



University of Connecticut First-Year Writing Program

Instructor Resource Book
2019–2020

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Chapter 1

Introducing First-Year Writing

Program Context

We enroll more than 3,000 students in FYW courses every year at the Storrs campus alone. More students also take the FYW course at UConn's regional campuses (Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, Waterbury) and around 3,400 students complete the course through our [ECE English](#) ("dual enrollment") courses in more than 90 Connecticut high schools. It is a robust program you are participating in!

What Are the Course Goals, in a Nutshell?

We seek to have UConn students learn to read and write with (alongside, against) challenging texts not simply to absorb information but to take up an engagement with a larger, ongoing conversation as they make broader meanings and connections from their reading and writing.

We aim to offer first-year college writers opportunities to contribute—through all modes of expression—to larger issues and conversations (globally, nationally, regionally, locally, personally) as we are also then encouraging and illustrating ways for them to:

- Approach Composition as a Complex Process
- Identify Themselves as a Writer
- Engage with a Conversation
- Critically Examine Different Ways of Knowing
- Use Technology Rhetorically

We believe in "projects"—rather than "papers" or even essays—rooted in inquiry, that ask students to develop, revisit, and revise their work continuously over the semester (and not by repeating the same question over and over, but by working through, for example, who they are in their community before examining how their community views outsiders).

A full articulation of the [learning objectives for First-Year Writing courses](#) is available in chapter 4.

Habits of Mind We Hope to Foster

Through the work of our FYW courses, we ask students to practice eight habits of mind, as advanced by the [Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing](#):

- 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.

Confidence in Our Students' Abilities

We've seen repeatedly that students can do sophisticated work: we've seen students compose theories conjecturing about how assimilation may be performed through singing the "Star-Spangled Banner" at a baseball game; or argue that a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial in Beijing mimics but also undermines the persistent orientalism of Western media; or trace the "problematics of place" on a contemporary beach near the ruins of docks built to capitalize on the Triangle Trade. Through compositions such as these, our students make sophisticated moves and unpack complex ideas that will not only make them valuable members of the academic community but also invaluable citizens of the world.

Multimodal Composition: Writing Across Technology

Writing has changed over time, and the teaching of writing needs to keep pace with our multiplying means of communicating. We certainly don't write on clay tablets any longer, but even our newest word processing programs use the image of "paper" as we write on the screen. While writers have found audiences across media, many common practices in writing instruction haven't changed since the desktop computer was introduced commercially in 1981.

An important part of UConn's First-Year Writing pedagogy is Writing Across Technology (WAT), which allows students to develop critical 21st-century literacies and make use of all the available means of persuasion afforded by new media environments. To learn more about WAT at UConn, check out the [WAT page on the First-Year Writing website](#) and also chapter 3 of this book.

Curricular Context

Course Description, English 1010 and 1011

Students fulfill the University of Connecticut's FYW requirement by passing either [English 1010](#) or [English 1011](#) (with a grade of C or above for ECE students). English 1010 and English 1011 are seminars in academic writing. Both provide students with practice and instruction in academic writing through project-based, cross-disciplinary reading and writing. English 1010 and 1011 include an emphasis on revision of formal assignments with information literacy, multimodal, and reflective writing components. Although there is considerable overlap in work done between the two courses, English 1011, "Writing Through Literature," gives more attention to literary texts as significant resources for advancing student inquiry. In both courses, the student writing that emerges from these engagements takes precedence over mastery of a body of readings. The goal of a First-Year Writing seminar is to provide a site for students to do and practice different aspects of writing, including drafting, revising, and reflecting on this work. Any texts (of any genre or media) used provides primarily an occasion for inquiry, as well, and importantly, as locations for examining their own writing moves.

More About English 1011, Writing Through Literature

English 1011 should be fundamentally identical to English 1010 in that it should encourage the same sort of writing, even though many of the texts read are literary. Literary reading in English 1011 works as a wellspring for writing and discussion. While instructors are encouraged to teach texts that interest them, the course is conceived as a writing seminar and *not* as an introduction to literature or a course focused on a narrowly defined period or subject area.

- The readings should incorporate literature broadly defined (poetry, narrative, drama, autobiography, creative nonfiction, graphic novels, films, etc.), but with no requirement to cover major genres.

- Readings may also include contextual resources supporting literary readings, such as historical documents, criticism, biography, visual materials, films, etc., but again, the course should not emphasize literary or historical criticism, but rather literature as a place to begin academic writing.
- Instructors should aim to assign no more than approximately 300 total pages of reading.

English 1003 and 1004

In addition to English 1010 and 1011, the FYW program also offers two courses that precede these seminars. English 1003 introduces international students and multilingual students to American university discourse by emphasizing classroom participation, discussion, and writing to help develop facility with English in the academy. English 1004 is designed to guide students in developing their writing practices and to introduce them to meaningful participation in critical conversations. More information about [English 1003](#) and [1004](#) is available on the Program website.

FYW in General Education

UConn's FYW courses are designed as key components of a student's general education. This means that the FYW courses play an important role in a student's overall curricular trajectory and are engaged with the university's general education requirements. Although FYW courses are housed within the English department, they are not introductions to the field of English. Rather, they are designed to help students practice and reflect on academic writing that can serve a diverse array of academic and personal goals. Specifically, FYW courses address [General Education](#) goals by providing:

- preparation for [writing-intensive \("W"\) courses](#);
- a first component of the University's Gen Ed [Information Literacy Competency](#);
- attention to [digital literacy](#), including multimodal composition and use of the university's online course management tools.

The [General Education Oversight Committee](#) is currently in the process of addressing a considerable revision to UConn's overall general education requirements and the processes and products students take up in Gen Ed work; FYW will be playing an important role in this revision and the conversations around it.

FYW in National Contexts

UConn FYW courses have a character that is specific to the tradition and history of this university, but they are also engaged with ongoing developments in the teaching of FYW courses throughout the nation, work supported by research and activity in the field of rhetoric and composition (known, too, as composition studies or writing studies).

The [WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition](#) and [Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing](#) are two important articulations of the values and practices of FYW courses that are informed by this research.

TAW

The FYW Program uses [The Academic Writer](#) (TAW) as its common textbook. The textbook is not required, but if instructors would like to use a textbook, this is the one we recommend. Throughout this Resource Book, callout boxes like this one will provide information on ways to interface the textbook with your course.

Course Components

Depending on your method of putting together a course, any of these components can be a useful starting point for envisioning the structure of your FYW course. We provide fuller descriptions and examples of these elements throughout the Resource Book.

Every FYW seminar includes the following components:

Revised, High-Stakes Writing Projects

Writing projects throughout the course ask students to practice five [writing moves](#) as outlined in the [Assignment Architecture](#). In the past, the requirement has been stated in terms of “pages” or a word count, but as we move toward placing more value in multimodal and/or non-linear composing, this requirement no longer

accounts for the processes and products that our students produce. Instead, we ask instructors to highlight one course move per assignment (whether the assignment is revised and evaluated or low-stakes and ungraded).

Additional Low-Stakes Assignments

Not all writing in FYW courses needs to be high stakes (graded). Sometimes the purpose of writing is simply to practice, brainstorm, learn, or scaffold into a larger, higher-stakes project. Writing should be a significant part of each week's work both in and out of class, and we recommend whenever possible that students do some writing, drafting, and/or workshopping and revision each day in class.

Feedback and circulation

Writing is social; that is, it's an interaction between an author and an audience. In order for students to develop their writing, their writing should circulate to different audiences and receive feedback from those audiences. Feedback may include [comments an instructor makes on each draft](#), but it also should, and perhaps more importantly, include feedback and workshopping from their peers. Class time and homework can be directed toward this reflection on the work that students have done as peer review, various forms of conferencing, workshopping of specific examples, and so on. Students may also provide feedback as out-of-class assigned work.

Revision

Much of the most significant work of a FYW seminar happens in revision after students have taken the first steps of drafting a specific writing project. Writing is a process that is complex and recursive, which is to say that it isn't "done" after the initial draft or idea has been produced. Students need to be able to return to projects (usually after receiving feedback) and rethink their claims, ideas, and rhetorical choices. This most often happens through multiple drafts for major assignments, but also happens as students perhaps revise low-stakes writing for a high-stakes assignment.

Information Literacy

[Information Literacy](#), an explicit component of UConn's General Education requirements, addresses making, not just receiving, knowledge and includes direct instruction in some elements of library research. In addition, we ask that FYW instructors utilize [HuskyCT](#) (or some other course management software) as a mode for storing and distributing course materials and circulate at least one cycle of papers digitally. More detailed information can also be found on our [website](#).

Writing Across Technology (WAT)

Our pedagogy recognizes both functional digital literacy (knowing how to do things with certain technologies) but also, importantly, composing in multiple modes (e.g., with combinations of images, sound, text, etc.) across diverse technologies as ways of writing, which have become increasingly important. FYW courses strive to encourage critical digital literacy skills and rhetorical strategies for composing through a variety of means besides traditional alphabetic text. We want students to be makers of digital and social texts, not just consumers.

Reflective writing

[Reflective writing](#), which includes characterizing, reconsidering, or qualifying one's work, fosters awareness and metacognition about writing (and not just writing processes). Reflective writing in FYW seminars is an ongoing activity that need not be graded or end-of-term. Reflective forms include: process notes, in-class reflections on (or presentations of) one's project, other kinds of metatexts, including placing of one's work within the context of others' work, introductory texts, and more. Reflective writing should ask students not just to list their process, but to also think metacognitively about their rhetorical choices, their audience, the mode they are writing in, and the course move they are currently working with.

Administrative Concretes

This checklist of administrative necessities (oh, those bare necessities of life!) focuses more on concrete details and is meant to complement the more substantive and narrated FYW course goals documented elsewhere in this Resource Book.

Course Concretes

- Engage [writing studio pedagogy](#), which prioritizes in-class, structured workshops on current assignments (as opposed to individual writing outside of class, or as opposed to lectures).
- Include an [information literacy](#) component in the course.
- Integrate WAT (**Writing Across Technology**)—both multimodal composition and writing technologies—throughout the course.
- Include opportunities for [reflection](#) (as a standalone assignment or built into other assignments).

- Engage with student writing regularly during class time, such as in structured workshops, whole-class modeling, revision activities, and so on.
- Assign the type and amount of reading appropriate to the [course learning objectives](#). This generally means far fewer materials for reading/viewing/consuming than other English courses in order to keep the focus on the students' own writing.

Assignment Concretes

- Assign at least four [assignments](#) (opportunities for students to share their work and receive feedback) that ask students to practice 5 [course moves](#). These assignments may be grouped or scaffolded together into any number of high-stakes, revised and graded writing projects. **All graded projects must be revised in order to receive a grade.**
- Provide [written assignment guidelines](#) for each writing assignment.
- Guide students through substantial revisions for each draft of major projects, using class workshops, individual conferences, group conferences, peer conferencing, or other models.
- At least one assignment must include an explicit [information literacy](#) component. (This is often, but not always, part of one of the course's major projects.)
- Assign at least one major [multimodal project](#) during the semester.
- Circulate at least one cycle of drafts and final projects via [HuskyCT](#) or comparable course management software (e.g., [Google Classroom](#)).
- Provide opportunities for [feedback](#) for each project at several stages in the writing process. Keep in mind that students cannot pass this course without submitting all graded assignments.
- [Assess](#) students' writing for each revised major project. This may be achieved through a [letter grade](#) or through alternative means, such as a [portfolio](#) or [grading contract](#) system.
- Do not grade unrevised drafts.

Assignment Definitions and Course Concretes

While it's not always meaningful to draw distinctions between these terms, in general a *project* is something students produce in response to the course inquiry ([read more about this in chapter 4](#)). An *assignment* is a prompt that asks students to accomplish a task ([read more about this in chapter 5](#)).

A *major assignment* is a prompt that asks students to 1) “turn in” their work to the instructor (and sometimes peers); 2) revise that work in some way; 3) be assessed on that work in some way. A *project* may consist of several scaffolded major assignments (which all combine to some final product).

The FYW assignment concretes (above) state that instructors should assign at least four assignments. However, these assignments may vary in length, importance, and complexity. What is important is that these are opportunities for students to *circulate*, *revise*, and *evaluate* their work, and to accomplish each of the five course moves.

Calendar

Before the Semester Begins

Administrative Concretes	Notes
Prepare your syllabus	Upload it to FYW Instructor Site on HuskyCT when finished.
Set up HuskyCT page/course management system	This is part of the Gen Ed Digital Literacy requirement.
Review your roster and course information in UConn’s administration system	Do not allow students to over-enroll in your course (students must attend the course before/by the fourth class; be aware that the university add/drop deadline corresponds with the fifth class on a MW schedule, which falls on the first day of week three).

During the First Week

Administrative Concretes	Notes
Distribute syllabus to students	Post it electronically on your course management system. Please avoid photocopying the entire syllabus for each student in your class; you may print the course schedule, however.
Schedule and attend at least one office hour per course per week	Post hours on your office door.

Administer and evaluate an in-class writing assessment on the first day of class	The assessment should ask students to do the same kind of work they'll be expected to do in the course. Come talk to us in FYW if you have any questions. This is a way to check on whether or not your students have been placed in the appropriate FYW course, and also to get a sense of your students' current writing practices.
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Before Mid-Term

Administrative Concretes	Notes
Record DFUN grades by the end of week 6	These grades are submitted through PeopleSoft and serve as fair warning to students in danger of failing the course and alert their advisors to the issue as well.
Distribute and work on the "Ethics of Scholarship" documents during the work cycle for the first assignment	
Offer a course evaluation opportunity around midterm	This can be an informal survey, but it gives you the chance to adjust course based on student feedback (see Appendix).
Upload first two assignments and syllabus to HuskyCT instructor site	

At the End of the Semester

Administrative Concretes	Notes
Remind students to complete the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) during the penultimate and/or last week of classes	Reserve class time to complete evaluations student participation to ensure all students have access and opportunity to complete these forms. For more information, see the Appendix .

Turn in final grades	FYW publishes dates and deadlines in its Weekly Digest.
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Chapter 2

Building Classroom

Communities

Students in First-Year Writing classes have diverse backgrounds, abilities, and viewpoints. This diversity can create exciting spaces where people can learn from one another, but instructors also need to consider how they foster community in the classroom thoughtfully, compassionately, and ethically so this space can be a safe and inclusive environment for learning.

From the first day, think about what tone and atmosphere you will be creating. The syllabus, introductions, and first-day writing prompt all do important work for making safe spaces and universally inclusive communities. Think not only about the policies and language you have in your syllabus, but also how you choose to present this content early in your course.

Consider providing confidential note cards on the first day that you'll collect. Ask things such as name, pronouns, accessibility concerns, preferred methods of learning, language fluency, access to technology to bring to class, or anything that they feel comfortable disclosing that might be a factor in their course participation.

Universal Design

[Universal design](#) (UD) is an approach to designing environments to be “as accessible as possible from the outset, to as many people as possible.”¹ That is, UD attempts to consider the diversity of people who may occupy or need to access a given space *as it is designed*, so the space won't need to be “retrofitted.” Universal design can manifest in the built environment (for instance, curb ramps that make sidewalks accessible not only to wheelchair users but also bikers and strollers) or in social environments (such as by allowing students to come to “virtual office hours” via online chat). UD seeks to avoid making exceptions when conflicts arise concerning a space's accessibility/inclusivity by imagining a space that is already accessible to all.

Adopting a UD approach to learning can improve access and inclusion for *all* students. While it is not possible for anything to be *truly* universally accessible, a UD approach to learning tries to anticipate access issues students may experience

¹ Aimi Hamraie. “Designing Collective Access.” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2013.

by providing multiple ways for students to access the course and its materials/practices. UD favors flexible negotiation of learning spaces over rigid standards. Taking a UD approach sometimes means rethinking our paradigms or teaching practices. Rather than merely “accommodating” difference as we encounter it and making limited adjustments when students ask, UD invites us to revise how we do things in the first place so that nobody needs to be singled out or forced into uncomfortable situations that are detrimental to learning and fostering inclusive communities. Above all, a UD approach to learning means recognizing that, no matter how thoughtful we are, we will always encounter situations we are not prepared for. It is necessary to listen, welcome suggestions, and remain flexible as we strive to continue to make the spaces we inhabit inclusive.

Accessibility and Disability

Universal design for learning is an important model for making courses accessible to all students. It is very likely that students with disabilities will be among the students you teach in any given class, even if some of these disabilities are not necessarily “visible” to you. Try to be aware of the ways that students may or may not have equal access to the materials, practices, or spaces of your class. For more information on accessibility and student support, see the [Center for Students with Disabilities](#).

This includes considering the ways that certain ideas about *writing* can be disabling and inaccessible to students. For example, a pedagogy that solely privileges standardized, logical, and correct written English excludes, for example, students who are blind or who aren’t neurotypical (such as students with dyslexia or attention-deficit disorders). And remember that even among those students who do not identify as disabled, there will always be diversity in abilities, personalities, and experiences. Everyone learns differently, and all students benefit when instructors encourage a culture of access in the classroom that allows students to negotiate different ways of engaging with the course.

You need not be an “expert” in access to make your course more accessible. One very basic place to start is by being intentional about the way you bring up [disability and access in your syllabus](#). Try to indicate in the language of the syllabus that you are open to conversations about disability and accessibility, and don’t gloss over this section when you go over the syllabus. It is usually best to avoid making the first discussion of disability a legalistic one—most students will find it easier to have a dialogue about their access needs if you invite that conversation without demanding paperwork up front. Make it clear that you recognize that

everyone learns differently, and you would like to help students to learn in the ways they are best able to.

