Making Research Personal

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University of Denver

Who Are We?

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What Are We Doing?

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Agenda

'Personal' Approaches to Pedagogy

Course Philosophy and Design

Write

A Qualitative Research Unit

An Individual Podcast Assignment

Write

Share & Discuss

Context

DU and the Writing Program

WRIT 1133 - Writing and Research

Student perceptions and the location of research writing in their lives

Writing and Research Goals and Requirements

At the end of WRIT 1133, students will:

- Demonstrate practical knowledge of academic research traditions (for example, text-based/interpretive; measurement-based/empirical; and observational/qualitative) through effectively writing in at least two of those traditions.

- Demonstrate practical understanding of appropriate rhetorical choices in writing for specific academic audiences or disciplines and specific popular, civic, or professional audiences, through both analysis and performance.

- Demonstrate proficiency in finding, evaluating, synthesizing, critiquing, and documenting published sources appropriate to given rhetorical situations.

- Have completed 20-25 pages of polished prose across at least three formal projects.

Challenging Traditional Approaches and Attitudes

The "Academic Research Paper" is . . .

Patching together what sources say--a lit review without a purpose (Harris, 2010)

An 'argument with sources'--begs for cherry-picking (Harris, 2010)

Impersonal, serious, hard, boring, tedious, and the opposite of personal or creative writing (Students, since the dawn of the research paper)

"[T]his frustration is a shared frustration; students want their own voices to be present in the paper. [...] They want the voice to be authentic, but the way that they have conceptualized or understand [...] academic research creates a struggle for many to achieve what they feel is an authentic piece of research" (Detmering & Johnson, 2012).

The problem with the "Academic Research Paper":

- The goal of these projects is **not actually self-discovery or meaning-making**, rather plugging in *other people's* ideas & words while avoiding plagiarism

- Students **struggle to express their own voice** while conforming to what they believe is "authentic research writing"

- Correctness of form is emphasized over *purpose* of "forming"

- Even after years of practice, their writing still comes across as disorganized and deficient

Making research personal can disrupt students' negative attitudes and address some pitfalls of traditional research writing.

What we mean by PERSONAL [1]

Not about composing traditional personal or expressive essays, but cultivating personal engagement with research and writing. Personal approaches to pedagogy:

- Respect and welcome students as PEOPLE with diverse personal and academic experiences, who face both shared and unique challenges, and may have radically different perspectives on research writing and its location in their lives

- Emphasize student inquiry, agency, authority, and creativity

- Encourage students to draw on their existing content, process, and rhetorical knowledge; see their experiences as valid; and realize that their (well-informed) opinions are worth sharing

- Ask students to find meaning and motivation for their work beyond 'the grade'

What we mean by PERSONAL

Can include, but often doesn't require, personal disclosure. (Students should have options.)
We've asked students to write about:

- Personal experience as context-setting, evidence, or rhetorical appeal

- Topics of their passion or topics they haven't studied at all but are genuinely curious about

- Topics that are 'good for them' in terms of their well-being or even self-interest

We can introduce more personal approaches from the level of course philosophy down to in-class activities.

Restoring Student Agency
Through Course Design

LP Picard

What can we accomplish in 10 weeks?

Personal Pedagogical Goals

What drives my teaching is the hope that:

- Students will become more **critical and socially aware readers** of their world.
- Through thorough inquiry, rhetorical analysis, and reflective writing, students will learn to **take ownership of their ideas**.
- Students will transition from simply *capturing* another author's idea to **confidently *joining*** rich academic and civic conversations.

"What are we doing and why are we doing it?"

New course priorities:

1) I'm inviting students to **join** the conversation by *grappling* with their topic and the sources they are working with, and

2) I'm encouraging students to view *research* as something other than rote performance . . . to view it as a creative **process** of inquiry and knowledge-building, of both unraveling and building, of piquing and satisfying curiosity.

