assignments

The following assignments are among the many we read; all of these assignments were felt by the study group to be doing the more interesting kinds of work privileged by the study group, and generally resulted in stronger or more interesting student writing.

1. Reflective Essay

For this essay, you will focus on what David Bartholomae calls the “product” of your work – that is, writing as a “physical presence on the page” (78). As I hope is clear from today’s discussion, this is different from focusing on the writing process. In preparation for completing this assignment, please consider the following steps.

To begin, use Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” as a lens for an active, critical reading of your own products – namely, the revision, reading, and research essays – and consider how his ideas and his reading of student essays can inform an understanding of your work. It may be helpful to focus on one or two of the questions from the lead-in assignment (or perhaps a question of your own).

After reflecting on your work in light of these complexities, use your writing as a lens for an active, critical reading of Bartholomae’s essay: what do your products tell you about his understanding of student writing? does your work support his ideas? challenge his ideas? nuance them?

Your writing and Bartholomae’s writing, then, should come into dialogue, a kind of mutuality of lenses (perhaps more of a two-way mirror?) that helps you to understand your texts in light of his text and his text in light of your texts. For pedagogical reasons that we’ll discuss in class (and a bit for fun), I’d like you to literally put this essay into a dialogue that rigorously focuses on ideas. By the end of the dialogue, it is my hope that you will have developed some understanding of academic writing not simply by narrating your writing process but by theorizing about the broader meaning(s) of student writing within the university.

What will you be graded on?

When applicable, this assignment should demonstrate proficiency in the aspects of writing that we’ve discussed this semester. Although this assignment will take the form of a dialogue (and not, say, a more formal essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion), it shouldn’t be approached as a piece of creative writing. I’m still asking you to think academically. As you move back and forth in your dialogue between Bartholomae’s text, your text, and your attempt via this dialogue to theorize about academic writing, you should quote (and properly cite by page number) from both Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” and your revision, reading, and research essays. How you focus and structure these ideas is largely up to you. You don’t, for

instance, have to begin with Bartholomae as a lens for your work and then turn to your work as a lens for Bartholomae. Likewise, you don't have to touch upon everything in Bartholomae. Focus, rather, and be diligent in ensuring that your dialogue progresses toward theorization, however provisional this may be. Although this assignment is significantly shorter than the others, remember that it's still worth 15 percent of your grade.

What are the practical requirements?

Aim for 4 pages. As always, your essay should be in MLA format.

What are the due dates?

Bring a hard copy of your draft to class on **Monday, April 29**. We'll revisit Bartholomae in light of your drafts and then you'll meet with a partner for revision conferences. The revision is due as a hard copy and via e-mail (Lastname-Reflective Essay.doc) on **Wednesday, May 1 by 5:00PM**.

2. Final Reflective Project

The Context:

Our projects this semester have revealed how recognizing our own ideas or assumptions, re-considering them, and drawing out their limits and implications can be illuminating and even liberating. As we bring the semester to a close, your final assignment is to reconsider the writing you have already done.

The Assignment:

Your task is to write an introduction to the body of work you have written this semester. For the purpose of this assignment, you'll need to look closely at your own work and you'll need to understand what an introduction is meant to accomplish. For an example of an academic introduction, you may want to look at the introduction to the *Ways of Reading* textbook.

How to Get Started:

Read over your first three papers, thinking about them both individually and as a single body of work. Can you find a theme that you trace throughout your writing? Do your papers build upon one another, challenge one another? Are there concepts that reappear or change? What sort of assumptions do you commonly make? What limitations does your thinking run up against?

Then produce a 2-3-page introduction to that collection of essays. I would like your Introduction to accomplish the following tasks:

1. Identify a theme, concept, or way of thinking that is developed in the texts you wrote.
2. Identify how each paper contributes to the overall theme or mode. What does each paper do specifically in relation to that theme or mode?
3. Place these papers in a logical relationship to one another, pointing out how they refine or complicate each other.
4. Explain why this work matters and what is at stake in the arguments made.
5. Explain what work is left to be done, and identify questions you will continue to ask.

