MnWE Journal 2.0

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The Minnesota Writing and English Journal Volume Two

MINNESOTA WRITING AND ENGLISH

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MINNESOTA WRITING AND ENGLISH
THE TWIN CITIES (OF MINNEAPOLIS AND ST. PAUL) AND DULUTH, MINNESOTA

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Editor's Introduction

DAVID E BEARD

The second issue of the MNWe Journal reflects the conversations at our conference in three ways.

First, it reflects the presentations, delivered in person and online, at the 2023 and 2024 conferences. We are grateful to the authors and presenters who elaborated on their work for this issue.

Second, it reflects the diverse interests of the conference and its communities — diverse pedagogical approaches, diverse administrative challenges, and multiple genres for sharing insights.

Finally, third, it reflects the geographic and demographic diversity of the organization and its community — from across the spectrum of institutions of higher education, the lived experiences of teachers, and the communities of urban, rural and suburban Minnesota.

We are grateful, too, to you, as our readers, who make this community and its journal possible.

Introduction

LARRY SKLANEY

Dear Reader/Writer/English User,
Welcome to the *MnWE Journal*! The Minnesota Writing & English (MnWE) Conference started because of a meeting that was too darn short. I have not characterized many other meetings that way. The RSP/ITeach Conference of the 2000's drew community and state college faculty from throughout Minnesota but mostly from the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metro to Minneapolis Community and Technical College. RSP stood for "Realizing Student Potential" and ITeach sounded quite current (but with no possible debt to Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak). The too short meeting was the 45 minutes we English types were allotted for a discipline meeting to discuss the state of English in the state of Minnesota. Richard Jewell said we need more time to talk, so let's have a conference, and I said "I'll help," and here we are 18 years and 16 MnWE Conferences later (MnWE launched in 2009 and took a year off for a pandemic) thanks to the energy and commitment of so many conference participants and members of the organizing committee.
I'm proud we have kept MnWE affordable and friendly. Our hardy regional conference is more about conversation than three presenters in succession putting their heads down and reading papers and then everyone trying to look smart by remembering a point from a half hour ago—though we hope we encourage and prepare people to engage in those more traditional, more formal academic conferences.
We've tried our best to expand the talking circle since that discipline meeting in one large classroom at MCTC. We provide a venue for exchange between faculty in different sorts of academic settings: high schools; community colleges, technical colleges, *and* community and technical colleges; for-profit schools; public and private universities. We invite writers and community members not affiliated with an academic institution to join the discussion. Undergraduates, grad students, part- and full-time faculty (as consequential yet artificial as that distinction can be in the labor we do for learning), and professors in their various ranks may connect through MnWE even if those professional barriers between Writing and English people are less likely to be crossed in other circumstances.

ESOL teachers, Reading instructors, and Librarians have brought their perspectives to the conference. This year at the University of Wisconsin—River Falls (our first venture outside Minnesota), a Counselor, a Professor of Psychological Sciences, and a Sociology graduate student spoke on our plenary panels. 40% of 2025 conference participants were from Wisconsin, and Illinois, Iowa and the Dakotas have also been well-represented over the years. English teachers visiting the University of Regina from Shanghai International Studies University attended our conference, and I count that as a twofer of China and Canada! This year, scholars visiting the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities from Kazakhstan presented in a breakout session.

This *MnWE Journal* continues and makes an enduring contribution to the lively conversations we enjoy at the conference. Like all things MnWE, it relies on the efforts of conference participants and the people who donate their time to helping MnWE grow into the future. I'm so glad I volunteered. You could, too! We hope you find the *MnWE Journal* stimulating and consider submitting to new editions and attending or continuing to attend the conference. See you in 2026 at Winona State University.

PRESENTATIONS AT THE MNWE CONFERENCES, 2023-2024

Feedback First Classrooms: Rethinking Grades in College English

JACQUELINE HERBERS

How many of us have had conversations with students in which the only goal was to clarify how we assigned points, percentages, or grades to individual assignments or to the overall course? It was years ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday. I had just handed back graded essays in one of my first-year composition courses, and almost immediately one of my students approached me with a concern about her grade. The essays were worth a total of 25 points, and the student earned 24 points. She set the essay down in front of me, pointed to the total, and asked why I had "taken off" that one point. At first, I was speechless, but after several minutes of a back-and-forth with the student, I just gave in and let her have a perfect score on the essay.