Other ways to make your course more accessible include:

- Creating multiple channels for students to participate. Many students find it more than just uncomfortable to verbally participate in an open, full-class discussion. Consider allowing students to participate in small groups, through electronic “backchannel” communication (e.g., Twitter or a shared Google Doc), on asynchronous discussion boards, through writing, and through active listening.
- Making materials accessible. In general, manipulable digital copies of materials allow for greater ease of access. (See [Tips on Designing for Web Accessibility](#) for pointers on ensuring that your digital content is accessible and accessibility guidelines in chapter 4 for [designing accessible syllabi](#).) When presenting multimodal materials (film, podcasts, etc.), consider how students with disabilities will access these. Providing transcripts, captions, and image descriptions will make these materials more accessible.
- Keeping your course technology-friendly. Students with disabilities may rely on various technologies to access and participate in your class. Although it can be tempting at times to ban all technologies that might appear distracting (such as laptops, phones, etc.), doing so creates an accessibility problem for many students—and may unnecessarily force students to disclose their disability to you and the whole class with accommodation documentation to receive an exemption from this ban. It is better to find ways to make technology work appropriately within the context of your course than to impose a de facto ban on tech (which probably won’t have the desired effect anyway).
- Providing options for peer review. Many students find peer review, especially when it’s new, stressful. Giving clear instructions and giving students time to read and comment on drafts on their own outside of class can help cut down on this stress. Consider allowing students to engage in the work of peer review in different ways. For example, you could give students the choice of working in verbal peer review groups or written peer review groups during in-class sessions, or even completely online with software like Google Docs.
- Being flexible. Make it clear to students that you welcome conversations about access, and be prepared to change your plans or restructure activities based on students’ needs.
- Considering the space of your class.

Built Pedagogy and Space

[Built Pedagogy](#) is a term used by Torin Monahan to refer to how physical and technological space is embedded with pedagogical or ideological assumptions—and not always helpful or accessible ones. For example, a traditional lecture hall embodies a certain ideology: the seats are fixed (immovable), facing the front, where the instructor is positioned to stand and fill the students with knowledge. There is no space for collaboration or discussion, and the room's layout physically points to a single source of authority.

Instructors have limited control over the physical space in which they teach, but it is important to consider the pedagogy and ideology that your classroom is enacting in order to make necessary changes or accommodations. Consider the bodies that will be working in the space. It's impossible to know what the needs of students will be before the first day of class, so be flexible. Some questions to consider when thinking about how to work in the classroom space include:

- How does the classroom encourage or limit interaction between students and instructors?
- If your classroom does not have movable seating, in-class group work may be a challenge. You may want to put together a digital collaborative space in order for students to work with others without having to move. Depending on the dynamic of your students, you may want to consider using large-group discussions in place of small-group work.
- Classrooms with awkward layouts can sometimes make it difficult for students to work together or for the instructor to navigate the room to interact with students. Depending on the source of the room's awkwardness (like a pole in the center of the room or a narrow layout), you may want to ask students to congregate in a certain part of the room or you may need to be the one to move more frequently so students can easily access you.
- Classrooms with tables enact a pedagogy more conducive to group work than individual desks. They invoke more of a "lab" model for a classroom. Use this to your advantage by encouraging students to sit around the table so they face each other when working. If you encourage students to use their computers in class, be mindful of where the tables are positioned in relation to outlets.
- If your classroom has individual desks, you have the advantage of having the most flexibility for group work and discussion; however, these desks are not always the most conducive for some laptops or even tablets.

- Some classrooms are more well-equipped or tech-friendly than others. There are always benefits and drawbacks to classroom technology, so you'll want to weigh whether the space will make your use of technology productive and practical for certain purposes. You should also consider students' technology needs and how the use (or absence) of technology affects their perceptions of class dynamics.

Another good option to consider is expanding your classroom out into the campus. Although we have larger classes that make conducting class outside tricky, there are some ways you can expand your classroom and make use of UConn's resources:

- Bring your students to the library and have them "shelf-read" in pairs to find books that are relevant to your course inquiry. You might set specific parameters or just let them explore and become comfortable finding sources that are readily available.
- Send your students out on a scavenger hunt to document spaces or ways they see your course inquiry playing out on campus.
- Send your students to the Dodd archives to collect primary sources.
- The [Benton Museum](#) is also a great space to analyze and think about visual texts (just let them know ahead of time that you intend to send your students there).
- If there is a campus event happening that's relevant to your course inquiry, you might consider redirecting class and having students write reflections afterwards.

The Translingual Classroom

English is used all over the world in a variety of ways; deviations from Standard Written English (SWE) are, in fact, the norm. When using English, we are all working in dialects or "Englishes." In FYW, we try to account for the many Englishes and to foreground the malleability of language by approaching writing translingually. "Translingualism" is an approach to language difference that challenges English-only monolingualism and assumes students' languages are not liabilities but resources. As Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu define it, translingualism is "best understood as a disposition of openness and inquiry toward language and language differences."²

² Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu. "Translingual Literacy, Language Difference, and Matters of Agency." *College English*, vol. 75, no. 6, 2013, p. 586.

Multilingual writers are often marked by the ways their texts might diverge from SWE, while “the rest of the students” are seen as generally competent monolingual users of that same English. The students whose first language is not English are socially and culturally subordinated to the other, presumably stronger users of English in the classroom. Such categories situate writers whose first language is not English as lacking, their use of English aberrant, their understanding of conventions weak.

Yet these assumptions misunderstand writing and conventions entirely. First, “all writing always involves rewriting and translation, inevitably engaging the labor of recontextualizing (and renewing) language, language practices, users, conventions, and contexts.”³ If we also accept that conventions are repetitions, but that no repetition can be an exact copy, then an apparent act of repetition is the moment that a writer’s agency emerges, producing difference at the same time that it reproduces the conventional.⁴ From this premise, we argue that every student is negotiating this dynamic, working out a mix of mimicry and agency, in effect translating what has gone before to make something new. Thus, each student is always engaging in translation, and all divergences are the norm. The multilingual writer engages in the same acts, encounters challenges, resolves problems, and produces meaning, as does every student. In short:

- Language is not stable and is always subject to negotiation.
- We are all writing in translation.
- The use of multiple languages in a classroom is a resource, not a liability.

For a further explanation of critical vocabulary (including our choice to use “Second Language Writing” instead of a number of other options), considerations for designing your course, and strategies for providing feedback to multilingual writers, see the [Multilingual Writers](#) section of our website.

The Ethics of Scholarship

In your class, you will be asking students to engage frequently with the thoughts and writing of others, which often can be a source of anxiety or stress for First-Year writers. Therefore, plagiarism is a word that often provokes strong emotions

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Anthony Giddens: “Every instance of the use of language is a potential modification of that language at the same time as it acts to reproduce it” (*Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, U of California P, 1979, p. 220; qtd. in Horner and Lu, “Translingual Literacy,” p. 589).

in both students and teachers. But sometimes the term “plagiarism” simplifies what is really a complex and very context-specific issue. Students who are often embarking on some of their first serious academic writing projects in FYW courses often face challenges and confusion when it comes to the ethics of scholarship.

Some students are challenged by the prospect of really engaging with writers and doing something with those other writers’ texts. Sometimes, the fear of putting one’s own ideas out there on equal footing with what they’ve been taught to revere as experts can short-circuit their writing. Students may not feel confident in their ability to conduct inquiry, and they may not know how to engage substantively with others’ writing. Or they may not understand what they are being asked to do or how to handle the critical vocabulary another writer has developed. These sorts of situations can lead to misunderstandings, misuse of sources, and academic misconduct.

Often, misuse of sources can be attributed to students’:

- not feeling like they have anything to say;
- not understanding why one would want/need to quote, document, and cite materials;
- not feeling like they understand what the writing prompt asks of them;
- not feeling in control of the ideas and/or vocabulary they are being asked to deploy;
- not feeling like they have enough to say (or, sometimes, that they’ve said it well enough, so why do they need to say more?);
- not caring about the issue or topic or course (the reasoning: why put in so much work when they don’t care?);
- or believing that their unacknowledged use of others’ works won’t be discovered, or that their readers don’t care, or that their readers are naïve or not very well read.

In practice, this may result in issues such as the following:

- A student uses a sentence or two of the Wikipedia biography of a scientist. The student thought the “facts” were “common knowledge” and therefore didn’t need quoting.

- A student glosses a film-theory word (“jump cut”) using a sentence from Wikipedia.

Or it may lead to more problematic situations:

- Baffled by an essay by Judith Butler, the student uses a blog written by a scholar to “patchwrite” a section of a project.⁵
- Feeling overwhelmed, a student “double-dips” for an assignment, using work done for another class in the FYW course.
- Believing something they’ve already worked on will serve a new context, the student repurposes their own work when doing so is not relevant or authorized for the project. (A student hires a tutor to write their essay, claiming that the ideas were their own, so having someone else write up their ideas shouldn’t be a problem).
- A student purchases an essay from a paper mill (often not even a very good match for the assignment).

While many of these reasons might apply to any instance of writing-that-is-not-their writing, there’s more to the problems of how we represent our own ideas in relation to those of others. Those problems boil down to how one sees the work of a composition course, how we teach and model intellectual work, what we explicitly and implicitly tell students they are to convey in their writing, and why any of us would want to produce acts of communication at all.

Addressing Possible Authorship Issues and Academic Integrity

Most issues with academic integrity emerge during the drafting process. Identifying a misstep should be treated as a “teaching moment” for a student. The student should revise the work, which usually means they have to stop seeing sources (even Wikipedia) as “experts” who will substitute much more interesting (and authoritative) ideas for their own. In other cases, working with the student on ways of using an idea or section of an assigned text helps them feel more in control of sources. When the student can revise the draft, using the work of others ethically and effectively, then we leave the lesson there.

⁵ In “patchwriting,” the writer/author/creator takes text or form from one text and then either uses small pieces of it to incorporate into their own prose or rewrites the original text enough to change the wording enough that a Google search of the section won’t turn up any matches.

On occasion, a student may panic after working on a draft or two and submit a final project that has more than a sentence or two pulled verbatim from another text, or will be a patch-written version of another work, or will have a significantly different voice or style from what you are used to reading in their informal writing for class. When the problem is with a project's FINAL DRAFT submitted for a grade, we generally follow this protocol:

- Prepare to speak to the student by assembling copies of the original text they've used and be prepared to compare the two for the student. This "evidence" isn't part of your opening gambit, but it will be necessary as the conversation about the writing moves along.
- Schedule a time to talk to the student, beginning the conversation with questions about how the line of inquiry was developed, how the writing process went, how the student made use of sources by putting them into conversation with their own writing, and where they had trouble with the writing. More often than not, the student will tell you the whole story of the situation that led to their over-reliance. Then show the comparison texts you've prepared and, especially if the student hasn't seen the issue (or denies using other texts), ask that student to account for the issue.
- In rare instances, when speaking to a student face-to-face is impossible, send the student an email asking about the project and the processes of writing it. If the student doesn't respond at that point (give them ample time to do that), then you can send a detailed analysis of the problems you found with the project, using the [sample letter](#) you'll find on our website. Because the second email is more along the lines of articulating a clear suspicion and leveling a charge of misconduct, you must include text that informs them of their rights to appeal and to a hearing, which can be found in the [Student Code](#), particularly [Appendix A](#). Note that all email to students on "official business" (grades, course concerns, academic misconduct) *must* go through the UConn system, not through your or the students' personal email accounts. The UConn email system is the only secure system that conforms to the privacy requirements of [FERPA](#) (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act).
- If the plagiarism is egregious (more than a brief phrase or two), and students used sources to substitute for their own ideas on a final draft submitted for a grade, the student should not receive credit for that project (after you've conferred with the student). You then have a couple of options: the student can produce another project (not revise the old one) entirely, and the grade for the new piece can either replace or be averaged with the "F" as the grade for that project. Or, you can give the student a failing grade on the assignment. The FYW program prefers the

“learning” approach, but the consequence with or without rehabilitation is your call. *Whatever option you choose, you should keep us in the loop before you file a letter with Community Standards.* FYW serves as advisors for cases that go to Community Standards, and Community Standards has asked that we metaphorically sign-off on any cases to be forwarded to them.

- Prepare the sample letter, linked above, for the student that covers what you discussed in your meeting, the details of the findings, and the statement of students’ rights and responsibilities.
- Send the letter via email and cc Community Standards (or use the Community Standards [online form](#)). For the online form, you’ll need the PeopleSoft numbers for the student(s) involved (on your course roster, the seven-digit number in the far-left column), a summary statement, and electronic copies of the documents that demonstrate the parallels between the source and student work (they are uploaded using the online form). Note that your final email to the student must include mention of the students’ rights to appeals and hearings.
- Please make sure we receive a copy of your letter (forward a copy to FYW with “Academic Misconduct” in the subject line).

Summary of Our Position on Ethical Scholarship

Ethical scholarship is a practice that can and should be taught in our classrooms, starting before students begin to write and throughout the entire writing process. Overall, we follow the [WPA Guidelines](#) on misuse of sources and plagiarism, along with other resources, which you can access through our website under “[Ethical Scholarship](#).” We don’t want to run a writing class as a penitentiary in which we assume all the “inmates” will “cheat”; we’re not interested in an ethics based on fear. We want students to see themselves as valuable, contributing members of a group of like-minded individuals in pursuit of new ideas and new ways to communicate those ideas. To foster an environment like this, we believe the best approach to misuse of source material and academic misconduct is prevention that focuses on how students might situate themselves in a conversation (rather than report on others), how they might make use of others’ work, and why their ideas are valuable to readers (and why, by extension, others’ ideas are valuable, too).

Safe Spaces for Students and Their Writing

Our courses often ask students to confront difficult subjects: institutionalized racism, privilege, genocide, suicide, violence, and other issues. We must make our

classroom accessible and safe for all students, who bring with them histories and assumptions of all kinds. The following section is meant to provide a few strategies for developing a space where students can take risks, explore difficult subjects, and compose writing that makes sense of difficult moments. We suggest being attentive to how the course and assignments are framed and providing opportunities for decompressive and empathetic writing built into the drafting and reading processes.

In the classroom, instructors should avoid viewing vulnerable or marginalized students as representatives of their communities or those communities' experiences; communities often consist of highly diversified experiences, beliefs, and backgrounds. Space should be given, however, for students to bring their individual experiences into classroom activity and writing.

Navigating Conflict in the Classroom

The seminar is a community that includes students from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Because this space involves negotiating difficult topics, discussion in class may become heated or lead to conflict between students, between students and the instructor, or between students and the text. While some conflict is a natural and productive result of the seminar community, instructors are responsible for ensuring that students feel safe and respected. Consider the following approaches to navigating classroom conflict:

- If conflict presents because of a particular student or student's contribution to a discussion, open the conversation to the rest of the class or return the conversation to a course text. Disagreements can be opportunities to highlight a useful place of difficulty, explore the complexities of audience, or consider the nuances of a site of inquiry.
- Contemporary politics or political issues will likely find their way into the classroom, whether students or instructors introduce the topic. Some students may vehemently express their opinions while others feel uncomfortable discussing such issues in class. If the discussion becomes clearly partisan or heated, consider moving from the issues at hand to the *rhetoric* that undergirds some of these issues.
- Building in moments for reflective writing will allow for decompressing after difficult texts and can take a productive turn toward inquiry (e.g., using initial emotional engagement to lead toward research questions). This might be able to prevent some unnecessary conflicts due to strong reactions to a text from playing themselves out in the classroom. This type of writing might be done through online forum posts, through uncollected

response writing in class, or through post-reading reflective writing, in or out of class.

- If a student is being openly disrespectful to another student, it is important for the instructor to step in and address the issue directly to ensure the targeted student feels safe and supported in class. In doing so, be sure not to make assumptions about that student's experiences. Point the student or the class to the "Respect" clause of your syllabus and/or conversations you had early in the semester about the type of community you are trying to build in the classroom.
- In the case that one student makes another student or the instructor feel unsafe, instructors may ask students to leave the classroom. Instructors do not have to tolerate hate speech or other violent language in their classroom. Call Campus Security at 911 in cases of physical violence or if you have any concerns about the safety of you or your students.

Supplemental Materials

For more information on classroom communities, safe spaces for instructors, and how to work on building a classroom community please see both the Classroom Resources and Instructor Materials folders in the [Supplemental Materials](#).

Other Resources

- [Academic Integrity Reporting Form](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Policies and Procedures](#)
- [African American Cultural Center](#)
- [Asian American Cultural Center](#)
- [CCCC Position Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers](#)
- [Center for Excellence in Universal Design](#)
- [Counseling and Mental Health Services](#)
- [Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices](#)
- [FYW Sample Plagiarism/Misconduct Letter](#)
- [MLA Commons Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities Guidelines for Accessible Composing](#)
- [National Center on Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center](#)

- [Rainbow Center](#)
- [The Rainbow Center page on “Creating Inclusive Classrooms”](#)
- [Student Code](#)
- [Students’ Right to Their Own Language](#)
- [UConn Native American Cultural Programs](#)
- [UConn Women’s Center](#)

Resources

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Chapter 3

Course Components

Students practice various kinds of writing for various purposes in UConn's FYW courses. Multimodal writing, information literacy, and reflective writing are key components of all FYW seminars. To teach these key components, FYW uses Writing Studio Pedagogy (WSP) as a framework to promote active learning of multimodal writing, information literacy, and reflective writing.

Writing Studio Pedagogy

Traditionally, writing classes ask students to work on their composing *outside* of class and bring in their work to be critiqued or evaluated. Writing, in this more traditional model, is treated as a product that needs to be "corrected." Writing Studio Pedagogy (WSP), however, is an approach to teaching writing that emphasizes active engagement in the process of composing *within* the class or "studio." As the name suggests, studio pedagogy puts a particular emphasis on the purpose of a studio - to create. As Sally Chandler and Mark Sutton write in the [first chapter](#) of their edited collection *The Writing Studio Sampler: Stories About Change*, writing classrooms that use a studio approach "[emphasize] mentored learning-through-doing. In studios, apprentice learners master their craft through directed group participation" (3). WSP helps students understand writing as a process and a way of thinking through complex inquiries in a collaborative and creative environment. UConn's FYW program suggests using Writing Studio Pedagogy as a framework to approach teaching the course components to encourage students to learn-through-doing.

[FYW's page on Studio Pedagogy](#) outlines several pedagogical principles that studio pedagogy emphasizes:

- Collaboration
- Experimentation
- Workshop
- Play
- Access
- Active Learning
- Design
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Digital Literacy
- Support

These values are useful for thinking through how the course components fit into and can be taught in your course. See [Chapter 6 “In-Class Work”](#) for ideas on how to incorporate the course components into your classroom using a Writing Studio Pedagogy framework.