The Specs:

- Your Final Reflective Project should be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman Font.
- Submit your Introduction and copies of all three of your essays to me by email.
- Your Introduction is due Tuesday, May 7th by 12noon.

3. Final Reflective Studies: Your Body of Work

Throughout this class, we've looked at a bunch of bodies – bodies of sex workers, vampire slayers, cancer patients, zombies, and transgender punk rockers. We've thought through how these bodies contribute to larger conversations of economics, race, class, gender, or sexuality. Now, for the final writing of the semester, I want you to become self reflexive – and write about your writing. In short, wrestle with the question of what is going on in your body of work? In order to do this, I am asking you to do 3 things:

The Overall So What: I want you to make an argument about your own writing for this course. It must critically engage with your own writing, analyzing it in an interesting/debatable/specific fashion.

Goals: UConn's Freshman English program wants to teach a class...on you. But they don't know what language to use or what type of academic moves you make in your writing. Use this Final Reflective Project as a space to create a manifesto or a defense of a discourse about your work. You will also develop an assignment based on You Studies.

Things You'll Need: In order to successfully execute this assignment, you'll need to engage with some of the following texts.

- your own writing (probably at least two papers, rough and/or final drafts, HuskyCT Posts, in-class writes)
- my comments and/or the comments of classmates from SGTs
- an outside source about academic writing (*A Writer's Reference*, maybe the Bartholomae essay, the ENGL 1010/1011 course description)

You must also cite your own papers in your Works Cited. There's no good MLA format for this, so I'll give you one:

Your Last Name, First Name. "Paper Title." Unpublished paper, Date of Turned in Paper.

Example:

Mollmann, Steven. "The Science of Transnationalism: The Unclassified Racial Residuum in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*; or, *The Hidden Self*." Unpublished paper, 6 Dec. 2010.

Part 1: The Language of You Studies: In this 3-4 page document, identify key terms in the language of You Studies. How would you characterize some of the rhetorical moves that you make in your texts produced this semester? What are the areas of study that a discourse of you would benefit? Where are some of the weaknesses of You Studies –

places it falls short, things it has excluded? How effective is the discourse in entering larger conversations of gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, or economics?

Part 2: Make an Assignment: I want you to go back to your readings of Bartholomae from the beginning of the semester. Take another look at your claims and your understanding of what Bartholomae values in writing assignments. In about a page or so, revisit those ideas, revising them if necessary, and assess the validity of his ideas – after a semester, what do you think about his models of assignment making? After revising/responding to your previous interaction with Bartholomae, take a risk and make a potential assignment for You Studies. What kinds of essays might future students make that take your work as a jumping off point? What type of questions about race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. could students pose that begins with your work? You might want to think about other texts to pair your essay with. You might also highlight what type of writing will best fit the assignment. (Overall, the assignment should not be more than a paragraph of two.)

Mechanics:

- 5-6 pages
- A 1 page revision plan for ONE of your papers
- MLA-formatted, one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, works cited, etc.

Due Dates:

Friday, May 10th by email.

4. Final Reflective Project

Primary Texts:

- Your writing this semester (at least 3 different examples)
(Your writing includes the four major essays, drafts, notes you've taken, RWLs, Weekly Reading Journals, etc.)
- Any materials you think would further your argument
(Including, but not limited to sources I've provided or ones you find on your own, particularly about literature and technology)

Assignment Timeline

4/30	In-class workshop time (bring all you writing from the semester!)
5/2	Small Group Conferences (in-class)
5/8	Final Reflective Project DUE (no later than 5pm)

Overview

Over the course of the semester, we have done a variety of writing – in-class responses, drafts, final drafts, SGC commentary, RWLs, Weekly Reading Journals, etc. Your syllabus for this class begins with an excerpt from Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form* in which he discusses the parlor metaphor of academic conversations (you should re-read this quote, and may even wish to use it in your paper). You have engaged in this Burkean parlor all semester through your various writings for this class, which you will reflect upon as part of your final reflective project.