The Interpretive Constellation Essay

WRIT 1133: Writing & Research

First 3 Weeks of the Course: Exposure + Invention

We spend the first three weeks looking at some **models** of both published and student examples:

1. TED Talk : Joshua Foer's "Feats of Memory Anyone Can Do"

2. **Features**: *RadioLab's* "Falling" (Sept. 19, 2010) *+ student work*

3. **Memoir**: Molly Birnbaum's *Season to Taste + student work*

4. **Notes**: a la Susan Sontag, but Maggie Nelson's *Bluets + (LOTS of) student work*

5. **Footnotes**: David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster" + *student work*

6. **Popular Research Nonfiction**: Aziz Ansari's *Modern Romance* *

7. Hybrids: *student work*

Weeks 3-8: Generating Material & Mini Projects

MP #1—Source Constellation

MP #2—Staging a Conversation (putting 2+ of those sources into conversation)

> *Draft 1 is due here—2 pages of "content" (to get a sense of their genre and voice) and then detailed*
>
> *outline of essay that begins to forward their 10 sources.*

MP #3—Content Analysis

MP #4—Qualitative Findings

MP #5—Arrangement Activity

> *Draft 2 is due here—fully rendered 10+ pages*

Outcomes

1. Students are the driving *agents* in their inquiry throughout the entire course.

2. Though the goal is a single essay, the process encourages **versatility** and genre awareness.

3. The structure of the class invites students to reimagine the nature of **research** itself...

    a. To view research as an **active**, **ongoing** process—not just the trip to the library (or library website), and not just the problematic "academic paper"

    b. To appreciate that there are various and overlapping **purposes** of research.

Works Consulted

Brannon, Lil et al. "The Five-Paragraph Essay and the Deficit Model of Education." *English Journal.* 2008

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives.* (1945)

Detmering, Robert & Anna Marie Johnson. "'Research Papers Have Always Seemed Very Daunting': Information Literacy Narrative and the Student Research Experience." *Libraries and the Academy.* 2012.

Gorzelsky, Gwen. "Working Boundaries: From Student Resistance to Student Agency." *College Composition and Communication.* (2009)

Harris, Rena M. "The Research Paper in the 12th Grade Classroom: Privileging Product Over Process." [Dissertation] University of Pennsylvania. 2010.

Kim, Miseon & Michael Dolan. "'Excuse Me, but What Is a Research Paper?': Embedded Librarian Program and Information Literacy Skills of Community College Students." *Community & Junior College Libraries.* 2015.

WRITE

Part A: Out of all the course goals you need to address—and of all the skills, understandings, and mindsets that you'd love to impart—which 2-3 do you want to prioritize?

Part B: How might you present these goals to students in positive and personally meaningful terms?

Cultivating Autoethnographic Authority

"As cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis, autoethnographies promote self and social reflection as well as establish compassionate classroom communities."

Camangian, 2010

April Chapman-Ludwig

Autoethnography and Authority

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005).

It is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

Ethnographic Authority results from being able to present details and insights that only the writer would know, because the writer was there and readers weren't. The knowledge that ethnography produces emerges from the relationships formed among writers and readers. (Kahn, 2011)

My Story to *Their* Story to *Our* Story

Autoethnography is a culmination of many acts and reflects culture through the performance of *my* story, *their* story, and *our* story. Students create their *autoethnographic authority* by placing their narrative into the larger subculture's story.

Scaffolding assignments around multiple narratives:

Weeks 1-2: **Artifact Vignette** (*My* Story)

Weeks 3-6: **Literature Review** (Their Story)

Weeks 6-8: **Participant Profiles** w/ Interviews & Observation (Their Story)

Weeks 8-10: **Autoethnography** (Our Story)

Beginning with *My* Story: Artifact Vignette

Vignettes are short, impressionistic scenes that focus on one moment or give a trenchant impression about a character, an idea, an artifact or a setting.

Step 1: Choose an artifact connected to your subculture
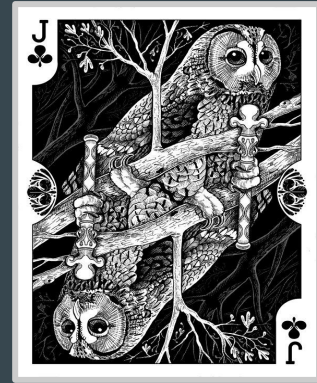
Step 2: In a paragraph, describe the artifact using figurative language.

Step 3: In a couple paragraphs, describe an important moment in your past when this artifact played a prominent role.

My Student's Story: An Example

The soft pasteboard feels warm in my hands. It nests in the crook between the pad of the thumb and the valleys of the remaining digits. It is an object in fluid motion. It is hard, yet soft. Rough, and yet smooth: a paradox.