After that experience, I thought, *What have we done to our students when they are so worried about one point? Surely, there must be a better way to do this.*

I soon learned I was not the only instructor in my department frustrated with the usual ways we grade student writing, and yes, I mean rubrics–especially rubrics that lead to final grades. One of my colleagues, Dr. Susan Cosby Ronnenberg, had stumbled across the work of Jesse Stommel and Susan Blum and read their ideas regarding reducing or eliminating grades in the classroom. She shared these ideas with me, and I soon found myself piloting "ungrading" in one of my classes. After that experience, I was hooked. The very next semester, I went as gradeless as possible in all my courses.

In her book *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, Blum writes:

> My reasons for wanting to get rid of grades were numerous: I felt as if my students were fixated on grades above all else. In fact, as

> I reported in my book, students told the research team that 'the purpose of college is to get good grades.' Most faculty conversations with students include some discussion of grades: What do you want? What do I have to do to get an A? How can I improve my grade? What are the criteria for grades? And the professor takes on the role of judge rather than coach, acting as all-controlling widget producer instead of companion on the road of learning…Everything focused on pleasing the professor. (54-55)

Is that the purpose of college? Are students not in school to *learn*? Blum, of course, argues that no, that is not the purpose of college, and that people are perfectly capable of and enjoy learning in various settings without being graded (56). So why do we continue to grade?

I wish I had a list of answers, but honestly, I do not. What I do have is information I found on the problem of grades and ways I tried to address those problems in my own classroom as I transitioned to focusing on providing feedback first, that is, providing as much feedback as possible on student work before we ever discuss grades.

Definition of Grades

Let us begin by defining grades; what are they? Many of us are probably grading student work in some way and think we could have a simple, straightforward answer to this question. We could generate responses related to grading scales, rubrics, and objectivity. If a student gets all A's in their classes, what does that mean? We might say the student showed up, did the work, followed the directions, submitted all their work on time, studied hard for tests, and spoke up or participated in class, but does it mean they learned how to become sophisticated writers and thinkers? Stommel argues that the invention of grades has a more negative origin and intent when he states, "An 'objective' approach to grading was created so systematized schooling could scale–so students could be neatly ranked and sorted into classrooms with desks in rows in increasingly large warehouse-like buildings" (26). Ranking and sorting. That does not sound like something

I want to be part of as I try to help each of my students become better readers, writers, and thinkers.

The Problem with Grades

Education researchers who have started to rethink the way we assess student work raise numerous concerns with grades, but I will focus on three. First, grades alone are not helpful feedback to the students and do not provide adequate information regarding student learning and progress. Blum, Stommel, and Blackwelder all argue that providing students with written or verbal feedback on their work is more effective than relying on rubrics and grades to communicate that information. In fact, Blackwelder compares his own experiences with providing grades and comments on papers to the findings of Ruth Butler's 1988 study. Butler found that students who received only comments consistently outperformed students who received only grades or grades plus comments. Blackwelder confirmed this in his own classroom: providing only comments helped students focus on the learning and improving the work rather than focusing on getting a good grade, which works to reinforce their identity as either a success or a failure (Blackwelder 46-47).

Second, while they give the appearance of fairness and objectivity, grades are actually neither. Blum states:

> students see the rules as arbitrary and inconsistent. Different professors have different scoring — participation, homework, teamwork or no teams, tests, showing your work, partial credit — all which appear to be plucked out of thin air and make no sense, as I found in my research on plagiarism. Citations? Sharing? Page length? Number of quotes? Consult notes or closed book? Students have to figure out in each case what the professor wants. It all seems arbitrary, and therefore unconnected with anything meaningful or real. (56-57)

And, even if we think using a rubric helps us grade each individual paper objectively, we are kidding ourselves. As Johnson points out, all our decisions about writing are wholly subjective, and students are aware of this. For

example, it is much easier for a student to argue with an English instructor for more points on an essay than to argue with a math or science instructor to mark correct a test question they marked wrong. There just are not a lot of wrong answers when it comes to writing.