Specifically, we have explored the sub-topic of “literature and technology” within our writing through literature framework. In doing so, we've looked at the digital native/digital immigrant debate in relation to children's literature, exploring how children read in a digital age. We also considered topics in *The Hunger Games* and how these matter in our contemporary society, given that the novel portrays a dystopian future where pre-teens and teens are the central focus and audience of the series. We also explored how these arguments are or are not adapted to the screen in the film version of this story. We finished the semester exploring topics in either *Life of Pi* or *The Kite Runner* by first watching the movie (which we agreed is how many people are exposed to literature), and then reading important sections of the novels. Here we also discussed the universality of these topics for audiences. Through every major assignment, we have looked at the intersections of literature and technology, and now at the end of the semester, we are left asking ourselves questions such as: how does technology enhance or promote the messages found in literature? How does technology detract from literature? What would reading be like without technology? What would technology be like without literature?

The Project

Why is a consideration of technology important when discussing literature? In one form or another, this course has asked this question all semester. Thus, your goal in this final reflective paper is to argue for the role of technology in the study of literature.

To do so, you will need to point to *specific* moments in your own writing from this class as evidence of the relationship between literature and technology. These specific moments will serve as evidence in the same way that you have cited the texts we have read in class in your writing.

Some points to consider:

- How have your views of the role of technology in literature shifted over the semester?
- Do you think technology enhances or detracts from the reading experience?
- Do you think technology makes reading literature more popular?
- Do you think technology changes the meaning of literary works?
- Why are adaptations so popular? Why do we see a number of films, plays, and even spoofs and memes about literary adaptations so often?

****In order to make your case for this argument, you should look back over your own writing, and come to some summary point(s) about your views towards literature and technology. Successful papers will quote extensively from your previous essays in order to show your reader why a discussion of technology and literature in our contemporary society is worthwhile or necessary.**

The Essay

- **4-6 pages** (that is, 4 FULL pages, not including the works cited)
- A clear, specific thesis that is open to debate (don't forget the "so what?")
- Debate should be backed up by your interpretation of *specific* lines, images, or moments from the text (i.e. direct citations and close reading from your texts)
- MLA formatting – correct citations, 12pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, no extra spaces between paragraphs, 1 inch margins

5. End of Semester Reflective Project

Instructor Note: *The prompt got mixed results. I either got essays that were focused primarily on the film or essays that ignored the film and focused on the student's writing. If I were to rewrite the assignment, I would try to bring the two aspects of the assignment together more comprehensively and inextricably. I might also allow student to choose from the two films on Dylan that we watched. The Haynes film is a particularly difficult text, and I think that some of the confusion came from struggling with the complications of the film. I also think that part of the difficulty arose from my students' semester long struggle to understand how texts create their own versions of people, places, and events through word, image, and representation. This was a concept that many never did get their heads around for a variety of reasons.*

Texts: *I'm Not There* [film] and all of your writing for the semester.

Points: 250

Length: Five (5) to seven (7) pages, typed, doubled-spaced in MLA format

Due: Rough Draft due Monday, April 29, at 9:00AM via email
Individual Conferences April 29 through May 3
Final Draft due Monday, May 6, at 9:00AM via email

Welcome to the final essay of the semester. Thus far, you have analyzed Dylan's songs, his literary language, and how he is represented in historical documents. Over the course of these 15 to 22 pages, you have created your own version of Dylan. That is what this essay asks you to explore. In conjunction with the version of Dylan presented in Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*, you will be comparing one version of Dylan from the film with the version of Dylan that you have created over the course of the semester in your writing.

The essay, then, has two parts: 1) your analysis of one of the versions of Dylan represented in the film; 2) your analysis of your own writing over the course of the semester that demonstrates that you have created a similar version of Dylan. Although you'll need to spend time analyzing both the film and your own writing, the emphasis should be on the writing that you have done over the course of the semester: **How do you represent Dylan in your writing?** In a five to seven page essay, I would imagine that 2-3 pages for the film and 4-5 pages for your own writing should strike about the right balance, although we'll discuss this further in individual conferences the final week of classes.