Writing Across Technology

Writing Across Technology (WAT) is a component of the FYW program designed to teach rhetorical composition practices with a diverse range of technologies and communicative modes. [Multimodal](#) composition engages more than one of the “five [modes](#) through which meaning is made: linguistic, aural, visual, gestural, and spatial. Any combination of modes makes a multimodal text, and all texts—every piece of communication a human composes—use more than one mode. Thus, all writing is multimodal.”⁶

While teaching and evaluating this kind of writing might seem pretty different from the primarily linguistic, alphabetic texts that are traditionally associated with writing classes, it is helpful to remember that even the academic essay in the humanities is already multimodal—it makes use of linguistic (words), visual (font, color), and spatial (arrangement, layout) modes, even though we may not always consider these choices as intentional or rhetorical. Of course, some texts privilege certain modes (academic essays tend to privilege the linguistic mode), and sometimes genre conventions tightly constrain the use of other modes. But we live in a world where it is increasingly common to encounter and produce writing that is multimodal and mediated by diverse technologies. It is important for teachers of writing to help students strategize and think critically about the synergy that is created when they compose through multiple modes as well as the technologies they use to compose.

Technology, however, need not mean *digital* necessarily. Alphabetic writing with a pencil and paper is still a technology, one that has diverse applications and uses multiple modes. Writing Across Technology invites students and instructors to consider the rhetorical implications of composing with a variety of other technologies: video, audio recording, oral speeches, photographs, body language, captioning, sculpture, hypertext, interactive games, comics, etc. Multimodal composition technologies have changed the ways we write, the way we read, and

⁶ Cheryl E. Ball and Colin Charlton. “All Writing Is Multimodal.” *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah State UP, 2015, p. 42.

the way we access texts, and it is important for students to become aware of these changes through the practice of composing.

WAT Pedagogy

FYW Instructors should make multimodal Writing Across Technology an integral part of the course throughout the entire semester. In addition to assigning multimodal texts for students to engage with, instructors should also ask students to *produce* multimodal texts. The [NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies](#) points out several principles that highlight the importance of writing across technologies and modes. Some of these are paraphrased below, along with implications for teaching WAT in an FYW course:

- Communicative modes and composing technologies are *rhetorically significant*, not just complementary enhancements to texts.
- Students often already have picked up a variety of skills for composing multimodal texts and are often capable of learning new skills on their own; though it may be useful to teach certain technical proficiencies, FYW courses should primarily focus on the rhetorical dimensions of multimodal compositions.
- Different modes and technologies provide different points of access for students; [accessibility](#), students' embodiments, and audience should be considered when teaching students to compose in diverse ways.
- Multimodal projects, especially when students are using technologies that are new to them, can demand a significant investment of time; it may be helpful to encourage collaboration on such projects and adjust their expectations and time frames.

See chapter 6 for more on how to [assess students' multimodal projects](#). The [FYW website](#) provides ideas, sample assignments, and resources for WAT.

Digital and Information Literacy

FYW is designed to be students' first point of contact with the university's Information Literacy (InfoLit) component, [a general education requirement](#). Generally, instructors introduce InfoLit throughout the entire semester, emphasizing it as process-oriented instead of product-oriented. In incremental steps, beginning with these FYW experiences, students develop the habits of mind needed to develop interesting questions, explore what others are writing,

evaluate sources, make decisions on authority, intentionally select sources to engage with, and develop metacognitive skills about these processes.

With the goal of creating lifelong learners, InfoLit can be taught and learned in all possible venues using myriad sources. In the past, alphabetic text-based works were assumed to be the primary resources for writing. Today, the information world is more expansive, and scholarship occurs in virtual communities, in collaborative groups, and through multimodal genres in addition to more traditional literacy activities. Therefore, information literacy in FYW and beyond increasingly encourages collaboration, creativity, and the use of digital tools and multimodal literacies.

Defining the Aims of Information Literacy

The University of Connecticut Libraries' InfoLit program, based on the current draft of the [Association of College and Research Libraries' \(ACRL\) Framework for Information Literacy](#), defines the term as follows:

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.

The Framework for Information Literacy establishes several threshold concepts:

- Authority is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

These concepts are designed to help students critically engage information as situated, rhetorical, and non-neutral, and also to understand research as an iterative process that depends upon asking increasingly complex questions whose answers develop new questions or lines of inquiry. The ACRL threshold concepts for information literacy parallels many of the [goals of the First-Year Writing Program](#). To see how these concepts interact with FYW learning objectives on the level of assignments, see the [course moves](#) in chapter 5.

Reflective Writing and Metacognition

FYW requires that all instructors incorporate some form of reflective writing in their courses. In particular, reflective writing should ask students to consider what their writing does rhetorically, describing and examining the choices they made and the effects these choices have in their writing. Students should also be invited to reflect on the *process* of writing. Reflection can (and should) be related to the course inquiry and the ideas and questions that drive that work and can be done in the context of the other course readings. Ultimately, one of the main purposes of reflective writing is to help students develop metacognition, which the [WPA Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing](#) defines as “the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes and systems used to structure knowledge.” Metacognition allows students to become self-aware of the processes and resources they use to compose, which can help them confront unfamiliar writing situations more flexibly in the future.

Reflective writing often falls into two broad categories:

- Low-Stakes Self-Reflection (Ungraded): This is writing about one’s own writing, the process and the product, in precise and local ways. Such writing is low-stakes, ungraded writing. One common approach is assigning cover letters for drafts/ final papers, either turned in with the assignment, or written upon arrival in class on the day an assignment is due. Other examples include process notes (which might explicitly examine the writer’s process for producing the draft), in-class reflections on (or presentations of) one’s project, or informal reflection journal throughout the course.
- “Textualizing” Student Writing (Graded): This means using the students’ own writing as “texts” in a later writing assignment. A [2013 programmatic study of the reflective writing](#) produced in our program found that graded reflective projects were more productive when they 1) reflected on students’ *writing as a text and process* rather than more abstract reflections on the students’ self as a writer; 2) engaged with the work that students have been doing throughout the rest of the semester. These assignment prompts emphasized the rhetorical nature of the students’ reflective writing (i.e., they provided or helped students develop a sense of appropriate audience, context, genre, and mode) and provided a space for genuine inquiry, in response to other texts. Without such a focus on student writing and critical texts, students were more likely to fall back on generic and uncritical “development narratives.”

Other Resources

Multimodal Writing

- [Annemarie O'Brien's Creating Multimodal Texts](#)
- [Digital Humanities Toychest](#)
- [Digital Media and Composition Institute Annual Suggested Readings](#)
- [Digital Rhetoric Collaborative Wiki](#)
- [FYW Writing Across Technology Website](#)
- [Multimodal Mondays Blog Series](#)
- [NCTE's Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Media Literacy Education](#)
- [NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies](#)

Information Literacy

- [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education](#)
- [FYW Guide for Scheduling the Undergraduate Research Classroom](#)
- [Library Guide to Incorporating Information Literacy into a Course](#)
- [Library Guides for FYW Instructors](#)

Reflective Writing

- [2013 Study of Reflective Writing at UConn](#)
- [Best Practices for Graded Reflective Writing](#)

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Chapter 4

The Syllabus

Projects and Inquiry

Courses in UConn's First-Year Writing Program are organized around two key terms: projects and inquiry. *Projects* are critical writing processes that foster discussion, challenge thinking, and create new sites for inquiry. Projects may be responses to an assignment you give to students, but they also may be work that extends across multiple, sequenced assignments, culminating in a combined product. All projects are in some way a response to the course's inquiry. *Inquiry* refers to the specific focus of a semester-long course, which includes a rounded exploration of a particular topic or idea using various texts, sources, and methods. For example, one baseline syllabus class is focused on questions concerning the way childhood is constructed rhetorically in contemporary discourse.

Rather than learning to master a subject, students in FYW classes engage with critical inquiry—e.g., how do audiences negotiate *logos* (and *pathos* and *ethos*) in political discourse?—through writing, reading, reflection, and use of technology. While these inquiries drive the academic work of FYW, these courses are not designed to teach students any particular content. Instead, courses should be designed to engage students in the work of academic inquiry: a process of exploration rather than an area of knowledge to be mastered.

Learning Objectives

While each FYW class features a distinct site of inquiry, all FYW classes are oriented around a shared set of course learning objectives for students, organized under five main categories:

Approach Composition as a Complex Process

- Practice composing and writing as creative acts of inquiry and discovery through written, aural, visual, video, gestural, and spatial texts
- Consider projects and problems from multiple ways of knowing
- Develop new methods for all forms (including digital) of textual analysis, synthesis, and representation

- Formulate strategies for the conceptual, investigative, practical, and reflective work of writing

Identify Yourself as a Writer

- Contribute to others' knowledge and understanding through your research and compositions
- Practice ethical scholarship and develop a strong identity as a responsible maker of meaning

Engage with a Conversation

- Discover, analyze, and engage with others' ideas in productive ways through complex texts
- Approach and use texts as ways to analyze, interpret, and reconsider ideas
- Extend your ideas to new ground in the context of others' work

Critically Examine Different Ways of Knowing

- Identify and analyze conventions of disciplines
- Interrogate genre expectations, including how knowledge is created and how evidence is used to forward work in academic disciplines
- Evaluate the functional components of format, organization, document design, and citation

Use Technology Rhetorically

- Recognize that technologies are not neutral tools for making meaning
- Assess the context and mode of technology you are using to compose
- Respond to situations with productive choices to deliver meaningful texts
- Employ the principles of universal design to make your work accessible and legible to the widest possible audience

In essence, the outcomes above are the things students should be able to do by the end of the course. There are many ways to achieve these outcomes, and individual FYW courses are structured differently and reach these goals in various ways. But these outcomes should always be at the core of assignments, activities, and assigned texts throughout the semester.

For information on how these learning objectives can be translated into specific assignment sequences or activities, see [chapter 5](#) and [“Developing Daily Class Goals”](#) in chapter 6.

Course Moves

One of the ways students achieve course outcomes is by performing certain “moves” in assignments throughout the semester. For more on this, see [“Course Moves”](#) in chapter 5.

Designing a Syllabus

The syllabus is a “first impression” to the course for students. Genre theorist Anis Bawarshi writes that “the syllabus begins to transform the physical setting of the classroom into the discursive and ideological site of action in which students, teacher, and their work will assume certain significance and value” (119).⁷ It is an important and powerful document that serves many functions: an introduction to the course; a schedule; a contract; a reference sheet; a space that sets up norms and conventions and directs activities throughout the semester.

The syllabus should be informative and needs to perform its various rhetorical functions, but it needn’t be exhaustively comprehensive; it can’t be. Syllabi need to be user-friendly if you want students to use them. Still, there are several “concretes” the FYW program requires or recommends are included on all course syllabi. The table below breaks down these components, and it is perfectly fine to borrow language from the baseline syllabi for many of these. After this, there is a more detailed discussion of some particularly important elements of the syllabus.

Nuts and Bolts

Syllabus Components	Required?
Course Information	
Name	Yes
Pronouns	Recommended
Email	Yes
Office Location and Hours	Yes
Course Number and Section	Yes
Year and Term	Yes

⁷ Bawarshi, Anis S. *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition*. Utah State University Press, 2003.

Course Overview	
Course Name: 1003: English for Multilingual Writers 1004: Introduction to Academic Writing 1010: Seminar in Academic Writing 1011: Seminar in Writing through Literature Course Description Course Inquiry General Education Requirement Habits of Mind Outcomes Multilingual Scholarship Academic Integrity and Respect Disability and Accommodation Required Texts	Yes Yes Yes Yes Recommended Yes Yes Yes Recommended Yes
Other Course Components	
Writing Reading Revision Conferences/Peer Review Information Literacy Reflection Participation/Engagement Evaluation/Grading	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes

Check out how these components are handled in the [baseline syllabi](#) on the FYW website.

Class Policies to Include in Syllabus	
Attendance	Remind students that the work of a seminar requires participation, which means that attendance is an important part of their participation grade. (Based on university policy, you cannot grade students <i>strictly</i> on attendance, however.)

Project Submission	<p>Detail the submission process for projects. Many instructors accept submissions as hard copies or digital copies through Husky CT, email, or Google Classroom.</p> <p>At least one assignment must be submitted digitally.</p>
Late Projects	<p>Write a clear late policy for assignments to foster transparency on the subject early in the semester. You may also consider writing an extension policy.</p>
Incomplete Work	<p>Clarify the importance of the FYW requirement of at least four projects, including a total of 7,500 to 9,000 words of revised writing. Instructors should be explicit about what constitutes a complete project.</p> <p>Major assignments must include more than one draft to be considered revised.</p> <p>Incomplete projects technically do not meet this requirement and should not be accepted. Be prepared to detail what steps you will take should you receive an incomplete assignment.</p>
Electronics in Class	<p>Explain how and when technology is appropriate in your classroom. You should not ban technology unilaterally, even if it may sometimes seem distracting (see guidelines on accessibility in chapter 2).</p>
Sexual Harassment	<p>Include information about resources, including the Office of Diversity and Equity, Health Services, Counseling and Mental Health Services, and the Women's Center. Inform students that you are a mandatory reporter for issues that may pose a danger to a student's health or safety.</p>
Snow Days and Emergencies	<p>Especially in spring semesters, expect inclement weather. Use this space to detail how you will respond to class cancellations. See the university's official policy on make-up classes.</p>

Email	<p>Some instructors include email policies that include how and when the instructor will respond to student emails.</p> <p>If you communicate with your students via email and/or HuskyCT, remind them to check these platforms often for important updates.</p>
Food and Drink	Depending on when your class is scheduled, you may want to include a policy on eating and drinking in the classroom.
HuskyCT/Google Classroom	If you class utilizes a digital meeting space, outline your expectations for use of that space.

Accessibility

Your syllabus should be accessible. This means that it should be easy to understand and encourage reading by students. It should also avoid practices that might make it difficult for users of any kind, regardless of ability, to access this important document. University of Minnesota has some useful guidelines on their [website](#), as does UConn's [CETL](#) website, and there are some important rules of thumb it's useful to always keep in mind:

- Make it digital. If students lose their paper copy or have a visual impairment, a digital version may be the only way they have access to your syllabus. It is very easy to make this available through a course management system or simply by sharing a link to a Google Docs version.
- Provide alt text for images. Graphics can be a *great* way to make your syllabus content more readable. But you should also caption it. This will help students with visual impairments and also those who might simply not immediately understand what the graphic is supposed to convey.
- Use bullets and headings liberally. This makes for easy scanning of your document—which is really how it will most often be read.

TAW

Instructors are encouraged to assign the program's textbook, *The Academic Writer*, by Lisa Ede. This text acts as a guide to discussion, inquiry, and reflection rather than a prescriptive textbook. As such, students and instructors are encouraged to engage critically with this text as they would with other assigned readings. Ideally, *The Academic Writer* would work in tandem with other assigned readings that form your course inquiry, and students and instructors would make connections between this book and other readings.

Instructors may approach *The Academic Writer* with attention to the ways in which it may be used to facilitate FYW's course outcomes. Some benefits and methods for using this textbook include:

Key terms. *The Academic Writer* introduces students to key terms that foster a shared vocabulary within the classroom and in assignments, provide methodological continuity to all FYW classes, and engage students within a larger disciplinary discourse.

Process. *The Academic Writer* focuses on process rather than product, and this rhetoric allows students and instructors to engage with the writing process through guided reflection and discussion.

Writing, reflection, and discussion. *The Academic Writer* provides students with opportunities to respond to the text through writing. At the end of chapter, Ede includes questions "for thought, discussion, and writing" that students may respond to through reflective writing or in-class discussions. This text also features student writing, providing models for engaging with the genre of academic writing.

Multimodality. *The Academic Writer* theorizes writing as "design" and includes a short section on multimodal composition. Along with the textbook, we integrate multimodal processes into our classrooms.

See ["Working with The Academic Writer"](#) in chapter 6 for more information about using this text within the space of a seminar.

Choosing and Using Texts

Often, when mapping out a new course inquiry, the first question we ask is: What texts will I assign? Especially for those of us trained in literary studies or related fields, texts are where we feel most at home. FYW courses, however, are about *inquiry* and *projects* rather than content; that is, the focus should always be on *what students are writing*. To that end, it's important to always first consider:

What do students need to learn? The assigned texts should always support this project.⁸ This often means developing assignments and activities *first* and only then choosing the texts that make sense in that structure.

Rather than writing about texts, students are encouraged to use course readings as sites for discussion, analysis, exploration, and *writing*. FYW courses are not “literature courses,” focused primarily on a specific genre or period or type of content. Instead, they should be courses focused on writing/composing, using texts as the place to ground and begin that writing as a way to explore or engage with the main inquiry of the course. Texts should be used to help students understand and practice writing processes. It can be helpful to analyze the way writing *functions* in course texts (how they achieve their rhetorical purpose or make arguments). Consequently, instructors are encouraged to avoid selecting texts that they simply agree with and want students to agree with as well; rather, texts should present complexities related to the course inquiry that have no easy solution or answer.

Current and previous instructors have assigned everything from critical essays to pop songs, graphic novels to Middle English poems, blog posts to scholarly chapters, graffiti art to student-produced photographs, James Baldwin to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as well as student writing. Instructors may find that they enjoy teaching texts with which they are familiar; however, this is not required. Some instructors teach texts well outside of their academic discipline or texts with which they are not familiar. Most instructors also choose to incorporate multimodal texts (such as videos or magazine advertisements) into their courses. Such texts can be valuable contributions to a course, though it is important that students understand how these texts fit into the larger context of writing instruction and [multimodal composition](#). There are few limits to the kinds of texts instructors may select; what matters is how instructors engage with these texts. To that end, it will be useful to structure time within the course to address how students engage with (i.e. read/analyze/incorporate) print versus multimodal texts for their writing goals.