Finally, grades are not an effective way to motivate students, and grades stifle creativity and risk-taking. Blum and Stommel both argue that this turns our classes into a means to an end. Students do the assignments to get a grade rather than learn and grow. Stommel points to a quote from Peter Elbow: "'Grading tends to undermine the climate for teaching and learning. Once we start grading their work, students are tempted to study or work for the grade rather than for the learning'" (qtd. in "How to Ungrade" 25). In other words, the student's real goal is to do whatever necessary to get a good grade, which does not always reflect any meaningful learning or knowledge. Sackstein agrees with this by stating, "Even high grades end the learning process as placing a label on learning as an act of completion. It is a judgment that says the work is done enough to be scored. If we want students to keep pushing, revising, learning, we must continue to provide feedback without a particular grade" (78). As a result, we need to change our practices to help students become more than "compliant players in the game of school" (Sackstein 78).

A Critical Pedagogy Foundation

Most of us in the humanities are familiar with Paulo Freire and his work with Brazilian working-class citizens as documented in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In it, he argues that education should go beyond providing people with functional literacy, a kind of literacy that allows them to function in their current place in society. Instead, it should also develop people's critical literacy skills by empowering people to develop a "critical consciousness" in which they can read both the word and the world. This kind of education should enable people to understand power relations and societal structures, see their place in those structures, and influence changes in those structures. In a 1999 interview, critical literacy theorist Ira Shor, who also co-authored research with Freire, argued that "Wherever human experience includes a meaningful encounter with texts…then

rhetoric has subject matter to examine. Thus, a writing class is really about critically studying our social experiences with discourses broadly conceived" (qtd. in Tinberg 169). In other words, the writing classroom should be centered on the notion that students need to understand the way language both shapes and is shaped by particular social norms and should empower students to use their own language to influence and change those norms.

For educators, this idea should go beyond just deciding which assignments to give students. Developing a critical consciousness should be an assignment we give *ourselves* to use our own research and writing to examine social structures, not to just negatively criticize, but to also offer thoughtful suggestions for improvement that benefit both our students and society in general. Stommel argues:

> …grades are the biggest and most insidious obstacle to education. And they are the thorn in the side of critical pedagogy. John Holt writes in *Instead of Education* that competitive schooling, grades, and credentials 'seem to me the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions.' Agency, dialogue, self-actualization, and social justice are not possible (or at least, unlikely) in a hierarchical system that pits teachers against students and encourages competition by ranking students against one another. (27-28)

But how do we combat the factory or banking model of education, which is transactional in nature? We can begin to refocus our own students' attention on learning and developing metacognition skills rather than obtaining grades or playing the game of college.

In my doctoral program, I came across the Latin root of assessment, which is "assidere," and means "to sit beside." This succinctly represents my own view of assessment. I have revised the way I teach to become someone who sits beside the learner and focuses on their needs, guiding and supporting them as they grow in their knowledge and skills. This view of teaching and learning is not new or unusual. As Backvelder states, "Learning is something done alongside others, not something imposed on them. If the learning is essential, then students need to be pushed until they get it. What makes teaching difficult is that it requires the teacher to care for the student and see value in the student. Because what is truly important is the child, and this is the lesson that must be learned" (50). Here, Blackwelder reminds

instructors that their goal should be to support and care for each student to push them to do the work of learning.

What is "Feedback First?"

As a result of my desire to work with and beside students as they learn, I created my own steps for helping students through this process in my classes, but I took inspiration from both Blum and Stommel, which became my feedback first approach. I should note here that the term "feedback first" is not my own. In the private Facebook group Grow Beyond Grades, I read that a group of high school teachers who were going gradeless were using the term in their letters to parents, and I thought it represented my ideas quite well also. My system requires students to set their own goals, track their own growth and progress through reflections, and propose their own grades at the mid-term and final points in the semester.