A singular object comprised of a multitude of smaller, weaker components. An infant would find ease if they were so inclined to destroy a single unit. And yet, place 52 of these flimsy constituents together and herculean resistance is easily encountered.

The state of the deck easily mimics your own evolution through sentience. Starting off strong, clean and crisp, stalwart to be put to use. However, after the days and years pile one, grime accumulates around the rim, getting bent, dented, and stained, but efficacy isn't depleted.

The Podcast Project:
Materiality, Stealth Qualitative Methods, & a Metacognitive Moment

Zoe Tobier

Lynda Barry, *What It Is,* 2008

Motivating the Project: The Community Partnership

1. Meeting with our partner, the Vicki Myhren Gallery on the University of Denver's campus, to discuss their community outreach needs

2. Screen "model" podcasts

3. Gallery visit (review note-taking strategies, including taking photo notes)

4. Q&A meeting with our partner liaison
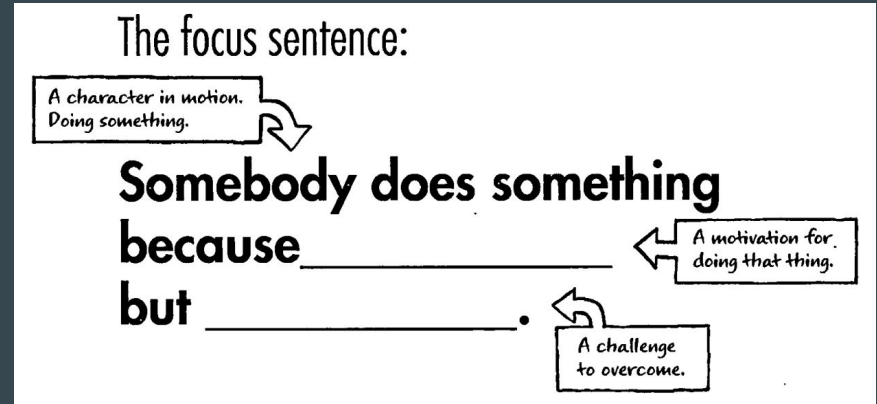
Defining, Exploring, and Generating a Plan

1. Post-gallery visit homework: individual idea generation
2. In-class activity: **design charette**
3. Project group alignment
4. Post-alignment homework: Group project proposal, including pitch/focus sentence

Michael Graves Architecture & Design
(not actual DU students)

Producing and Editing the Project

1. Identify interviewees

2. Identify audio and visual archival material

3. Script first draft

4. Design interviews (write questions, practice)

5. Conduct and transcribe/evaluate interviews

6. Revise script (iterative process -- keep returning to the pitch/focus sentence)

7. Compose/edit using Audacity, Adobe Audition or other audio editor

The focus sentence:

A character in motion. Doing something.

Somebody does something because_____ A motivation for doing that thing.

but _____. A challenge to overcome.

I'm doing a story about X. Topic
And what's interesting about it is Y. Story

Jessica Abel, *Out on the Wire: the Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*, 2015

Esther: After talking with Maria and getting such an interesting perspective on social practice art today, we were curious about how art and its relationship with social justice has changed over time. Has art always been so political? Or is its role in community building and politics a newfound phenomenon?

*Insert clip of John answering question 5

Sierra: Coming back to the idea of appropriation that is so prevalent in art today, we thought a lot about controversial the pieces of art we studied in class, particularly Dana Schutz's piece "Open Casket". The issue of white artists choosing to represent marginalized groups within their art is an important topic to explore, and since Maria does a lot of social practice art in which she goes into communities that are not her own, we wanted to ask her how she approached these issues in a productive and respectful way and what kind of impact she expects to make with these types of projects.

*Insert clip of Maria discussing question 6 and/or 8

Left: Student work from WRIT 1633-1, Spring 2018
Top: Maria Molteni
Bottom: photo of Dana Schutz's *Open Casket*, in situ: Michael Bilsborough

WRITE

Which of your course goals could be met, or more deeply attended to, through an autoethnography or similar project in your research writing class? What might the process and product(s) of this assignment look like?

What course goal(s) could be met, or more deeply attended to, through a podcast or similar project in your research writing class? What might the process and product(s) of this assignment look like?

SHARE

In small groups, share your ideas for personal pedagogies and assignments.

Ask one another refining questions and brainstorm more ideas.