Students need to see their writing as occurring within a larger, ongoing network of information and communication, and the texts they read or study in your course are part of that network. Having materials that inspire weighty conversation and call students to problematize their thinking will create the space needed for

⁸ In fact, this is probably good advice whether you’re teaching a First-Year Writing course or an upper-division literature course. Robin Bernstein has created a useful heuristic with examples for designing courses this way in this [blog post](#).

dynamic and complex writing. Ideally, the texts in each unit or major project will speak to each other across the semester, so students find themselves not only responding to the material they have just read but also to their own evolving thinking as the weeks and drafts progress. Usually choosing one or two main texts per major project works best; additional (often shorter) texts can supplement and complicate the main text. Too many texts per major project can overwhelm your students and cloud the conversation.

Schedule

Most syllabi include a schedule that lists deadlines for assignments and dates for covering texts or engaging in peer review. While it's important to be transparent with students concerning deadlines and pacing (they need to be able to plan their work for the course around other classes and commitments), the schedule and syllabus need not be the same document necessarily, and there are several ways one might organize this information. Some instructors, for example, provide assignment deadlines for the semester in the syllabus but distribute dates for reading separately at the beginning of each unit. Some instructors like to include an idea of the kinds of class activities that will happen every day on the schedule; others leave this off, knowing that they will adapt lesson plans in response to student needs throughout the semester. Be aware that schedules will sometimes need to change in response to snow days, illness, or unforeseen circumstances.

Baseline Syllabi

Many instructors in the program—particularly those new to the program—and all incoming graduate instructors use common syllabi designed by other instructors in the program. These syllabi are examples of the ways FYW courses meet learning outcomes and administrative concretes. They are also excellent examples of the diversity and innovation in course inquiries throughout the program. You can access the [baseline syllabi](#) on the FYW website.

Other Resources

- [Baseline Syllabi](#)
- [Accessible Syllabus Design \(U of Minnesota\)](#)
- [Database of Possible Anthologies and Readers](#)
- [The Academic Writer](#)
- [Habits of Mind](#)
- [Robin Bernstein's Blog Post on Designing Powerful Syllabi](#)

- [UConn Academic Calendar](#)

Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

Coxwell-Teague, Deborah, and Ronald F. Lunsford, eds. *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*. Parlor Press, 2014.

Harnish, Richard J., and Bridges, K. Robert. "Effect of Syllabus Tone: Students' Perceptions of Instructor and Course." *Social Psychology of Education*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2011, pp. 319–330.

Jones, Natasha N. "Human Centered Syllabus Design: Positioning Our Students as Expert End-Users." *Computers and Composition*, 2018, pp. 1-11.

Slattery, Jeanne M., and Carlson, Janet F. "Preparing an Effective Syllabus: Current Best Practices." *College Teaching*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2005, pp. 159–164.

Womack, Anne-Marie. "Teaching Is Accommodation: Universally Designing Composition Classrooms and Syllabi." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2017, pp. 494–525.

Chapter 5

Assignments

Assignments are an especially significant part of a First-Year Writing course because it is through assignments that students begin the most important work of the course: writing. In fact, one can argue that assignments—including how they are contextualized and sequenced—provide the structure for the entire course. FYW refers to this structure across the whole semester as the assignment architecture. Although the [inquiries](#) and assignments in FYW courses necessarily differ across sections, certain elements of every course’s structure follow common patterns: The assignments ask students to perform five central course moves.

This chapter breaks down what the course moves are, how assignments are structured in FYW courses, strategies for how instructors can adapt or create their own assignments, and how to integrate assignments within the entire course ecology.

In addition to what follows in this section, instructors may find useful suggestions about assignments on the “[Assignments](#)” page of the FYW website.

Course Moves

There are five writing moves that First-Year Writing courses ask students to make throughout the semester, both during in-class activities (see [chapter 6](#)) and through writing assignments. These moves are: collecting and curating, engaging a conversation, contextualizing, theorizing, and circulating. Assignments in your course should be designed around one or more of these moves, and students should practice *all* of them at some point by the end of the course.

Each move has been designed to help achieve First-Year Writing’s [learning objectives](#). Each move is also associated with certain [information literacy threshold concepts](#) and [habits of mind](#) that are components of First-Year Writing courses. In addition to a description of each move, the sections below outline these elements and also include brief examples of the kinds of assignments that could be designed around each move. Finally, each move also includes a very brief bibliography of texts that might help instructors theoretically conceptualize this move. See the [baseline syllabi](#) for examples of how assignments are designed around course moves.

Assignments focus on one course move in order to highlight **one** way that we compose. While there are always multiple moves engaged in the process of composition, the ways we go about those moves are not always immediately apparent to students. By focusing on one move, we allow them to practice and learn about that particular aspect of writing, and also allow them to see how other texts are engaging in that practice.

The five course moves are **collecting and curating**, **engaging a conversation**, **contextualizing**, **theorizing**, and **circulating**. (See below for more details on each.) They can occur in any order, or multiple times, during a semester, as long as each has been highlighted once in either a major project or a smaller assignment. These course moves aren't prescriptive, but rather describe the moves all writers make in the different kinds of writing they do.

Course Moves in Assignment Prompts

Assignment prompts should clearly state the course move you want students to work with and include a brief description of what that course move means in the context of the assignment. In selecting a course move to highlight in an assignment, consider the following:

- What writing outcomes do you imagine this assignment fulfilling? What would you like them to do or think about writing as they complete the assignment?
- How will this assignment relate to future ones? Are there moves they'll need to make now that would be useful for later assignments?

Course moves are not tied to mode or form. Modes (the five semiotic modes are spatial, aural, visual, textual, and linguistic) and forms (podcast, website, etc.) can engage or highlight any course move depending on the writing outcomes. Different forms afford different ways to think through each writing move.

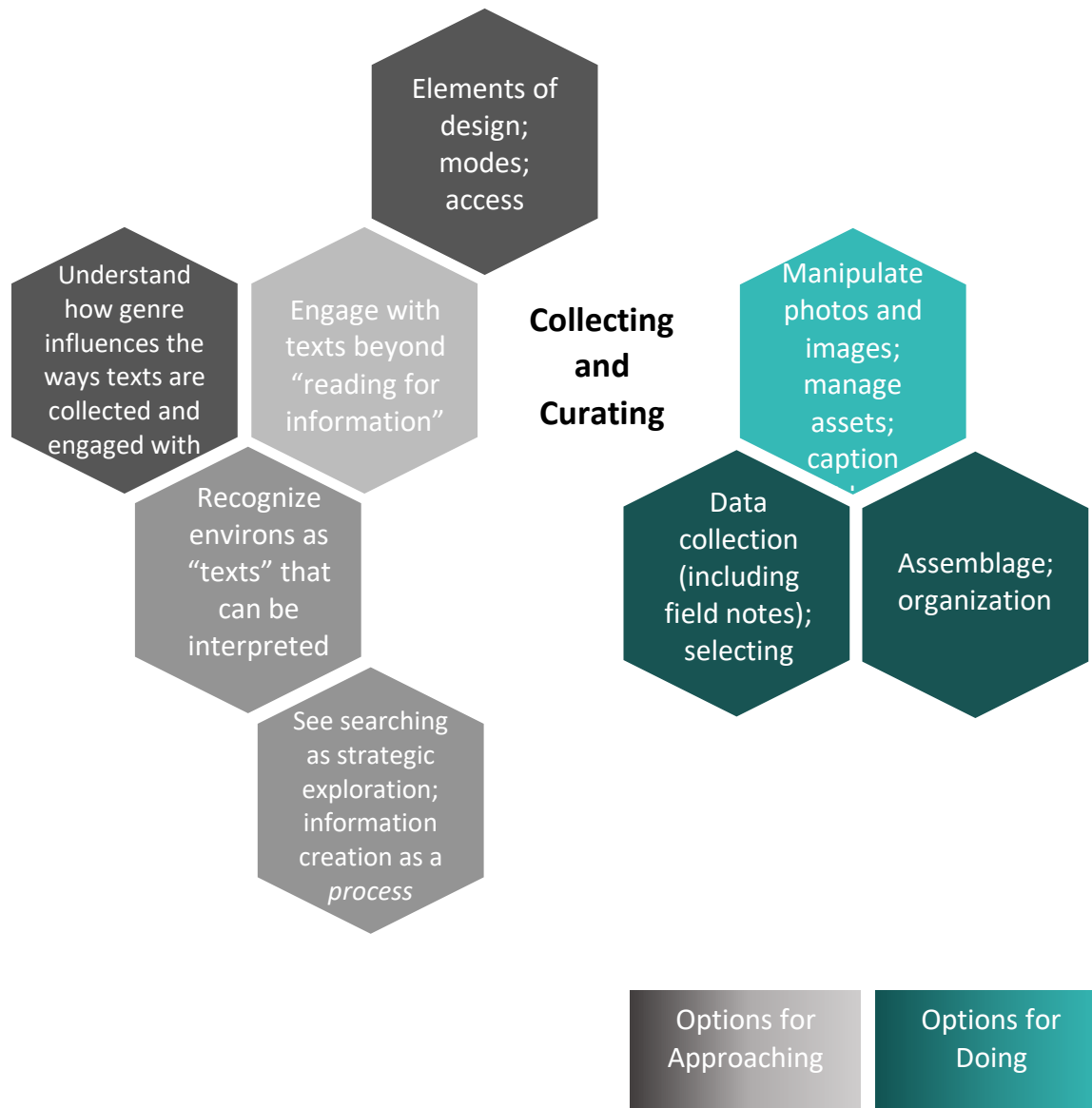
Here are examples of different podcast projects using each move:

- **Collecting and curating:** Students collect sounds from their environment and curate them in a podcast to provide an “audio tour” of a particular location.
- **Engaging a Conversation:** Students interview people on a common subject, and trace a conversation through those interviews in either a storyboard, script for the podcast, or the podcast itself.
- **Contextualizing:** Students do intensive research on a particular topic and create a podcast that gives an overview for the large scale social, political, or critical context(s) they want to highlight or find important by incorporating quotes, interviews, and information from their sources.
- **Theorizing:** Students stage an intervention, develop a new term, or challenge assumptions in an existing conversation by including interviews, quotes, sources, etc. and then troubling, extending, or challenging them in their podcast.
- **Circulating:** Students create podcasts and collate them in a public or semi-public forum for distribution (i.e. on a website), paying particular attention to the audience they are speaking to (whether self-selected or assigned) and how they will reach that audience as they develop the podcast.

What a course move will look like in an assignment also depends on when in the semester students engage that course move. A collecting and curating assignment will look different at the end of the semester than at the beginning, due to students’ deeper engagement with the inquiry and the scaffolding of other assignment prompts to that point (i.e. students might collect and curate their own work into a portfolio at the end of the semester).

Each of the diagrams below offers a description of each move as well as several options for ways to engage that move in the visual graphics. When students engage a move, they don’t necessarily need to be doing everything suggested by the graphics.

Collecting and Curating



In this move, students are asked to gather (collect) *material* from a site, an environment, or their lives and represent it (curate) through writing/creation. Students not only produce whatever material they can find; they carefully select *what* information needs to be presented to achieve the assignment's goals and also to think critically about the *way* the material will be presented. Assignments emphasizing collecting and curating ask students to focus on objects, experiences, and ideas from their surroundings, environment, and/or experiences, and to visibilize them through the process of collection and curation. We might think of

the ways museums and galleries curate work and artifacts, for example (and the ethics of curating existing work).

Information Literacy Threshold Concepts

- Information creation as a process
- Searching as strategic exploration

Habits of Mind

- Curiosity
- Engagement
- Creativity

Examples

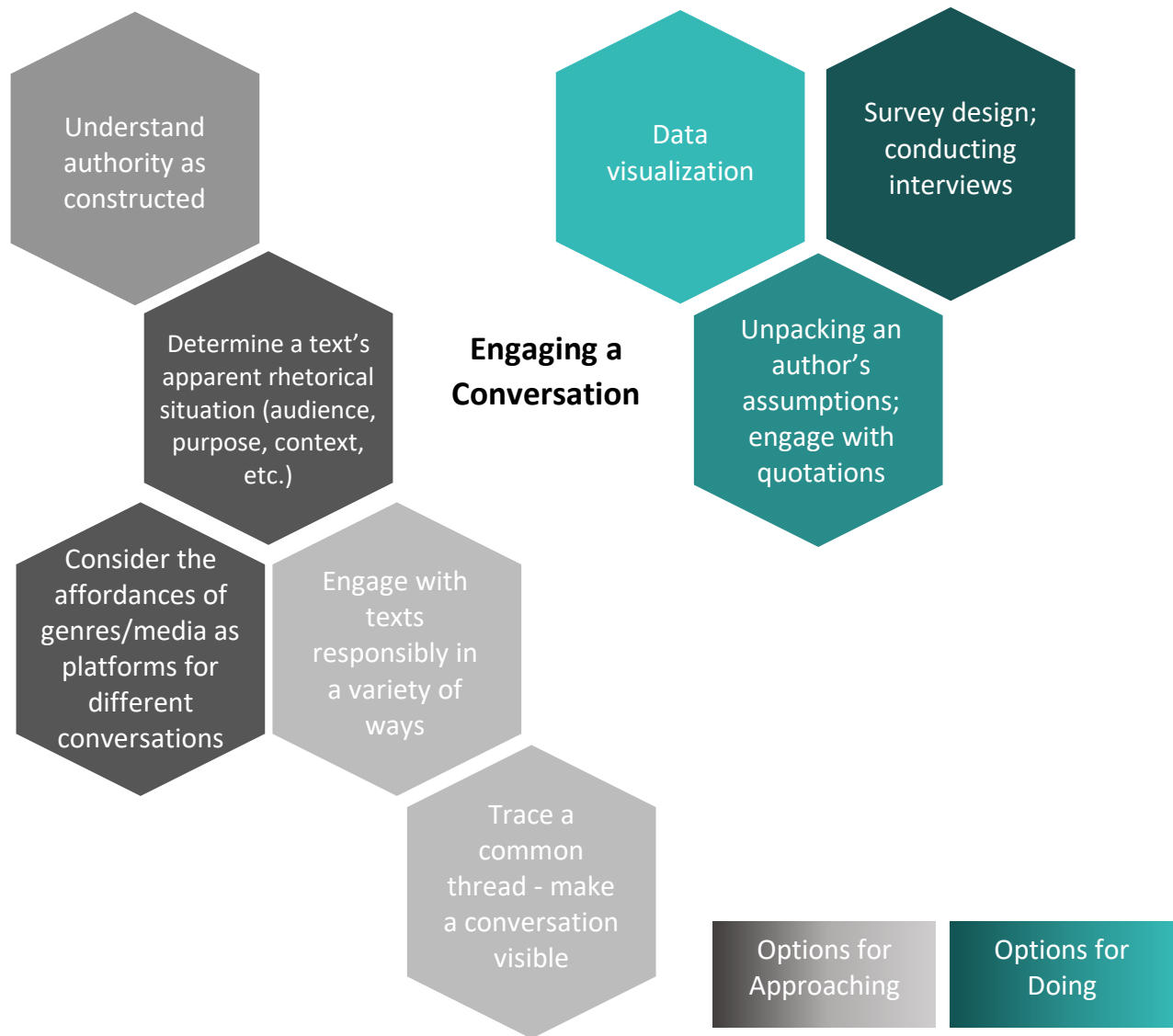
Genre	Writing goals	Collect	Curate
Collage	Recognizing environs as “texts”	Photos from a particular location	Assemble photos into a meaningful organization
Soundscapes assignment	Searching as strategic exploration	Sound assets from an environment	Describe and analyze what the sounds mean in a PowerPoint
Literacy narrative	Understand how genre influences the ways texts (memories) are collected or engaged with	Memories of literacy learning	Present in narrative form
Discourse community map	Engage with texts (interviews) beyond reading for information	Interviews with professionals in a discipline	A map describing the features of the discourse community

Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

- Matalene, Carolyn. "Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgeably about Public Issues." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1992, pp. 252–265.
- Mihailidis, Paul, and Cohen, James N. "Exploring Curation as a Core Competency in Digital and Media Literacy Education." *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2013.
- Sunstein, Bonnie S., and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. 4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

Engaging a Conversation



In this move, students learn to identify, describe, and interact with (engage) an intellectual conversation. This conversation need not feature “academic” (scholarly) voices necessarily, but it should feature a complex issue of critical importance. In this move, students synthesize what more than one author or

speaker has articulated and make a conversation about the issue visible to their audience. They may begin situating themselves in that conversation, but they are not necessarily intervening into it. They may respond to a text or texts (of varying media), but they aren't creating "original" arguments or answers.