At the start of the semester, I use the syllabus as a place to introduce my evaluation philosophy and methodology to my students (see Appendix A). In these paragraphs, I explain to students that I will not assign grades to individual assignments, but instead, I will provide them with feedback regarding what they are doing well and what they can improve. They can use those comments to either revise the current assignment or apply them to the next assignment; it is their choice. My university still requires a formal final course grade, though, so I do explain to students at the start of the semester the way that grade is determined as well. I have experimented with self-evaluations in both portfolio and essay forms and have not yet determined which one works best (see Appendix B). However, for both, students propose their own grade based on the descriptive grading criteria I provide in the syllabus (see Appendix A), and they provide evidence from their own learning to support their grade proposal. I collect those at the end of the semester and meet with each student in a conference to chat about their self-evaluations and, if needed, negotiate that final grade.

After introducing students to this kind of evaluation in the syllabus, I spend time in the first few weeks of class discussing with them grading and various approaches to grading student work. I have used several articles as a basis

for these discussions, but two I share most often include "Grades Hinder Learning. What Should Professors Use Instead?" by Beckie Supiano, and Stommel's "Ungrading: An Introduction." Both provide a concise overview of the problem with grades and offer alternative assessment practices. For most of my students, reading these articles is the first time they have ever considered the idea that grades are a social construct, and as with any social construct, we can change it if it is not working.

The final step I take in setting up the course at the start of the semester is to ask students to write two learning goals and create a goals-tracking chart (see Appendix C). For this assignment, students have the opportunity to think about what they personally want to learn from the course instead of always focusing on what I want them to learn. They spend a little time reading the syllabus, previewing readings and assignments, and skimming the texts, and then they generate two goals they work on for the first eight weeks. At the start of each week, they write what they plan to do that week to work on each of those two goals. Then, they put that plan into action and reflect on their progress at the end of the week. At mid-term, they include their progress on their goals in their self-evaluations or portfolios; then, they reset their goals for the second half of the semester and include progress on those in their final evaluations.

Throughout the semester, I integrate additional opportunities for students to think about their own learning and growth by asking them to write reflections at the end of each unit. The following are examples of questions I ask:

- What did you learn about your topic?
- What did you learn about yourself as a reader, writer, and researcher?
- What were your successes?
- What were your obstacles, and how did you overcome them?
- If you had to do the assignment over again, what would you do the same, what would you do differently, and why?
- Take five minutes to track your writing goals for this week.
- How did working on these goals help you with this assignment?

My hope here is that by the end of the semester, they will have developed the language to clearly and concisely describe their skills and knowledge. This helps them move beyond saying, "I am good at writing because I got an A

in English" to saying, "I am a skillful writer because I can make a claim and support it with appropriate evidence," or whatever they identify as their own strengths.

Feedback First Is Not Contract Grading

To better understand what feedback first is, it might be helpful to also explain what it is not. In Blum's book, the term "ungrading" encompasses a range of practices instructors can implement to de-emphasize grades in their classrooms. Among them is probably one of the most recognized forms of going gradeless: contract grading (Katapodis and Davidson 105-122). Using this method, instructors create a contract that contains a set of criteria required for students to achieve an A, B, C, etc. in the course, and students contract for their desired grade at the start of the semester. If they fulfill the requirements of the contract, they earn the grade. The advantage of contract grading is that students decide how much work they want to do in the semester (111).

An enthusiastic advocate of contract grading, Asao Inoue, takes it one step further and works with his students at the start of the course to negotiate and agree upon the contract. In his view, because grading students' writing against a standard perpetuates white language supremacy (5), "*It's better to separate the course grade from how and what students learn in the course*" (126). His labor-based grade contract, then, is comprised of four main elements: participation and attendance, submitting assignments on time, submitting complete assignments, and attempting all the work (127). He requires students to track their own labor using a spreadsheet, and he has provisions for the unexpected, such as when a student fails to meet contract requirements or when a student exceeds labor expectations.