The film presents multiple versions of Dylan through different story lines. You'll need to choose the version of Dylan that seems to parallel the version of Dylan that you have been thinking about all semester. **Because you will need to have a good, critical sense of your own writing in order to accomplish this comparison, I would strongly**

encourage you to begin spending time re-reading your previous essays and my comments immediately. You'll want to use details from the film to describe and explain the version of Dylan that you will be comparing with your own writing.

The second part of the essay requires you to think critically about your own writing. You'll want to spend time re-reading your writing and my comments, and think about how your arguments, choice of evidence, and word choice represent Dylan. (While this is the second part of the essay, it should probably be the first part of your thinking.) **You'll then use those close reading skills of quotation, analysis, and explanation that we have been working on all semester to show how you have created a version of Dylan similar to one of those versions found in the film.**

Because this prompt largely gives you the structure of the essay (although you are free to use another structure of course), I will be looking at all of those writing skills that we have been discussing this semester: strong introductions, clear thesis statements, body paragraph structure, analysis and explanation of evidence, and concise and relevant conclusions. I will also be looking closely at your MLA formatting. If this is something that you have struggled with, now is the time to start reviewing my handout and the Hacker guide to make sure that you have MLA formatting down. This is the final assignment, and so it should demonstrate the best work that you have done in the class this semester. Because we are now at the end of the semester, **I cannot offer any extensions on this essay. The rough draft and final must be turned in on time.**

I've provided the format for the parenthetical citations and "Works Cited" entries for your essays and for my comments below: For class notes, class handouts, and other casual writing, you will simply substitute a title for these documents where the entries below say, "Title of Essay."

Your Essays:

Parenthetical Citation: (Last Name, "Title of Essay" page number)

"Works Cited" Entry:

Last name, first name. "Title of the Essay." 1004: *Introduction to Academic Writing*.
Instructor Name. University of Connecticut. Spring 2013.

My Comments:

Parenthetical Citation: (Instructor Name, "Title of Essay" page number followed by n)
[for example, if the comment appears on page five, you would put 5n.]

"Works Cited" Entry:

Instructor Comments on "Title of the Essay." 1004: *Introduction to Academic Writing*.
Instructor Name. University of Connecticut. Spring 2013.

6. Review and Reflection

Writing was discussed. They said, "We create values in the process of living..."

*...Be abstract
and you'll wish you'd been specific: it's a fact.*
MARIANNE MOORE, "Values In Use"



The author Ernest Hemingway revising his work (Paris, 1950s)

Texts

Selections from the writing you have produced for this class during the semester. This might include rough drafts, revised drafts, end-of-unit reflections and your response to the first in-class writing prompt.

Wallace, David Foster. "Authority and American Usage". *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*.

(You are also welcome to bring in any other texts from the course, including the selections from *Ways of Reading*, the handouts I've circulated in class and put on HuskyCT, and the feedback offered on your writing by your peers and myself.)

Your Project

In this assignment, you are being asked to read your own writing from this semester closely in order to **reflect on your role as a writer**: you should approach your writing like any other text, using quotation and paraphrase. You need to explore how you might have begun constructing the figure of a particular intellectual, a person with ideas and knowledge and something to say, through your writing: you could do this by speculating what type of intellectual figure is constructed through your writing and what role they might be taking on in the university. You are also being asked to question what might be at stake in a writing class such as this one, **what role it might play in your intellectual development** and why this may or may not be significant and/or productive.