Information Literacy Threshold Concepts

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Scholarship as conversation

Habits of Mind

- Openness
- Persistence
- Responsibility
- Metacognition
- Engagement

Examples

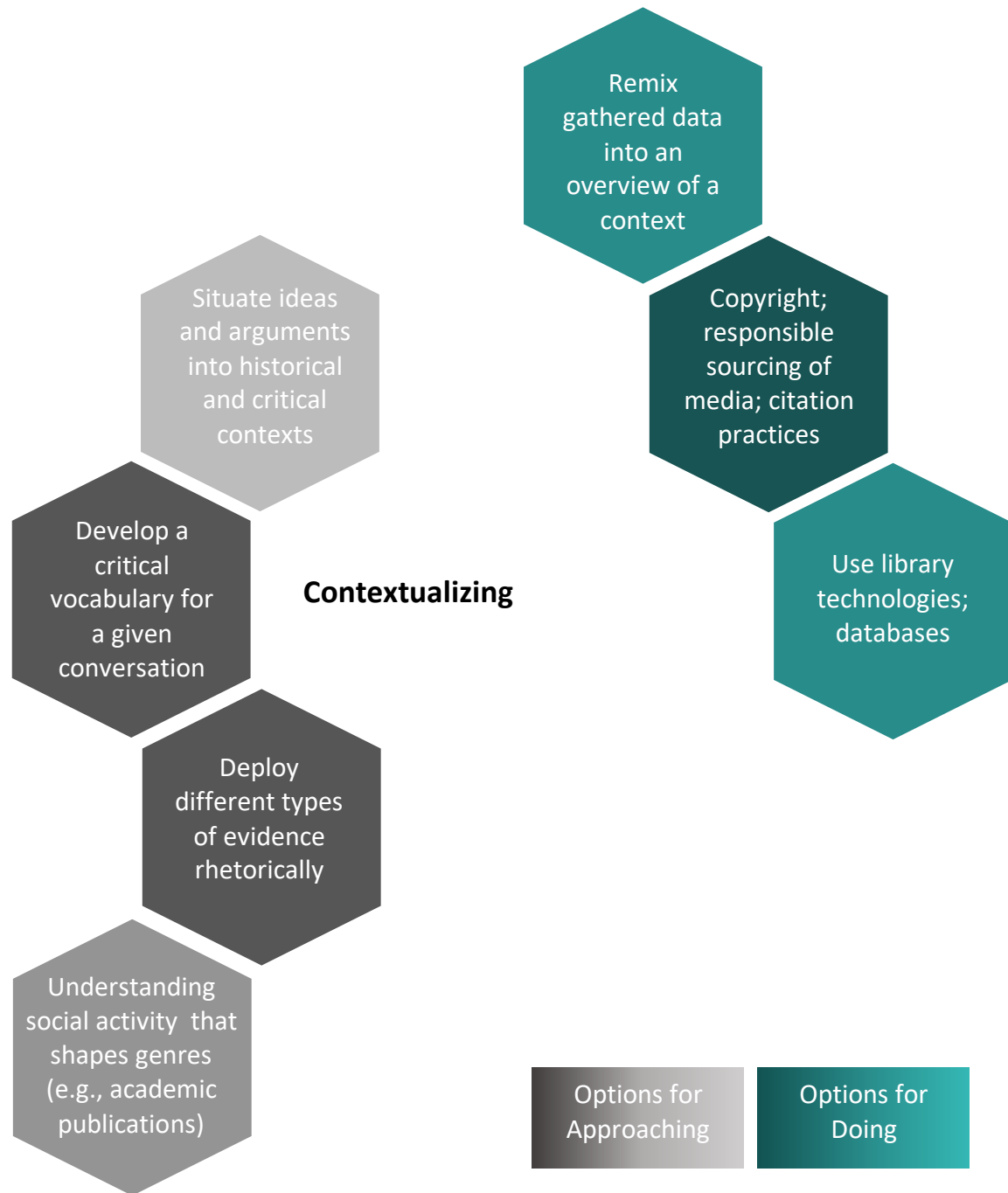
Assignment	Writing Goals	Engage Conversation
Literature review	Make a conversation visible - understand authority as constructed	Show relationship between several authors
Annotated bibliography	Make a conversation visible - understand authority as constructed	Describe each source and its relationship to each other
Podcast	Consider affordances of podcasts for a conversation	"Moderating" a panel of authors/sources
Research map	Trace a common thread - determine a text's rhetorical situation	Track an academic conversation nonlinearly
Response Essay	Understand authority as constructed - engage with texts responsibly - determine a text's rhetorical situation	Situate oneself in conversation with a particular text

Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

- Bizup, Joseph. "BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2008, pp. 7286.
- Howard, Rebecca Moore, et al. "Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences." *Writing and Pedagogy*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 177–192.
- Salvatori, Mariolina. "Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition." *College English*, vol. 58, no. 4, 1996, pp. 440–54.
- Sommers, Nancy, and Saltz, Laura. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2004, pp. 124–149.

Contextualizing



When students contextualize, they are situating ideas, arguments, or practices in a larger context (e.g., a historical context, a critical context, a cultural context) in order to call their audience's attention to that context. Contextualizing goes beyond summarizing the relevant information about an author or idea; when students contextualize, they use research in order to construct or bring into view a picture of the broad-scale situation, circumstance(s), or relationships that surround an issue, text, genre, or mode (as opposed to tracing a particular conversation within an issue, as in engaging a conversation).

Information Literacy Threshold Concepts

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information has value

Habits of Mind

- Openness
- Persistence
- Flexibility
- Responsibility

Examples

Assignment	Writing Goals	Contextualizing work
Annotated Bibliography	Situate ideas into a historical context - develop a critical vocabulary	Explore what each source shows us about the larger context surrounding a particular issue
Process note	Understand social activity that shapes genres	Reflect on the choices the student made and challenges encountered while working on a project
Genre analysis	Understand social activity that shapes genres	Investigate the history and cultural context of a kind of text (e.g., the political cartoon)
Short documentary	Situate ideas into a historical context - deploy different types of evidence rhetorically	Present an issue at length from multiple perspectives

Infographic	Deploy different types of evidence rhetorically - situate ideas	Remix gathered data on a particular issue into a visual form
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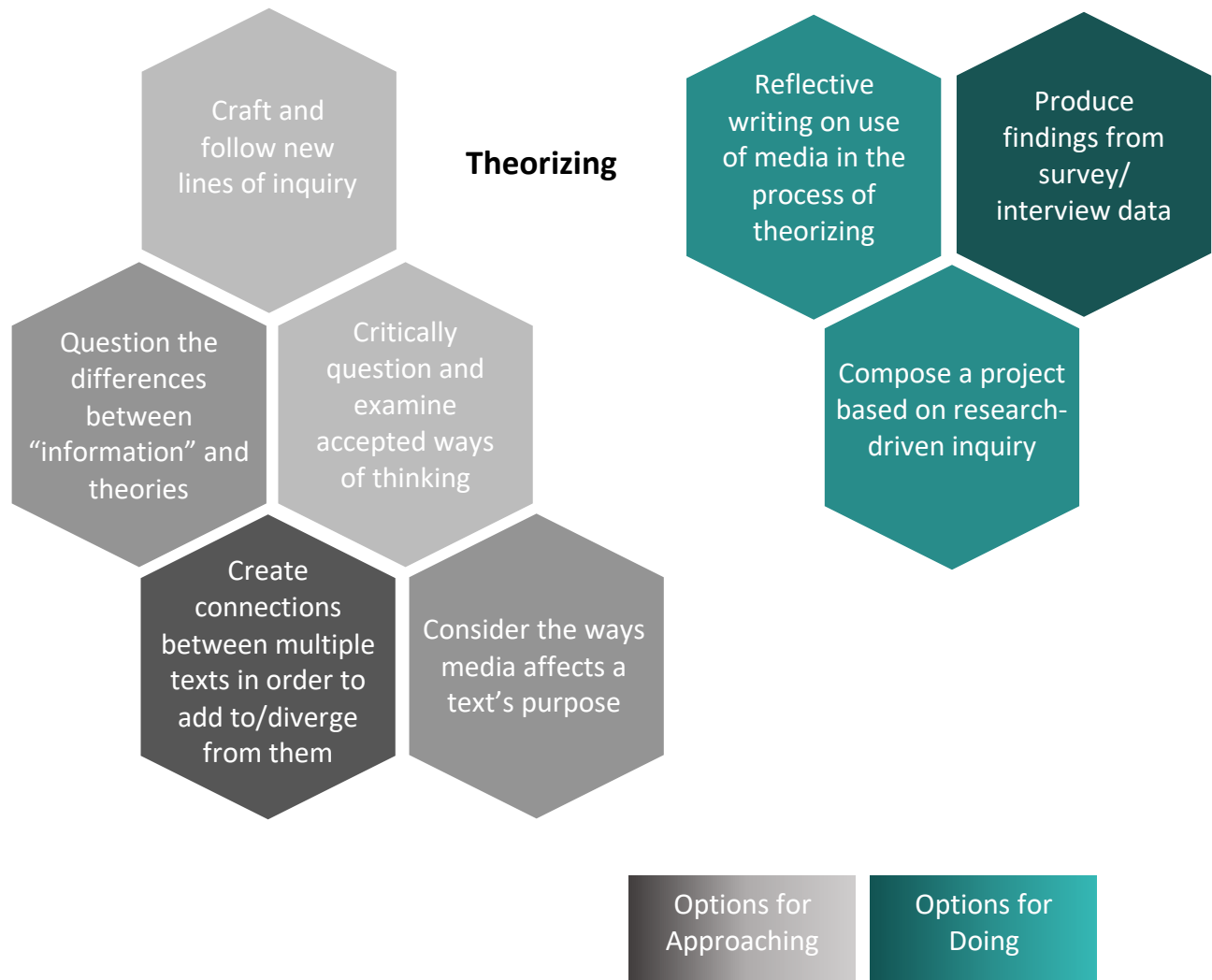
Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

Devitt, Amy. "Teaching Critical Genre Awareness." *Genre in a Changing World*, edited by Charles Bazerman, et al., The WAC Clearinghouse, 2009, pp. 337-351.

Beaufort, Anne. "Operationalizing the Concept of Discourse Community: A Case Study of One Institutional Site of Composing." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1997, pp. 486–529.

Theorizing



By theorizing, students produce new knowledge and contribute meaningfully to intellectual conversations. While research is often a first step, when students theorize, they are doing more than interpreting, summarizing, or applying others' ideas. They are *creating* something that could be interpreted or applied by someone else. Of course, creating new knowledge doesn't always mean providing answers; more often, it means crafting new questions and lines of inquiry, developing new terms, or crafting a critical vocabulary.

Information Literacy Threshold Concepts

- Research as inquiry

- Information creation as a process
- Authority is constructed and contextual

Habits of Mind

- Creativity
- Persistence
- Responsibility
- Metacognition

Examples

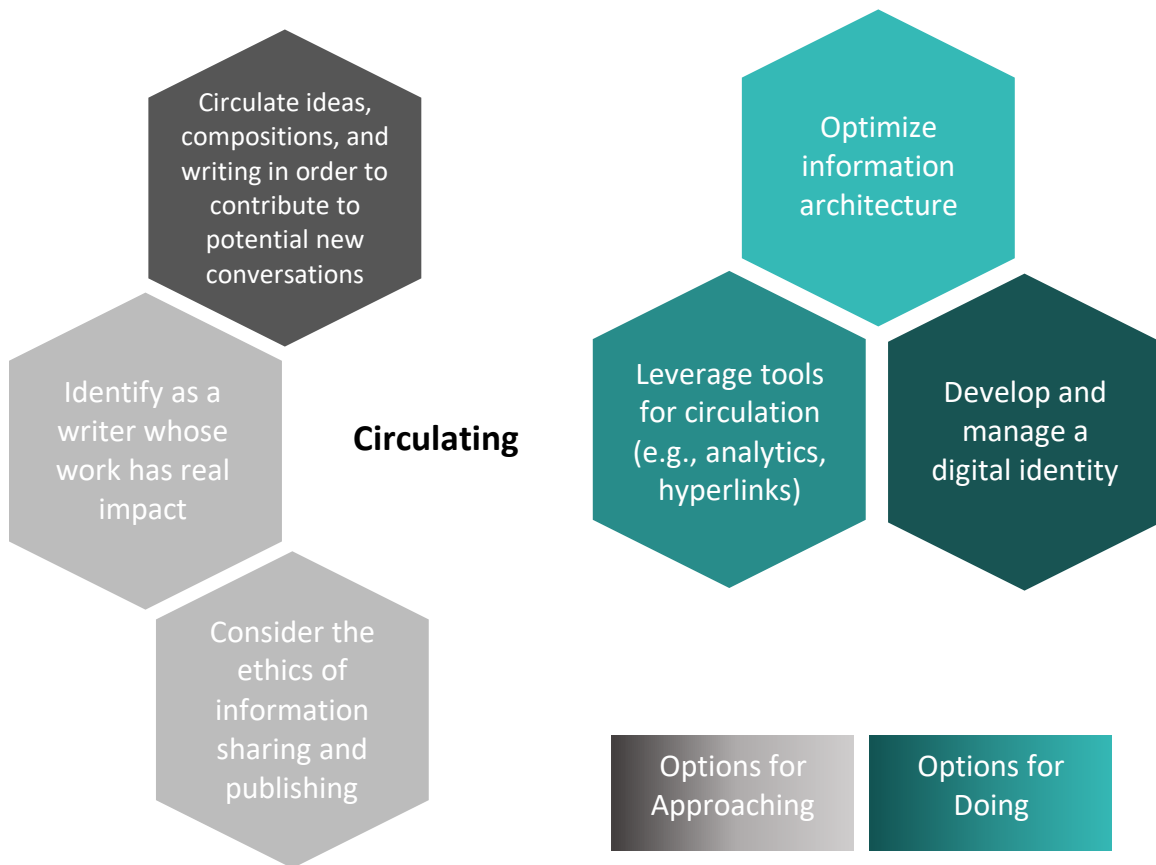
Assignment	Writing goals	Theorizing work
Blog	Critically question and examine accepted ways of thinking	Work through a problem and posing questions over time through a series of posts
Poster	Question the difference between information and theories	Present a visual heuristic for conceptualizing a problem
Conference-style presentation	Craft and follow new lines of inquiry	Present findings and implications of a brief study the student conducted
Article	Create connections between texts to add to/diverge from them - question differences between information and theories	Make a persuasive, data-driven argument

Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

Warnick, Chris. "Texts to Be Worked on and Worked with: Encouraging Students to See Their Writing as Theoretical." *Teaching with Student Texts: Essays Toward an Informed Practice*, edited by Joseph Harris et al., Utah State University Press, 2010, pp. 163-70.

Circulating



FYW courses help students develop habits and skills related to writing, but they also allow students to understand how writing circulates actively in the world. An important part of circulating is understanding *audiences* who will read the writing and also the *media* the writing uses. An assignment that asks students to practice circulating creates situations where students have readers and uses for their work beyond their instructor. Circulating assignments especially focus on the relationship between audience, genre and media, and purpose by asking students to take a new and specific audience into account in their writing.

Information Literacy Threshold Concepts

- Information has value
- Information creation as a process

Habits of Mind

- Engagement
- Flexibility
- Metacognition
- Responsibility

Examples

Assignment	Writing Goals	Circulation work
Website/Online forum post	Identify as a writer whose work has real impact - develop and manage a digital identity	Publish in accessible formats and make use of site infrastructure
Peer review letter	Circulate ideas and writing in order to contribute to potential new conversations	Read each other's work as critical texts and adapt to feedback from others
Service learning project	Identify as a writer whose work has real impact	Create a text that will be used by an organization
Group report	Circulate ideas and writing in order to contribute to potential new conversations	Collaboratively author a text
Remix	Identify as a writer whose work has real impact - circulate ideas	Remediate an academic essay for digital/public shareability

Resources

Scholarly Bibliography

Cushman, Ellen. "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1996, pp. 7–28.

Dush, Lisa. "When Writing Becomes Content." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 173-196.

Ridolfo, Jim, and Dànielle Nicole Devoss. "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery." *Kairos*, vol. 13, no. 2.

Trimbur, John. "Composition and the Circulation of Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2000, pp. 188–219.

Assignment Architecture

In order to ensure that students have plenty of opportunities to practice the course moves—and, most importantly, to ensure that students are consistently *writing* and circulating that writing—FYW instructors should assign at least four [assignments](#) (opportunities for students to share their work and receive feedback) that ask students to practice 5 [course moves](#). These assignments may be grouped or scaffolded together into any number of high-stakes, revised and graded writing projects. Assignments ask students to practice different course moves. Course moves don't necessarily have to happen in one particular order across these assignments. Many assignments will give students the opportunity to practice more than one move; however, each assignment will generally tend to focus on one move in particular as its main objective.

There are many viable ways one could organize the course and imagine the moves working within an assignment architecture. But the overall structure across assignments throughout the semester shouldn't be random. Assignments should be *scaffolded*—that is, they should build logically on each other and give students the opportunity to apply concepts they are learning as they learn them.

One way to scaffold assignments is through sequencing. For example, it often makes sense for students to do an assignment that asks them to work through one or two challenging texts before asking them to synthesize a wider pool of sources for a research assignment. It is also possible to build “steps” into a major project by designing scaffolding assignments that students combine or build on in the final project. For example, if your course inquiry examined the intersections between culture and literacy, you might first ask students to compose a literacy narrative before they produce a larger project that also synthesizes scholarly sources. In this example, you could design the assignment so that students use this literacy narrative as a “case” that becomes part of the larger research project.

WAT Course Architecture

In order to help instructors scaffold their assignments, the FYW program suggests using an architecture with three main components: **grounding**, **connecting**, and **opening out**. [You can learn about this architecture on the FYW website](#).

Shaping Assignments within the Course Inquiry

Instructors should consider how each individual assignment will build on both the previous assignment(s) and how it will contribute to and potentially trouble the larger question that the course is exploring. Instructors should choose and

develop a larger inquiry that they do not have a predetermined “answer” to and individual assignments they are not expecting prescriptive responses to. Instructors and students will explore and complicate the conversation together, with the instructor and the assignments opening up possibility rather than foreclosing it.

When considering the course’s assignment architecture conceptually, instructors might want to ask:

- What is the main inquiry the course will explore? How will assignments connect that inquiry to writing and/or language and allow students to begin thinking about writing and reading in new ways?
- How do I expect students to contribute to that inquiry in each assignment? Is there room for them to draw on their own interests and experiences and connect the course to their wider sociocultural context?
- Do my assignments and text selections allow for students to explore a diversity of experiences? Do my assignments foreclose certain experiences or backgrounds? Do they incorporate practices of [universal design](#)?
- How do I want to shape the course? Should students begin with a critical (theoretical or conceptual) text that will function as a frame for the work they will be doing, or might we begin with more local, student-generated resources, turning to critical texts further in the semester?
- How will each assignment build on the previous one? What is the course move students will practice, and how does it lead logically to the next assignment’s moves, and ultimately to the [learning objectives](#) for the course? Will students be able to develop and engage with ideas they developed previously, while still working on a new/distinct assignment?

Writing It Up

An assignment prompt for a First-Year Writing course locates a point of entry for student writing, defines a goal or set of goals for the intellectual work of that writing assignment, describes the form the assignment will take, provides explicit information about how that writing project will be evaluated, and sketches out the context within which the writing will be accomplished. All of this needs to be communicated clearly to students in some way, and there are several factors to be considered when representing concretely what students are expected to do.

Assignment Components

This section will cover four assignment components that most assignments should incorporate: context, task, form, and evaluative criteria. Instructors are encouraged to take these three components into consideration while drafting assignments. Instructors need not use the exact language provided here, and the relative importance of each component will depend on the assignment.

Context. Context maps out how the assignment fits into the conversation that has developed in the class so far (although this should be kept quite brief). Context might introduce key vocabulary or concepts, and it might remind students of materials and texts that students might engage. Context can also include suggestions about what is at stake in addressing the larger questions of the course and where an inquiry into them may lead. Context should also include attention to the audience for the assignment: It's often taken for granted that the instructor will be one audience for the project, but what other audiences might this project have (e.g., classmates, an internet community)? What imagined audiences are students writing for (e.g., a scholarly discipline)?

Task. The task of an assignment should provide specific, feasible goals a successful project will accomplish according to the major course move for that assignment. The writing project often has two components—an analytical goal asking students engage intellectually with some aspect of the course's inquiry as well as a rhetorical goal: a chance to practice writing strategies through the *course moves* (see above), which should be clearly named in the writing task. That is, in addition to spelling out a chief goal for the thinking required of students (e.g., examine race as a factor of identity), the prompt should make explicit mention of how writing will serve that goal (e.g., “theorize by introducing and defending a term that an author *doesn't* use in discussing racial identity but that you think belongs in this conversation and why”). You should be able to define the most basic parameters of the task in 1-2 sentences.

Form. Although it may not be the most important part of the project, students will sometimes immediately focus on certain formal elements: page counts, genre, conventions, etc. You may also need to be specific about the *media* students are expected to use, particularly for multimodal assignments (see below). Be as direct as possible; students will be confused, for instance, if you do not specify a page range but actually *do* have a general idea of how much writing is “long enough” to accomplish the task. Setting some parameters can be helpful for students who might never have written anything quite like what you have assigned before.

Interrogate any tacit assumptions you might have (see below) and try to make these explicit to students.

Evaluative criteria. While FYW discourages rigid, scaled rubrics, instructors should provide a description of how this particular project will be assessed and what constitutes a successful project. Remember that it's very possible that evaluation criteria will differ from one assignment to another. (For example, a research project might prioritize the way sources are engaged with, while a reflective assignment would be more likely to prioritize metacognition.) This needs to be made explicit to students, and it can be helpful to point out *why* you have chosen to value certain things in the way you evaluate projects. If you have trouble explaining the logic of your criteria to students, you may need to reassess why you tend to emphasize that criteria in the first place when you assess student work. Also, remember that not all assignments need to be graded, and remember to specify whether the project will eventually receive a grade and how important that grade is. Major projects should only receive a grade after students have revised them.

Guidelines for Successful Assignments

Good assignments tend to preempt better student writing, and designing assignments often merits careful consideration; the extra time you spend trying to anticipate how students will respond will pay off. Below are some guidelines for delivering assignments:

- **Write It Down.** Avoid giving purely verbal prompts, even for very brief assignments. This will cause problems for absent students and makes it easy for students to forget important details. A brief assignment still merits a brief written prompt shared through class email or the course management system.
- **Be Concise.** Try to describe the project in approximately one page. It can be tempting to try to cover all your bases by adding on more and more detail. However, students can suffer from information overload with excessively long prompts. It's difficult to know what information to really pay attention to when the prompt stretches over several pages. There are other ways to break down what students need to know (e.g., you could separate steps into multiple [scaffolding assignments](#) or Contextualize the Assignment—see below).
- **Strive for Accessibility.** If you photocopy and distribute the assignment, make a digital version accessible on your class platform as well. Bold important information, and consider using headings and bullets to make

the assignment easy to scan. Ask students to produce project in accessible formats. (For example, if students create a podcast, they should also create a transcript of the project.)

- Check Your Assumptions. Remember that your students are likely first-years from a wide variety of backgrounds and that FYW courses are general education courses. Not all students will be familiar with the discipline of English, and most students will not continue their studies in that field. Don't expect students will arrive in your classroom knowing how to close read a text or format citations in MLA style, and consider *why* students should need to follow such conventions before requiring them. Don't assume all students will be familiar with linguistic or cultural contexts you may take for granted.
- Choose Your Words Carefully. What tacit assumptions might be attached to the vocabulary you deploy in the assignment. Take care with words like "analyze," "thesis," "argument," "research," "essay," and "evidence," which may seem self-evident to you but in fact can mean wildly different things to different audiences. Make sure you clarify such terms in class beforehand and provide explanations and examples where possible.
- Provide Examples. It is not "cheating" to provide an example of the type of project you want students to produce. If you have something particular in mind, students are much more likely to produce it if you provide some models.
- Contextualize the Assignment. Set aside time in class to go over the assignment. Consider distributing the assignment before class or at the start of class so that students have time to come up with questions about it. Clarify terms or even have students do some in-class brainstorming so that they can begin to visualize what they need to do before they're left to their own devices.
- Don't Forget the Essentials. Include: the instructor's name, the course information, a title for the assignment, due dates, conventions, parameters (such as page ranges or word count), and submission information (such as how students will turn in the project).
- Run It by Someone. Ask someone else to read the assignment and describe how they would interpret the task before you distribute it. They may be able to point out the ways students would read it differently than you.
- Do It Yourself. If you get the chance to, do your own assignment. There is no better way to anticipate how a student might approach the task or conduct a reality check on your expectations.

Assignments and Course Components

Assignments must incorporate all [FYW course components](#) at some point in the semester. See the [assignment concretes](#) in chapter 1 for more details.

Assignment Vs. Project and Course Concretes

While it's not always meaningful to draw distinctions between these terms, in general a *project* is something students produce in response to the course inquiry ([read more about this in chapter 4](#)). An *assignment* is a prompt that asks students to accomplish a task.

A *major assignment* is a prompt that asks students to 1) “turn in” their work to the instructor (and sometimes peers); 2) revise that work in some way; 3) be assessed on that work in some way. A *project* may consist of several scaffolded major assignments (which all combine to some final product).

The FYW [assignment concretes](#) state that instructors should assign at least four assignments. However, these assignments may vary in length, importance, and complexity. What is important is that these are opportunities for students to *circulate*, *revise*, and *evaluate* their work and that they engage each of the five course moves at least once during the semester.

InfoLit Assignments

Assignments emphasizing student research should ask students to use critical sources to develop their own projects that complicate or extend critics' arguments, rather than simply summarizing them as moments of authorization or producing agree/disagree papers.

You may also need to clarify what you mean by research in your assignment prompt. For many students, the term “research paper” has come to mean “a report,” and “sources” have come to mean an arbitrary number of texts that must be cited in the project. FYW emphasizes working meaningfully with sources as part of a critical conversation. At least one graded assignment should require students to find and engage with source(s) beyond the course texts, [but the genre of this assignment need not be an essay](#), and the focus should be on *how* students engage texts rather than *how many* texts they cite.

Some of the functional information literacy skills students possess (Googling, using Wikipedia, etc.) have drawbacks, and their usefulness depends heavily on context. FYW instructors should strive to foster critical information and digital literacy skills

so students become more aware of the affordances and contexts of the resources they draw on during research. We want students to move away from just collecting facts and instead toward developing questions that would frame such information, leading to more meaningful questions.

More information on designing information literacy assignments can be found on the library [website](#).

Assigning Multimodal Projects

FYW understands both “text” and “writing” to include composition through a broad range of modes and technologies. Instructors may incorporate chances to practice and discuss the rhetorical affordances of multimodal composing and writing technologies through [in-class activities](#). Instructors should also assign at least one major multimodal project during the semester. Examples can be found on the [FYW website](#) as well as in the [baseline syllabi](#).

In many ways, most of the guidelines on assignments in general apply to multimodal projects. Below are some additional considerations for multimodal projects:

- New ways of writing should not be seen merely as “enhancements” or additions to more conventional texts. Students may require extra guidance on how to navigate new technologies.
- Multimodal projects can be very complex, and it may be necessary to devote a significant amount of in-class time to practicing and discussing principles of composing through alternative modalities (for example, by giving opportunities to learn visual design skills through activities or by rhetorically analyzing audio texts).
- Collaboration may also be important for certain multimodal projects, and instructors will need to consider how to facilitate this. Collaborative work can be time-consuming, so instructors should note (and schedule for) the fact that collaboration can take time, both in and out of the classroom space.
- Multimodal projects need to have clear instructions and goals; there is often no “tacit script” that students have internalized from other writing experiences for what they need to do.
- Instructors should have realistic expectations for the work multimodal projects require, and this should be communicated to students. (Students do not always have realistic perceptions of how long such projects will

take.) A 60-second video could well be more demanding to produce than six pages of written text.

- Depending on how open-ended the assignment is, it may be useful to ask students to write a proposal for their projects, so you can preview and advise them on their projects as they develop. Sometimes it may be easier to respond to a detailed proposal as a draft, or to workshop proposals during peer review, since diverse multimodal projects tend to develop at different rates.
- Multimodal assignments should always consider how the use of diverse modes or technologies contributes to students' rhetorical awareness and abilities; they should go beyond "functional" use of technologies as tools.

Supplemental Materials

For more information, examples, and help with assignment development, please see the Assignment Development Materials folder in the [Supplemental Materials](#) and the [Course Development Tool](#).

Other Resources

- [Baseline Syllabi](#)
- [Bedford Bits' Ideas for Teaching Composition](#)
- [Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives](#)
- [Examples of Multimodal Assignments](#)
- [Past Sample Assignments and Assignment Sequences](#)
- [Prompt: A Journal of Academic Writing Assignments](#)
- [Using Film in Class and in Assignments](#)

Resources

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Chapter 6

In-Class Work

As the instructor of a First-Year Writing seminar, your role is to facilitate writing and discussion activities that foster [habits of mind](#) and develop [course goals](#). Because student composing is integral to the work of the class, students should be doing some form of writing or creating in every class period. Writing, creating, and reading are social, conversational, and collaborative acts, so students should be interacting with their peers and their peers' work during class sessions. In addition, because students develop digital and information literacy in FYW courses, instructors should provide students with opportunities to practice critical writing, reading, and research across technologies in class.

Developing Daily Class Goals

Instructors should determine what the class goals will be for each class session. These goals should work toward meeting the [overall learning objectives for the course](#), in a broad sense, and should also help students develop their writing critically as they move through each assignment.

To determine daily goals for a given class session, instructors might consider the following:

- What is the [course inquiry](#) and how does the inquiry map onto the [course moves](#)? How will students expand their sites of inquiry and their writing by the end of the semester?
- How do the [assigned texts](#) provide students locations to develop sites of inquiry through writing? How do they address broad reading, writing, and critical goals (such as those seen in the section on "[Assignment Architecture](#)" in chapter 5)?
- What will students need to consider before addressing the next project? Will they need to, for instance, be able to assess the usefulness of a text? Will they need to think about the rhetoric of visual design? Will they need to consider larger social contexts?
- What issues or difficulties have you noticed in students' writing? Rather than "correcting" them, what might such difficulties productively demonstrate about the work of writing? For instance, if students compose work that lists presented facts to prove a pro/con point, how might an

instructor explore the uses/limits of such a writing strategy in relation to the course inquiry?

- What technologies does the activity require? What technologies will students have access to?
- Is this activity [accessible](#) to students with differing abilities, personalities, and backgrounds? Are there multiple ways for students to participate in this activity?

Daily class goals should allow students to develop their own critical approach to writing. [Readings](#) should help students develop ways into existing conversations, but they should be approached in a way that allows students to think about their own writing practices and interests. In other words, your daily class goals should be ways to encourage students to pursue inquiries through composition.

Later in this section, there is a guide to developing your own in-class activities focused on keeping your daily class goals and the course moves in mind. It's a good idea to look at your course schedule over the course of your assigned projects and think about the interlocking strategies and course moves your students will use in each assignment.

In the instructor [supplemental materials](#) on the FYW website, there are a number of examples of in-class activities instructors might choose to incorporate into their courses. Feel free to use these as resources for planning the work of your class. However, these are not intended to be chosen randomly just to fill time, without considering how they fit into the overall inquiry and arc of the course. Class activities, like the [assignment architecture](#), should be scaffolded—they should develop or lead toward a specific course move or moves, which in turn should be sequenced to fit within the larger course moves. In other words, instructors should determine what students should leave the class knowing how to do and then design activities that will build sequentially toward that outcome.

Planning the Class

FYW courses are four-credit courses, and consequently FYW class sessions last longer than sessions in other courses. They run for 1 hour and 45 minutes, twice per week. To most effectively use this time, instructors have a variety of strategies at their disposal.

- Some instructors break their lesson plans into minute-by-minute increments so they know precisely how much time they have for each portion of class. Instructors are encouraged, however, to acknowledge and prepare for the fact that some activities may take more or less time than anticipated. It may be better to deviate from the lesson plan than to end a useful discussion prematurely.
- Some instructors come prepared with a sequence of planned in-class work and a more general grasp of how long each of those activities will take.
- Some instructors come to class with several class activities prepared and the assumption that they will not be able to complete all of them in a given class. During the class session, they decide which activities they will do based on the time remaining and students' needs.
- Some instructors prepare a general plan for what goals they have for the session. They draw from a repertoire of in-class activities to meet students' emerging needs and immediate concerns.
- Some instructors plan on giving short "breaks" that help students transition from one activity to the next while catching their breath. This is a good way to let your students reflect, leave the room without creating ongoing distractions, and allow students to direct questions to you in a more relaxed way.

Technology in the Classroom

Technology is a vital resource in the FYW classroom for teaching and composing. To best facilitate our students' process of *writing across* technology, it is important to mindfully integrate technology into the daily activities of our classrooms. Beyond the requirement to assign at least one multimodal major project, it is strongly recommended that instructors use technology in their instruction and for in-class activities. As previously mentioned, you should not implement a complete ban on student use of technology in the classroom. To take this a step further, instructors should foster a space where students are able to learn and practice the *responsible*, *effective*, and *ethical* use of technology in classroom and professional environments. Instead of telling our students to put away their cell phones, tablets, and laptops, consider having productive discussions about *how* they can use those devices to take better notes, listen actively, engage in class discussion non-verbally, and access cultural (or other) knowledge necessary for comprehension and engagement. Much as it is important for students to be exposed to course management systems and the library website in general education, the FYW classroom is an ideal space for students to gain experience with the technological tools that they will continue to use in their future classes and various disciplines.

As an instructor, it's important to find what works for you and in your classroom. Some students will be more confident than others using technology in various ways, so you should consider such activities as a time to "practice" as well as to compose. Sometimes technology fails, but it's also possible to feel that you are "failing" with technology. In any activity using technology, remind yourself and your students that it's the process and practice that is important, even when you all might feel that the composition itself isn't what you imagined.

Using technology in your classroom activities can help serve several purposes. It can help students learn the rhetorical affordances of technology, provide multiple points of access for students, and allow for new kinds of classroom dynamics and spaces. Diverse technologies are increasingly becoming more important in students' writing lives (in *and* out of the classroom), and it can be useful to address what this means by making technology a part of classroom activities. To begin deconstructing the stigma surrounding the presence of technology in classrooms, we recommend that instructors encourage specific uses of technology and talk about the affordances of the specific technologies as a means of fostering student practice and improvement.

There are several practical considerations to take into account when using technology in the classroom. Below are some guidelines for using technology in class and workarounds for when some technologies aren't available.

- If your classroom does not have a projector, the FYW office has two projectors and sets of speakers available for checkout. However, you should consider points of access no matter what technology you're using (see point below).
- If your classroom has limited audio or projection technologies, it will be important to bring in hard copies of PowerPoints, pictures, articles or notes you were going to project in class OR bring in copies of transcripts for videos or any audio recordings that will be used in class. (It's a good idea to do this regardless of your classroom's capabilities). Be sure that videos have captioning. You should host or link to these materials online via your course management system whenever possible.
- Are there computers in the classroom? If not, what will students bring to class? It is a good idea to *anonymously* (without singling students out) survey what bring your-own technologies your students have access to so as to determine whether you will be able to rely on students using this technology in class. Even if all students have access to a portable device,

plan for how students will participate when they forget their technology or when that technology fails to work. You can also make your students aware that they can borrow laptops from the library to bring to class, but this is not something you can rely on absolutely.

- If students don't have access to personal technology and the room isn't furnished with computers, consider structuring any activities that rely on tech to be group activities. Another approach might be to make the technology aspects of an activity *optional* so that there are ways to participate using analog methods.
- Always have a Plan B in case technology doesn't work. (This you can pretty much depend on—sometimes it won't!)

Information Literacy in the Classroom

FYW instructors should incorporate activities that meet the goals of the [InfoLit requirement](#) in their classrooms regularly. Instructors should schedule at least one session of explicitly hands-on information literacy work so that students experience university-level academic research and are introduced to the research databases available to them (keeping in mind the wide variety of fields of study the students will be moving into). The session should provide a general overview of the main sections of the library website, indicating how to find and/or request materials in many disciplines.

The hands-on session is particularly useful for showing students *practical skills* that reinforce the conceptual skills (see above) of information literacy. However, these skills should be meaningfully nested in the context of your course or an assignment. Avoid telling students to find books, learn how to use Interlibrary Loan, or search databases *for their own sake*. The goal of the information literacy component is not to create librarians or English majors but to help students begin to obtain critical skills for reading and handling sources—including the ability to learn how to flexibly use different kinds of information archives in the future. Practical tasks should lead to the more challenging, substantive work of following leads and finding new avenues and forming new questions, while also paving the way for students to work collaboratively on future projects in your course and beyond.

We encourage all instructors to use [Homer Babbidge Library's Instruction Rooms](#) for these sessions. The instruction rooms include a projection system and computers for all students. However, because it is impossible to cover all the important aspects in a single session, information literacy work in your class

should not be confined to the library; rather, you should strive to include elements of information literacy in the work of the seminar throughout the semester.

TAW

If you are using *The Academic Writer*, consider framing part of your InfoLit work around this text. Chapter 7 of the textbook, for example, details strategies for academic research framed around “habits of mind” and specific research tools.