In David Foster Wallace's review essay, he represents an academic debate about language usage, raising issues such as the significance and origins of rules, and the ideology underpinning how one might conceive of correct writing. As a review, the essay explores the project of another author (Garner), paying close attention to how he writes and in what spirit. Wallace's prose—particularly how he organizes it and his distinctive style—also foregrounds writing and so I hope his text will provide a useful springboard for you to consider your own writing over this semester. **You will need to respond to Wallace in your reflective project, putting his essay and a selection of your own writing in dialogue.**

(The first and second assignment ideas for the Wallace essay which are provided by Bartholomae and Petrosky in *Ways of Reading* may also help you brainstorm ideas about the figure of the intellectual and the role of a writing class, with regard to “Authority and American Usage”.)

Remember!

- Length: at least **SIX** pages for the rough draft and **SEVEN** pages for the revised draft (excluding ‘Works Cited’)
- Include a list of ‘Works Cited’ and use in-text citations, following MLA format (you can cite your own work in this format: Instructor Name. “The Ungrievable Lives of the Elderly: First Draft of Assignment #1”. Unpublished paper, 14 Oct. 2012.)
- Use 12 point, Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins and double spacing

Due Dates

First draft: 48 hours before your Small Group Tutorial (which will take place on either Monday, December 3rd, or Wednesday, December 5th) via Husky CT for me and your fellow SGT participants to read

As with all first drafts I will assign in this class, please take a moment to reflect on the process at the end of your draft by completing the following 4 sentences and including them at the bottom of your paper:

“My approach to writing this paper was... What works well in this paper is... If I’d had more time, I would have.... My focus for revising this draft will be...”

Revised draft: 12 noon on Wednesday, December 12th, via Husky CT

Appendix B. Reflections

During the study, a few members of the study group took time to reflect on the process of reading thus far. We include those reflections on reflections here to better capture the viewpoints of individual members of the study group.

1. Melissa Bugdal

FRPs fall into 3 types:

1. *Self-Reflecting*: short personal reflections with little or no citation of any texts required (caution: what often sounds thorough, i.e. “point to specific instances in your own writing...” can lead to vague responses i.e. “in my introductions, I learned to...” vs. “in my introduction to essay #1, I wrote ‘quote’...”)
2. *Show and Tell*: “standard” self-reflections that often ask students to look over their body of work for the course and show how they’ve “improved,” “mastered” content, etc. (caution: although we often believe our students have improved from the beginning to end of the semester, this approach often leaves students writing what the instructor wants vs. what they think of their own work).
3. *Reflecting on the Course*: self-reflections that connect to course themes/content. These reflections may extend the critical inquiry of the course (serving as a sort of essay #4), or may ask students to reflect in a way that relies directly on work they have done previously for the course. I.e. write an introduction to your collected works, turn a previous essay into a satire, etc.

Things to consider when assigning the FRP:

1. Do you want this assignment to be for students, or for you? If it’s meant to be a purely self-reflective moment for students, perhaps including more process notes when turning in final drafts of papers along the way could get at this throughout the course, rather than in the culminating project. If this is meant to be a critical assignment like other essays in the course, then it can benefit from being a bit longer, and requiring students to cite their own work and perhaps even course materials or outside sources.
2. A paper assignment that is long enough to sustain critical inquiry, but not so long so students feel as if they’re just writing what you want. This in part depends on the assignment prompt and the goals you envision for this project.
3. Questions of transfer. Do you want students to consider how your course might help them in the future? How their ideas progressed across drafts? How they came to be interested in a specific theme or idea throughout your course? Etc.

4. Be careful of reflective projects that sound like revision. Yes, we all see mistakes or things we might have changed given more time to work on a project, and with knowledge gained as the semester progresses, but revising those assignments only shows students that they've "mastered" something, rather than *reflect* upon their ideas. This can easily become a surface-level correction project, and as we know when trying to revise and publish our own articles, good revision takes several weeks/months/years.
5. Context, context, context. FRP assignments that are broad or ask students to look back on their work and point to changes (i.e. "I learned how to write clearer thesis sentences..."), often move students' focus from *ideas* to *mechanics*. They don't necessarily see the way their ideas evolved, rather, they look to the surface level features of their essays – grammar, mechanics, form, arrangement, etc. Although all important parts of the writing process, this approach also de-contextualizes the semester's worth of writing from the ideas generated during class discussion and within student writing. Thus, FRP assignments that can contextualize ideas, and present key terms/ideas arising from the course help students keep their focus on inquiry rather than surface-level writing features.
6. How much of the final grade should the FRP be worth?

2. Steven Mollmann

The stated purpose of the reflective writing project is that it is more in tune with the Freshman English Program's learning goals: *critical literacy, rhetorical knowledge, academic writing conventions, and self-understanding as an academic writer*. A "timed, proctored final examination" (as was the tradition pre-Fall 2010) is held to be inconsistent with the achievement of these goals, as it does not allow for the type of writing that the Freshman English course emphasizes: writing performed with care, revision, specificity, and risk. If the program claimed these were fundamental to good academic writing, then how could it allow its final assessment to happen in a form not conducive to them? Hence: the "final reflective writing project" in its current form. This is a venue for students to cast a critical eye backward on writing they've done during the semester. The question then becomes – does the RWP accomplish these goals better than the timed, proctored final exam did?

Examination of the RWP prompts written and the student writing produced would seem to suggest "no," or at least, "not often." Though students often succeed on the terms set out by the RWP prompts, their writing does not often evidence the attributes of academic writing desired by the Freshman English Program.

This is not to deny the usefulness of "reflective" writing. Stepping back and examining one's own work certainly can be of use to student writers – and indeed, it has been of use to all of us as writers, I suspect. However, if the point of such exercises is for the student-writer to learn something for him/herself, is a graded project the proper location for it? The introduction of "stakes" changes this from an exercise for the student's own knowledge into one of performance for the teacher, in which a student is forced to demonstrate a revelation even if one hasn't taken place. (Admittedly, this is a danger run in all academic writing, but it seems exacerbated in these circumstances.) Furthermore, if academic writing is meant to be a genre about public exchange of knowledge, then writing-for-the-self doesn't seem an appropriate match – ultimately one only learns for one's self in this case.

I think this last objection is why projects such as the Dylan one, the Batman one, or the Bartholomae dialogue are appealing. Though they use the students' own writing as text, they also say something about Dylan, about Batman, about Bartholomae, potentially participating in a wider conversation, as desired by the Freshman English pedagogy. There are glimpses of this in other prompts, of course, ones that ask students to write back to the FE guidelines – but projects that treat the guidelines as sacrosanct texts to be measured against contradict everything we tell our students about sources in all of their *other* papers.

Still, though, even if a student writes about his or her own writing well, it does raise the question of whether or not this is *more valuable* than the final paper project simply being

another traditional academic paper. The evidence suggests that for most of these projects to be done well requires both class-time actually spent on the subject and revision. If, then a full unit is going to be devoted to this project, is that more valuable than spending a full unit on paper #4? I am left uncertain, given the evidence at hand. Reflective writing does have a place in the writing classroom, I think, but much of what we've seen would have been better deployed as "low stakes" work, where a student can make use of it, or not, and not be worried whether his or her ability to undergo a revelation will be scored. (Then, are even exams too much? Uh oh.) That said, even in those cases, it seems that students would benefit from more specific directions, especially explicit requirements to quote their own work (at least), and positive alternative models (many prompts simply indicate how *not* to write a RWP).

3. Christiana Salah

In the reflective writing study, looking at an assignment prompt and two papers from each section of Freshman English (FE), we have found an impressive degree of compliance to FE recommendations. The official “End-of-Semester Reflective Writing Project Guidelines” document suggests “an assessment form that encourages self reflection on the part of students through a comprehensive examination of the writing students have done throughout the semester,” and this is what the Study has found that most instructors assign.