Reflection in the Classroom

In some cases, instructors choose to incorporate reflective writing in the day-to-day work of the class as in-class writing or activities. In other cases, instructors incorporate reflective writing

as an assignment toward the end of the course. Students may tend to view reflective assignments as an opportunity to demonstrate learned knowledge rather than as an opportunity for learning and critical thinking. Typically, for in-class work, reflection will take the form of ungraded self-reflection, as is described in the [Course Components](#) chapter. However, graded reflection assignments can be part of the work you do in-class, particularly for peer-review. For example, instructors sometimes assign [portfolios](#) with an introduction, “cover letter,” or other reflective genre that ask students to analyze their writing through/with the course inquiry in order to develop that inquiry further. This can be workshopped in-class in order to provide a moment to help students reflect on reflection (metacognition).

Active Learning and Studio Pedagogy

There are countless ways you can organize class time in any given session, and, as outlined above, these necessarily must respond to learning goals and the needs of the class. However, in general, class sessions should employ principles of [active learning](#) and [studio pedagogy](#), considering not only the activities or goals you want students to accomplish, but how the classroom space itself might facilitate such work. First-Year Writing courses have a *practice-based curriculum*. That is, rather than teaching a certain *content*, they focus on developing skills and [habits of mind](#). Students develop these things by *doing*. Because of this, FYW classes tend to feature little to no traditional lecture time, instead consisting largely of collaborative work, practice, and active learning activities. You can find a bank of active learning activities in FYW’s [supplemental materials](#) and guidelines for developing your own activities in the section below.

Some of the broad categories of classroom activities FYW instructors most commonly employ include:

- Writing studio time
- Brain-storming sessions prior to starting work on projects
- Practice time for working with technology for multi-modal projects (asset collection, working with sound/image technology, building analog materials, etc.)
- Seminar-style discussions of student writing
- Small-group discussions and problem-solving
- Peer review workshops
- Student-instructor conferences (either in-class or via redirected class session)
- Library research activities
- Student presentations
- Fieldwork for ongoing projects
- Reflective writing or discussion

Designing Classroom Activities

While you want to avoid the feeling of “creating the wheel” for every class period, there is tremendous value to developing your own activities based on your knowledge of yourself (what activities suit my teaching personality?), your syllabus (what are the main goals of this lesson or project?) and your students (what do your students respond to?). In order to create your own in-class activities, it’s useful to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the value or utility of the text, question, or skill you want your students to encounter through this activity?
- How does this value or utility relate to your goals for the unit in terms of the project assignment, the writing/research/technology skills you want your students to learn, or interests your students have voiced?
- How does this text, question, or skill relate to the [course moves](#)?
- What do you want students to gain from this activity? Do you want them to be prepared for a specific upcoming reading/homework assignment? Do you want them to have a bit of writing done to revise for next class? Do you want them to be able to transition right into a class-wide discussion?

Once you establish *what* you want your students to gain from this activity and how this activity fits into your syllabus goals, consider *how* you want your students to meet this daily goal of the activity:

- Do you want students to work with one partner, multiple partners, or as a defined group?
- How in control do you want to be? Are you comfortable giving very open-ended directions in order to allow your students to direct conversation and/or composition amongst themselves?
- How can technology aid your activity's goals? Do you want to limit technology as a resource? Do you need students to be aware they need technology ahead of time?
- How might you incorporate InfoLit strategies to enhance student learning?
- How might you design/set up the classroom space to operate as a studio (e.g. work stations, section for instructor-group feedback, brainstorming tables, etc.)? What materials are needed to set up the desired space for your activity?
- Do you want students to be consistently writing or composing or do you want them to reflect afterwards?

After considering these basic questions, start envisioning concretely what activity might accomplish your goals, either by adapting another activity you know of or by putting all the pieces together on your own. This looks different for everyone, and it might take multiple lesson plan drafts to figure out how to facilitate what you're imagining. Writing out directions, even rudimentary ones, allows you to imagine how your activity will come to life, and what elements you still have to figure out. Some steps to finalizing a new activity and preparing to use it in class include:

- Double-checking the language and expectations set out in your instructions (whether they are verbal notes for you, handouts, a slide, etc.). Be sure your language is clear and avoids complicated terms/ideas that your students might be unfamiliar with. Make your expectations clear, even if you are being intentionally vague about what they should be taking away from your activity.
- Assemble all necessary materials, including craft supplies from the FYW art cart (which can be found in the FYW office), printed handouts, note cards, technology, and so on. If your students need to bring something (three quotations from a reading, a paragraph they wrote for homework, an outside text) it's a good idea to remind them via email, HuskyCT, or other classroom management system ahead of time.
- Have a colleague read your instructions or demo your activity. Another set of eyes can help you anticipate issues you might not be aware of.

- Think about how your students will react. Will they be out of their comfort zones? Will they enjoy the activity? Will it be challenging? Will it be too easy?
- Think about how you will transition out of the activity. If your students aren't taking enough time or not going as in-depth as you want, how can you get them to revisit their work? How can you get them to reflect on this activity or practice these skills?

Remember, some activities will fall flat despite over-preparedness, while some activities prepared last-minute can succeed depending on factors beyond your control. Sometimes it takes building in the time for your students to reflect independently to know that an activity was successful for their work, even if the activity didn't seem beneficial from your viewpoint.

TAW

Working with *The Academic Writer* in Class

The Academic Writer can be utilized within the classroom as a way into discussion, writing, reflection, and multimodal work. This textbook is not a prescriptive guide to writing, but rather a text with which students are encouraged to actively engage. If you assign *The Academic Writer* for your class, you should work with this book thoughtfully and meaningfully within the space of the classroom and alongside other course texts.


The Instructor Resources section of the book is helpful for thinking about ways to use the book in your course and features some sample lesson plans and activities. If you don't have an instructor's edition of the textbook, the Instructor Resources are available [here](#).

Practice. After assigning a section from *The Academic Writer*, you may consider asking students to practice the theoretical work of that section. For example, if students read Ede's work on "reading visual texts," you might bring some visual texts to read in small or large groups during class time. Instructors may also have students practice various "strategies for invention," such as looping and clustering, after reading Ede's descriptions of these methods.

Synthesis. If you assign a section from *The Academic Writer* alongside another text, consider making connections between the two texts during class. Doing so highlights the relationship between reading and writing while also providing an entry point into the discussion of a potentially complex or difficult text. For example, if your class has read Chapter 6 from *The Academic Writer*, "Making and Supporting Claims," you may ask students to apply the "questions for evaluating evidence" to a recent reading.

"Guidelines." *The Academic Writer* includes "guideline" tables that may act as opportunities for students to reflect on their writing process in the form of writing or discussion.

"For Exploration" and "For Thought, Discussion, and Writing." These short sections could be adapted into in-class discussions or activities.



Vocabulary. While students may be used to using textbooks as a way to study “vocabulary words,” you can take a more nuanced approach by considering how *The Academic Writer* fosters a common language in your classroom. Have students approach these terms critically and consider how these terms may be adapted and adopted by your classroom community.

Adapting to Challenges During In-Class Work

Improvising in Class

Often, students will have unexpected reactions to in-class work and to assigned texts. It can be difficult to predict how long a discussion will run or how much time an in-class activity will take (even if an instructor has done that activity before). While instructors may have different levels of comfort with how much improvisation they would like to rely on in their classes, some improvisation is often necessary.

Strategies for improvisation include:

- Attend to students’ needs in class. An unanticipated difficulty might arise, or a conflict, or a point of interest. You might adjust a planned activity accordingly.
- If an activity is running too long, you might wait to do the whole-class “synthesis” portion until a later day, or reduce the requirements for part of the activity.
- Gauge students’ interest. Sometimes it is difficult to accurately assess students’ level of engagement during class. Students often arrive tired from their other courses, and instructors are often surprised to later learn that students they’d assumed were uninterested in a topic were actually very interested in it. If students seem particularly quiet, however, you might bring in a popular example that relates to your given topic, such as a song, film, or TV show. You might also have students participate in an involved group-based activity. Finally, students can free-write about their personal reactions, feelings, or relationships to the concepts under discussion. It’s a good idea to have them turn in these free-writing

activities by email or in writing so you can respond (individually or globally in the next class). This establishes that you value their experiences and that they should too.

- Always have a backup plan (or several) on days when you rely on technology— sometimes things glitch out or break down unexpectedly!
- Have five- to ten-minute writing prompts prepared in case students complete all the planned work more quickly than anticipated. These prompts could serve to create small-group/partner discussions, or you might want to have them compose in writing then recreate their answers in another medium. Focus on next-step application for these prompts, even if they are simple or open for the students to use as they need.

Fostering Student Participation

Because the course is a seminar, it relies heavily on student participation, whether in the form of written work, small-group or peer participation, or participation in whole-class discussions. Different students will have different levels of comfort with different modes of participation. Some may want to participate but may be uncertain about how to do so.

It is often helpful to give students a few minutes to free-write about a particular point of interest or complexity that you would like to highlight prior to asking for students to verbally discuss these things in groups or as a class. Some students may also feel more comfortable contributing to small-group or peer discussions rather than to whole-group discussions. In that case, instructors may wish to designate a student in each group as the “scribe,” so someone in each group ensures everyone’s contributions will become legible later in whole-class discussion. Be sure that the scribe’s notes are made available on [HuskyCT](#) or [Google Classroom](#) so students can look at those notes later on their own.

When facilitating whole-class discussions, it is important not to get too stuck in the pattern of posing a question (particularly ones that are information-based), waiting for students to raise their hands, and calling on a student to respond. This pattern of discussion may become monotonous and rely too heavily on the contributions of only a few students.

It is also important to recognize that some students will feel very nervous about speaking in front of the class. Calling on students who aren’t raising their hands should be approached with caution. Some instructors ask students at the beginning of the course to note on an index card if they are comfortable being called on without having raised their hand. Additionally, if students free-write prior to discussion (or come to class with assigned writing), instructors may feel

more comfortable calling on various students, since every student will have already prepared some thoughts.

Finally, it is important to validate students' work and contributions. Instructors might highlight a student's contribution during class discussion as demonstrating something unique or interesting that might be worth dwelling on in group or individual work. Or instructors might gesture to something a student has written in the past and draw the student into the conversation by having them elaborate on and explore their work as it relates to the current day's inquiries. Further, instructors might gesture to things students have contributed in class discussions previously as ways to engage students in the current conversation. It's good practice to keep notes on your students' discussions and what goes well after each class to help keep tabs on individual students as well as for your own use in planning future classes.

When Technology Fails in the Classroom

Technology is a vital resource in the FYW classroom for teaching and composing. However, there will inevitably come a time in your teaching career where an activity you had planned around using technology is thwarted by uncooperative tech. When this happens, here are some strategies to not let it derail your class:

- Keep in mind the possibility of failed tech when building your lesson plans; always have a contingency plan for your goals for each class.
- Rely on resources in your classroom. By each computer station is a laminated sheet with tech support's phone number and information. Sometimes a quick call can solve your issues.
- Rely on your students. Students often bring their own tech to class. If possible, ask students to share devices in groups to access online material you had planned for the session. If you were planning to workshop on the main projector, try moving to a Google Doc that is shared with the full class.
- Bring hard copies of video or podcast transcripts, lyrics, images... etc. and include links to the content on HuskyCT or Google Classroom so that students can access content via their phones, tablets, or computers and redirect class to view/listen on their own or in pairs.

Supplemental Materials

For more information, examples, and help planning in class work, please see the In Class Work Materials folder of the [Supplemental Materials](#).

Other Resources

- [Bedford Bits English Community](#)
- [Centering Student Writing in the Classroom](#)
- [Using Film in Class and in Assignments](#)

Resources

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Chapter 7

Responding to Student Work

Response and Responsibility

What roles do we play when responding to student work? While it is often our default as instructors to inhabit the role of writing authority and judge, Thomas Newkirk argues that we must “act as the fallible, sometimes confused, sometimes puzzled readers that we are.”⁹ David Fuller also suggests we respond as *readers*, rather than as “critics of classroom performances.”¹⁰ In this way, *we model a reader/responder role* that peer reviewers too can inhabit while responding to their classmates’ work. Fuller writes that in doing so “we can dispel the notion that [students] need to decipher our commentary in order to learn how to play the game for us.”¹¹ What’s more, responding to written work is part of the shared work of the seminar. While we serve as leaders, we want everyone to feel that this is a part of their work in the course. We are not the only or even the final authority; we are reader-responders.

To help breakdown a view of the instructor as a sole or final authority, we recommend building many and varied forms of feedback on student work into your class. Forms of feedback to consider building into your class include: individual conferences, group conferences, feedbacking student writing with the whole class, and written or oral feedback on student drafts.

Our goal should be to *project an attitude of respect and a sense of responsibility toward student work*. One of the simplest ways to project respect and responsibility is by returning student papers quickly so the feedback is relevant to the work they have underway. In case of extenuating circumstances, place the same expectations on yourself as you would place on students. Return feedback on drafts promptly so it is useful during the revision process; plan to return graded student work within a week or so, but never longer than two weeks (and two weeks should be the exception, not the rule). Finding ways to build feedback into

⁹ Thomas Newkirk. “Looking for Trouble: A Way to Unmask Our Readings.” *College English*, vol. 46, no. 8, 1984, p. 765.

¹⁰ David Fuller. “A Curious Case of Our Responding Habits: What Do We Respond to and Why?” *Journal of Advanced Composition*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, 1988, p. 92.

¹¹ Ibid.

the daily work of the class can help manage the amount of written feedback you need to do. If you find yourself in a bind on returning work on time, consult with the FYW office as soon as possible to discuss alternatives and strategies for responding to student work.

Along with timeliness, we project our attitude toward student work in the language we use to comment on that work. It is important to be aware of both the roles we inhabit when we comment and the contextual criteria we bring (or sometimes invent) that influences our attitude toward the work. A number of contextual matters have an impact on the language that we use in commenting on student work, including the kinds of work invited by the assignment prompt, the priorities established through written evaluative criteria for the assignment and through interactions with students as they draft and revise, and the rhetorical terms and approaches explored during class time.

In addition to contextual criteria that originate with course discussions, assignment guidelines, and small group and individual conferences, an important piece of contextual criteria for instructor grading is what Bob Broad terms “teacher’s special knowledge” (TSK).¹² TSK arises out of assumptions that instructors make based on the way students write (and speak). An instructor’s familiarity with students can be an asset in that it permits an understanding of the challenges faced by individual students and enables instructors to use comments as productive contributions to student endeavors to work through these challenges. It is important to ground these contributions in actual encounters with student writing across this semester; for instance, instructors might take into account the concerns that students have noted in group or individual conferences or in reflective writing. These experiences allow feedback to reflect a continuing conversation between students and instructors, rather than stemming from imagined assumptions about a student’s background or abilities. Instructors should be self-aware about the ways their assumptions and imagined contexts may influence their responses and use TSK instead to make fully-informed comments that take into consideration each individual student’s needs.

The following sections provide best practices for responding to student work. While some best practices change between different modes of responding, many principles are consistent across methods of giving feedback.

¹² Bob Broad. *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. Utah State UP, 2003.

General Notes on Feedback

Offer feedback as a reader rather than as an authority. Point out where you see a line of thought taking shape and articulate what you see. If a student's work contains seeming contradictions, then point that out not as something to be resolved and unified, but as the substance of a section or an entire argument that would examine the contradictions, or as locations of interest. Articulate, too, the effects that certain sections of their project have on an audience, and ask questions to push your understanding of their text forward (as well as point them toward places to expand and further develop where a reader might not yet be able to follow their argument). Engaging with specific moments in their text, as a reader, ensures that comments are not interchangeable, but carefully contextualized.

Best Practices for Feedback: Rough Drafts

General best practices for responding to rough drafts:

- Feedback should take as a starting point what the student's writing is already doing, and so instructors should read with an eye toward the student's developing project. Often feedback can take the form of articulating what you see a student's project doing and how it does it. Feedback on first drafts should never be "evaluative."
- Although it may be easier to mark primarily surface-level or textual features (like grammar, punctuation, word choices, and citation), what matters in academic writing is how the text develops and advances a meaningful project. To keep yourself from focusing too heavily on smaller order concerns, we encourage feedback on rough drafts to focus on global concerns of the paper rather than sentence-level concerns. This means helping students reshape the work, rethink the problems, and redraw lines of thought. Encouraging the development of this project may mean that the student will need to remove or completely rethink large portions of the rough draft; emphasize that a first draft is a "discovery draft," or prototype, rather than a completed project that will just need to be polished. You can reinforce this by reminding students that they had to write a lot in order to find out where they want to take the project.
- Specific evaluative criteria help students to understand how you will be responding to their work, even prior to the actual evaluation of their last draft. It is important to establish and maintain a clear vocabulary (on the syllabus, assignments, and class discussions) of your expectations and how you will evaluate student work, and use that vocabulary to comment on that work in ways that will help students revise their drafts. Be aware of

the choices you make in this vocabulary, though, because it is easy to slip into some familiar terms that nevertheless assume a privileged audience.

- Comments should not be so directive as to take over the piece you believe the student should have written. If students need more direction, try to ask questions and offer multiple strategies or suggestions for revision so they can take responsibility for making active choices.
- When responding to multimodal texts, keep in mind that responding to these texts is similar to responding to written texts and that you don't have to be an expert in a given technology to comment on a student's rhetorical use of the composing technology.
- When giving feedback on multimodal projects, it may be useful to consider the genre and purpose of the multimodal text students are composing in and to what extent their drafts respond to and engage in that particular genre, purpose and the overall assignment.
- Comments on multimodal projects should not primarily focus on students' *technical proficiency* (mechanical skills) unless the lack of technical proficiency is hindering your understanding of the text.

Best practices for written feedback:

- Marginal comments are a useful way to make note of particular moments in a student's draft that introduce ideas worth exploring further. These will often take the form of questions that arise from particular claims or rhetorical approaches in the draft. These comments work productively in cooperation with endnotes, as they allow instructors to engage closely with textual moments in student work that inform the larger patterns of inquiry noted in end comments. Marginal comments may be less helpful in early drafting, as students may need to focus on more global concerns.
- Marginal comments can also alert students to specific errors, such as improperly formatted citations, but should not attempt to point out every single error in the draft as this can prompt students to focus on isolated, sentence-level revisions, and become too overwhelmed for larger, more global changes. Many instructors find it helpful to note the first instance of a common error with a suggestion to work on similar issues throughout the draft.
- Avoid covering student papers with a large number of marginal comments in general, as these may overwhelm the student.
- Endnotes help to communicate a set of priorities for the revision of the draft. These do not need to reiterate every marginal comment but should instead focus on the larger questions that underlie the comments throughout the project. Endnotes can point students toward the major

choices that they need to make when revising the draft and can enable the instructor to draw connections between related comments and questions appearing at different moments in the draft. These comments can help students to develop a plan for their revisions by making clear the instructor's primary concerns about the paper.