In broad terms, the Study has agreed that the practice of self-reflection holds value for students, but that such value is far more evident to us anecdotally as teachers than in the writing produced by Final Reflective Project (FRP) assignments. With a few exceptions, we found this writing to be bland and, as instructors would no doubt agree, repetitive in form and content. Blame for this cannot be placed on the students’ shoulders, as in most cases the tasks they are being asked to complete do not inspire, and many in fact preclude, a unique or inventive approach. Nor should blame be ascribed to instructors; time and again, we saw evidence of instructors attempting — through the incorporation of outside texts, through the use of a voice or persona, or through various caveats — to circumvent the repetitive, uninteresting narrative of writerly growth and triumph. That these attempts were largely unsuccessful must be, therefore, a fault inherent to the current FRP parameters.

The goals of FE are to teach writing that clearly expresses independent thought and inquiry through a dialogic engagement with the work and ideas of other writers. Faced with a large sample of writings that cannot be characterized in this way — even taking into account that the random sample may have missed many or all of the best reflective papers — the Study has been forced to reconsider whether the FRP is an appropriate requirement for the FE program. Our concerns can be expressed through a series of questions, which deserve further, serious consideration.

1. The first question regards **the audience of self-reflective writing**. Put simply, we wonder if students’ written analyses of their own work should be for their teacher or for themselves. If the latter, we must ask if self-reflection of the simplest and most typically employed type — where students read the work they have written during the class and look for trends, acquired skills, and weaknesses — should be a graded activity. Where a student might be more candid in a low-stakes environment, formal self-reflection seems to produce a script of compliance to the teacher’s (perceived) desired learning outcomes. Even if the student who claims the class changed his life is telling the absolute truth, such narratives seem less useful than precise, local analyses of the contents and projects of a student’s work, elements inevitably thrust aside in the process of narrativization.

2. We might also ask **when self-reflective writing should take place**. Is the end of the semester (the *final* aspect of *final reflective project*) necessarily the best time for work which may primarily be of use in a student's further writing? Not having access to any data on how and to what extent instructors assign tasks of self-reflection throughout the semester, it is unclear whether the FRP constitutes the first attempt at self-reflective writing under most instructors, or whether this is more often a continual practice throughout the course. While hesitant about the current parameters of the FRP, the Study is in agreement that self-reflection is a worthwhile tool that belongs in FE classrooms. The question is thus to what degree and in what form this practice should be mandated.
3. To more closely align with FE goals, **should the FRP be a full, drafted essay project**? The FRP was instituted because it was felt that, if FE is to emphasize the practice of academic writing above all other evaluative criteria, it is inappropriate to have a final exam which tests students in some other way. The Study's findings, however, indicate that the writing produced by the FRP lacks the attributes our course promotes. FE emphasizes drafting, but few FRPs are drafted. Current guidelines recommend that essay prompts "combine texts in ways that resist formulaic readings"; situate texts "historically, culturally, [and] critically"; "leave room for students to develop their own complex projects" while "tak[ing] risks in pursuit of their inquiry"; and "point toward ... 'what's at stake'" in each proposed project (Orientation Handbook, "Assignment Guidelines"). Understandably, very few current FRP prompts fit this model. Is the solution to require a more extensive reflective assignment than current guidelines indicate?
4. Or **should the final exam be reinstated**? If we decide that the use of self-reflective elements in final essay assignments should remain at the instructor's discretion, the program may choose to take evaluative emphasis off self-reflection entirely. In this case, either some other method of examination will have to take the FRP's place, or instructors will have to grade the course based primarily on the full-length revised writing assignments (as many currently do anyway).

All these questions will require thought, but before we are able to competently address the third point above in particular, further investigation is essential. It will be necessary that FE make an effort to determine if instructors feel competent in constructing full-length essay assignments which make use of self-reflection productively – and if not, whether it is worthwhile to make a push to train instructors in creating such assignments. As a provisional alternative, we might consider recommending that the final assignment include *a reflective component*, whether intrinsic to the project (using student writing as a text within the paper) or in conjunction with it (such as an

extended cover letter or meta-analytical text accompanying the paper). In any case it seems worthwhile to collect, and continue to explore, assignments that successfully incorporate student writing as texts while holding true to the writing goals encouraged by the FE program.