- Consider limiting endnote comments to two or three major points of interest and/or concerns.

Best practices for audio or video feedback:

- Audio or video feedback is an alternative to marginal and endnote comments that some students may find helpful. These modes do much of the same work as marginal and end comments, but research suggests that feedback through these modes tends to be more formative than summative (that is, more helpful during drafting stages than as an evaluative comment on a completed project).
- Audio or video comments also help students understand the tone or ethos of your comments in a way that written comments cannot, which may make students more responsive to your feedback. Some instructors have also found that this mode of commenting more time efficient.

Best practices for individual conferences:

- Individual conferences make possible a direct conversation between instructor and student about a rough draft. When meeting with students one-on-one, have students first articulate their project to you orally. You can then discuss how this project was articulated in the draft and how they might revise with that project in mind.
- In neither individual nor group conferences should you provide the "last word" on a student paper, and in an individual conference, you should allow the student to speak as much as possible (especially if you've already provided written feedback). Focus on opening up questions for the student, suggesting lines of thought they might develop, or helping them unpack something they've glossed over. When you finish speaking about a student draft, ask that student to rearticulate their understanding of your feedback as well as how they plan to revise the draft.
- Determine how your conversation will be recorded for the student's future reference before you dive into talking about student work. You should remind students to take notes at the beginning of the conference or, if you are comfortable, allow them to record your conversation. You might want to take notes for yourself as reference, but students might see this as a reason to not take notes for themselves.

- Some instructors build time in or out of class for individual conferences with all students on a given project. Other times individual conferences are only held when requested by a student or with students who are having challenges.

Best practices for group conferences or whole class workshops:

- Generally, students learn more about writing through group experiences than just receiving comments on drafts so use these methods, which exemplify studio pedagogy, often in your lesson plans.
- Focus these sessions on a smaller aspect of the project that all or most students need support with such as introductions, developing an argument, working with sources, etc. rather than trying to work with an entire project as you might in an individual conference.
- Coach students to give feedback to one another as readers by questioning: “What is this project trying to accomplish? How is it doing it? Where is it falling short?”
- Just as with individual conferences, when feedback in conferences or group activities, build in a structure for note taking. It’s often helpful if the person who’s paper is receiving feedback doesn’t have to take notes so consider designating another group or class member as the note taker.
- Lead students through an activity where they articulate the type of feedback they want to receive in order to create “group norms” about giving feedback. This helps build a culture where students feel comfortable sharing their work with one another whether in small or large groups.
- Many instructors wonder if they should use the work of currently enrolled students during class activities. This is dependent on the teacher’s preference, but using student work often can be incredibly productive. We do recommend always taking students’ names off of any work shared in class and letting students select if they want to disclose that work is theirs.

Class Workshop Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Round Robin - in small groups, students pass a passage of their paper around in a circle so that they receive feedback from many readers. ● Q & A - writers bring specific questions about their writing to a small group. The group works together to offer suggestions. ● Reverse Outline - partners create a reverse outline for one another then exchange to see if the outline matches the writer’s perception of their own work ● Argument Matching - writer and responder both read a piece and then

summarize the argument. Then they exchange to determine if the writer's intended argument matches what the reader identified.

- Passage Projections - project a passage of a student's work on the white board and then have students with different color markers annotate to model giving feedback.
- Traffic Light Highlight - Have students work through either their own draft of a peer's draft, highlighting strong sections in green, sections that need more development/fleshing out in yellow, and confusing sections in red.
- Reading Aloud - in true writing center style, ask pairs of students to read their papers to each other. Reading aloud can sometimes help students better conceptualize what they're trying to say in their paper.

Best Practices for Feedback: Final Drafts

- Students do not instinctively understand what grades signify in your course. Therefore, it is essential that instructors pair grades with clarifying comments. Without comments, grades reduce writing assignments to hoops to jump through, rather than opportunities for learning. Good comments reinforce grades by both drawing attention to the strongest parts of the paper and providing suggestions for development.
- It is worthwhile to keep in mind the difference between formative and summative comments. Feedback on rough drafts should focus on helping students to advance and develop an existing piece of writing, and so will rely heavily on formative comments. Final drafts provide the opportunity for more summative commentary, allowing instructors to note the work that a paper has accomplished and the ways in which the student's approach has enabled them to take on this work. Both types of comments should reflect the language that the instructor has established for the evaluation of written work.
- While this feedback involves response to a completed project, it should reflect an awareness of the student's ongoing development as a writer and should situate comments such that they are useful for the student's future work. This feedback may involve emphasizing particular approaches to revision that helped the student to improve the draft, or noting specific strategies or methods of analysis and argument that the student might focus on in subsequent papers.
- Responding to students' reflections on their projects in addition to the projects themselves in summative comments on final drafts can be a way to breakdown that you are the sole authority on their paper. For example,

you might amplify areas of their writing that they thought they did well or give them advice for improvements on areas they identified.

- Individual conferences can be valuable for discussing a final draft and the grade the student earned. Ask the student to take notes on your conversation, and take this opportunity to talk through the project and point to what worked well, what didn't, and what could be carried on in the next assignment. Such a conversation will help situate a grade in the larger context of written and verbal feedback.

Grading and Evaluation

Philosophy

Grading can be a delicate subject, especially in a course such as ours, in part because inexperienced writers often see criticism of their writing as evaluations of their abilities. They also tend to equate labor with quality, meaning that if they put in what they perceive to be a lot of work, they believe the grade should be commensurate to the effort. Still, in FYW, it is possible to think of most grading as occurring at one of two distinct levels: the grade for the assignment and the grade for the semester.

An assignment grade evaluates the quality of intellectual and written work observable in a student's project. At the end of this section, we have included brief descriptions of projects that would earn an A, B, C, and F, respectively. While no student's work will fit these criteria exactly—and your values as an evaluator may differ somewhat from those expressed in the criteria—you can use this set of descriptions as a starting point for assigning grades.

Although grading is an inherently subjective activity, there are some points of convergence on which most instructors agree. In FYW courses we emphasize exploration, complex thinking, contribution, and collaboration within a larger academic conversation. Thus, rather than focusing on local issues of grammar, diction, and syntax, we encourage instructors to privilege global issues such as the student's development of ideas, engagement with class texts, and adoption of an academic style. Ultimately, most instructors look at papers holistically and measure their quality by their overall success in using writing to advance a conversation.

We have included a similar set of descriptions for semester grades. Once again, the grade descriptions supplied below should be regarded as starting points for determining students' semester grades, not as fixed, inflexible criteria. You should

base semester grade decisions on the student's level of achievement and decide how you personally would best be able to measure that. We have included recommended methods of grading in the section "Grade Calculation and Management."

We discourage you from using the D grade, which can connote a paradoxical mix of both passing and not passing (technically, a student who earns a D has "passed" the course, per university rules). On papers, non-passing grades (F or "NP") should be addressed with a clear statement of potential consequences of this grade (e.g., "you risk failing the course") and, usually, a concrete plan for addressing these consequences. Students who do not pass your course should know of this possibility well in advance and should have been given some opportunities along the way to address this possibility. A revision policy can help you provide parameters for addressing poor performance on one or two papers.

Participation

Because participation is vital to the work of a writing seminar, many instructors include participation as part of a student's final grade. FYW recommends that instructors weight participation between 10 and 25 percent. Instructors should make their expectations for participation clear early in the semester and in the syllabus, giving students an opportunity to approach the instructor should they have anxiety about participation. Instructors should consider participation as encompassing more than just a student's verbal responses in whole-group discussions, as some students feel more comfortable participating in small-group discussions or through in-class writing. University policy does not permit the use of a system of points based solely on attendance, such as the deduction of a certain number of points for each unexcused absence; however, students who do not attend a class are unable to participate in the work of that session and should understand that their participation grade will reflect their lack of contribution.

Instructors may calculate participation as a cumulative grade at the end of the semester or as a more regularly calculated grade (e.g., a bimonthly participation grade). Some instructors record daily student participation, while others keep sparser notes.

Assessing Multimodal Projects

As part of FYW's Writing Across Technology component, instructors should assign at least one multimodal project (and perhaps more) as part of the work for FYW courses. Even when a multimodal project has not explicitly been assigned, students are increasingly writing for diverse multimedia environments, and

multimodal scholarship is becoming more common in various academic communities. Multimodal writing presents many exciting possibilities for students and instructors. However, for teachers of English steeped in print-centric linguistic practices, approaching and assessing work that expands beyond this one mode of communication can seem daunting.

Sometimes, discomfort with assessing multimodal projects can stem from your own unfamiliarity with certain media, technologies, or ways of knowing. However, it is important to remember that 1) you needn't be an "expert" in a given media or technology in order to respond to or evaluate it, and 2) you already are an expert in some respects. As a teacher of writing and scholar of English or a related field, you have the expertise to assess a variety of texts through close reading, regardless of whether you could produce that text yourself.

That said, students are typically not experts either—in fact, they are likely also far more used to producing traditional alphabetic texts than multimodal ones—and you'll want to keep this in mind as you approach multimodal projects. In general, you should prioritize the learning goals of the project and how students address the rhetorical demands of the assignment above technical proficiency with media or polish—which is to say, you should prioritize the same elements that are most important in a traditional academic essay. That said, there are differences between multimodal projects and traditional alphabetic essays. Here are some guidelines to consider when assessing multimodal projects:

- **Prioritize learning objectives.** Try to grade projects based on how successfully students show that they have achieved the learning objectives of the assignment rather than by focusing on technical elements (e.g., page count, bibliography formatting, camera manipulation, technology quality).
- **Make instructions and evaluative criteria clear.** When assigning multimodal projects, be very clear about your expectations and spend time in class going over examples if possible. It's likely students haven't been asked to do work like this many times before and won't have as much genre knowledge to fall back on. Articulate transparently in assignments how you will assess projects (e.g., whether you will give credit for process writing or what you consider the most important thing for students to accomplish).
- **Emphasize the rhetorical dimensions of technology.** Sometimes it can be easy to be taken up with the spectacle or "cool" factor of multimedia projects. But you should stress, in both your assignment and evaluation, the rhetorical aspects of these elements. Is the student using these

elements for a good reason? Does the medium or genre of text support the goal of the project?

- **Include process writing.** Process writing (asking students to describe and analyze the choices they made while writing) is a great way for students to reflect and learn. It also may be helpful in assessing whether they are using technology rhetorically and meeting the assignment's learning goals. Additionally, it can give you important information when a student is using a technology that you are not familiar with, such as how time-consuming the process is or what some of the technology's limitations are.
- **Communicate.** Invite students to discuss with you, in and out of class, what your expectations are. If you haven't explicitly assigned a multimodal project but are open to students attempting them, make it clear that you would like to negotiate how you will address things like required page counts or use of sources before the project is handed in.
- **Use resources available to you.** FYW is happy to help you with specific questions you may have. Contact the FYW office at: firstyearwriting@uconn.edu.

Grade Calculation and Management

Be sure to submit grades at two points in the semester. At the end of Week 6, you must submit DFUN grades via PeopleSoft (instructions will be sent in FYW's weekly digest). This is a university requirement for all 1000- and 2000-level courses. These grades serve as fair warning to students in danger of failing the course and alert their advisors to the issue as well. You will also need to submit grades via PeopleSoft at the end of the semester, no later than the Registrar's deadline (you'll receive a reminder in our FYW Weekly Digests). Some instructors use Excel or HuskyCT to organize and calculate grades throughout the semester. For more information, consult with FYW or see the [HuskyCT guide on its grading resources](#).

Instructors use a number of ways to record and calculate grades. We have outlined a few below:

- **Letter grades.** Some instructors assign letter grades for both assignments and the semester. The advantage of assigning letter grades is that it allows instructors to refer to more general criteria without feeling the need to assign point values to certain items. Instructors may indicate what qualities they see projects in the A range as achieving, B range, etc. Further, some instructors then may use their special knowledge about students to observe if the student has made significant improvement consistently later in the semester; if a student, for example, receives a C, B, and two A-'s on

their papers over the course of the semester, the instructor may award them with an A- at the end if they so choose and if they feel it is accurate (and if the student's in-class work has additionally been A-level) to reflect the current achievements of the student's writing. The downside to this method is that students (and some instructors) may feel that it is overly subjective. It is also difficult at times to account for new significant problems not anticipated in an instructor's evaluation criteria.

- **Numerical or point-based grading.** Some instructors assign number grades for each assignment. The advantage of this method is that it allows grades to reflect a precise understanding of the work of the paper. A paper that falls between B+ and B quality work might merit a grade of 86, for example, which eliminates the need to make a choice between the two letter grades. The downside of this method is that the use of such fine distinctions can run the risk of seeming arbitrary—it can be difficult to justify the difference between a 91 and a 92. Similar effects can attend the use of number grades to calculate the semester grade; this method makes it easy to determine a student's average grade, but can obscure the nuances of other considerations, such as improvement over the course of the semester. *Instructors making use of number grades are encouraged to think carefully and holistically about the student's level of achievement in the course when determining semester grades, rather than relying entirely on the numerical average.*
- **Contract grading.** In a [contract grading system](#), student work is assessed less on *quality* than on *labor*. Students must meet certain explicit benchmarks and they will receive an agreed-upon grade; how “good” the finished product is doesn't really matter. There are a few main reasons that people use this approach, one of these being that it avoids the grades-as-carrot-and-stick mentality. Another reason is that it sidesteps the problem of making subjective decisions ("Is this a B+ or A-?") and contested grades. Many professional communicators observe that this is how writing actually works in the world: You don't often receive grades on writing outside of school; what matters is that the writing *gets done*. Some argue contract grading is *fairer* than other grading systems, especially for students of color, multilingual students, students with disabilities, or students from marginalized populations, because hegemonic and normative assumptions are "baked in" to almost all traditional concepts of grading and what counts as "good" writing. Some instructors (and students) feel that contract grading removes incentive to produce strong work, although there's also evidence that suggests grades do little to promote student learning and, in many cases, actually decrease motivation.

- **Portfolios.** Some instructors base semester grades on a final portfolio, in which students revise and collect their own papers into a portfolio that is then used as the sole grade for determining the semester grade. Students may have received grades on their papers throughout the course, but the only one that will be factored into the semester grade will be the final portfolio. Some instructors include portfolio assignments as a final paper assignment without using it as the only grade for the semester, as well. The advantage of the portfolio grading method is that it allows students to revise their papers and reflect on them, and it allows the instructor to view their work collectively when determining the semester grade. The final revision allows students to utilize skills they may have developed later in the semester on earlier papers, thereby potentially more accurately reflecting their end-of-semester achievements in writing. The drawback to this method is that students may feel overwhelmed by such a final assignment as they are beginning to become concerned about final exams, and some students will potentially have had more time to devote to the class at the beginning and consequently the pedagogical narrative of growth over time may not hold.

Regardless of the model that you decide to use, it is important to be consistent and transparent. Together, your grades and comments should help students to understand how they are doing in the course.

Assigning Project Grades: A Starting Point

As the section above demonstrates, FYW doesn't have a universally required system for grading. Instead, instructors are encouraged to reflect critically on which system will be most fair, transparent, and practical in their course and also which system will most support student learning. As a result, it can be difficult to provide stable definitions for what grades should "mean" in every course context. The guidelines below are meant to serve as a starting point and one model for a framework you might use to assess students. Although these guidelines are not universally, it is important that you have some clear assessment framework in place before you evaluate students and also that you communicate that explicitly to your students.

A: Student completes all required assignment elements, including scaffolding, revision, and process activities. Responds energetically and creatively in a sustained way to the assignment as well as to feedback from classmates and the instructor. Contributes meaningfully to the course inquiry and engages other authors/texts responsibly. Demonstrates rhetorical awareness, including

appropriate appeals to the project's audience(s) and effective use of genre and/or conventions. Can show metacognition of writing process and choices through any of the project's reflective components.

B: Student completes all required assignment elements, including scaffolding, revision, and process activities. Attempts to respond to the assignment sheet and feedback from classmates and the instructor, though perhaps not energetically or creatively. Responds to the course inquiry, but may not make a particularly original contribution. Makes an effort to engage other authors/texts responsibly, though not always successfully. Shows some degree of rhetorical awareness, but could have made more effective choices. Can show metacognition of writing process and choices through any of the project's reflective components.

C: Student completes some, but not all, of the required assignment elements, (including scaffolding, revision, and process activities) but still completes drafts of the project. Responds to the assignment in many respects, but not in certain key ways. Does not always respond to feedback from classmates and the instructor. Responds to the course inquiry but overlooks key concepts. Engages other authors/texts in some way, but not critically or responsibly; documentation of research may be faulty or missing. Exhibits inconsistent levels of rhetorical awareness, including choices that may work against the project's purposes. Completes project's reflective components but does not demonstrate metacognition of writing decisions or process.

F: Student does not complete many required assignment elements or else fails to turn in a draft (either a first draft or revised draft). Does not make a good faith effort to respond to the assignment and ignores feedback from classmates and the instructor. Does not respond to course inquiry or disregards class materials/texts. Misrepresents authors in problematic ways; fails to do or document research entirely. Shows little to no rhetorical awareness, including choices that compromise the project's purpose. Does not demonstrate metacognition or fails to address project's reflective components.

Supplemental Materials

For more information on how, when, and why to respond to student work, examples of grading scales, and sample papers please see both the Responding to Student Work and Instructor Materials folders of the [Supplemental Materials](#).

Other Resources

- [General Information about Grades](#)
- [HuskyCT Grading Help](#)
- [Instructions for Submitting Final Grades](#)
- [2009 FYW Program Assessment Report](#)

Resources

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