Feedback first, however, is different from contract grading in that students' grades are not determined at the start of the semester, and the student does need to provide evidence of progress toward the course learning outcomes as opposed to the labor-based grade. I share many of the same concerns Inoue has, though, regarding outcomes and have asked myself his same question, "… but do our grades really measure outcomes that students have

learned?" (190). This is why I might experiment with contract grading in the future, but for now, I ask students to use their mid-term and final self-evaluations as places to provide and explain their own evidence for meeting the course learning outcomes. This helps me understand why students made particular choices about the language they used to address a certain audience or the decisions they made to include or exclude source information when crafting an argument. Finally, as I state in the next section, "Successes and Challenges," it helps students articulate what they think are their own writing skills and strengths.

Successes and Challenges

So, what have I learned so far? I see both successes and areas that could improve.

The most important success of focusing on feedback first is that in their self-evaluations, students share with me the learning I would never know from reading one of their papers. For example, in the learning outcomes for every writing course I teach, getting the students to understand the relationship between audience and purpose is included. The self- evaluations allow me to see if the students can articulate this relationship, and they often do. For example, in one of my journalism courses, I asked students to work in groups to write a magazine geared toward an audience of their choice. One group chose to write helpful articles for their fellow college students. In their final course self-evaluation, one of the students in that group admitted that writing the feature article for the magazine was when they finally understood what it meant to write for a specific audience. They stated that their focus on hiking as an inexpensive and fun way to de-stress was ideal for college students who usually do not have extra money to spend. At the end of their explanation, they indicated that by finally understanding how to tailor a piece of writing to meet the needs of the audience, they had the confidence to do that in future writing assignments. By stating their own thoughts on the audience/purpose relationship, the student most likely learned more than if I had simply assigned a grade to their feature article.

I often wonder, *Should the grade include the learning that students encounter beyond the learning outcomes*? This is the gap that self-evaluations fill. For example, I would never include a learning outcome like "Students will demonstrate spiritual growth in the writing process" in any of my syllabi. However, in their self-evaluation, one of my journalism students reflected on conducting an interview in which they were surprised by the spiritual aspects the interviewee brought to the conversation. They felt this gave their writing purpose and reminded them to be peaceful. This is the learning beyond the outcomes that I could not ever predict but is just as or even more important than any aim established at the beginning of the course, and in completing a self-evaluation, it can be included in the student's grade.

A few students, though, especially students in my general education courses who are in majors that are hyper grade-focused, stated they did not "enjoy having to argue for their own grade." These comments came several semesters ago and reminded me to be even clearer about the purpose of self-evaluations and portfolios. I want students to use those as opportunities to critically reflect on their own learning and develop the language needed to articulate their own skills and growth areas. Based on these comments, my worry is that students may not see it that way and could still view it as a hoop to jump through to get a good grade.

Lingering Questions

After almost four years of using feedback first assessment practices, I am by no means an expert yet and still have several lingering questions I shall investigate going forward. For example, I know that when the education system elevates the importance of grades and emphasizes the need to obtain high marks above all else, this can cause stress and anxiety in students. I wonder, though, when I de-emphasize grades in my class, does that help or worsen student anxiety related to grades, especially when students know they will still get a final course grade? In addition, while I do everything I can to show students the value of the learning that happens in my classroom, what if that is not enough to motivate some students? What if a student is not intrinsically motivated to learn but does genuinely need some kind of extrinsic motivation? How can they be accommodated? Finally, grades are

ingrained in our schema for "school;" we have used them for so long that they seem inevitable and even necessary. Even though there is a growing population of teachers, professors, and administrators who think differently, how difficult would it be to make permanent changes? While all the answers are not clear yet, it is imperative that educators keep working to reform the system so all students see the value of learning.

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Appendix A

Example Feedback First Syllabus Statements

Please note: The Descriptive Grading Criteria I use is adapted from Susan Blum's work.

Evaluation Method

I use an unconventional method of evaluation called "ungrading." This means you will not receive formal letter grades from me for individual writing assignments. Instead, I will use a feedback sheet to provide comments regarding your writing strengths and suggestions for improvement. You will

also receive feedback from your peers during peer-review sessions. You can then use those suggestions to revise your work. In addition, you will start the course by creating your own two learning goals and action plan. Then, you will write informal reflections at the end of each unit in which you log your progress toward those goals and state what you learned in that unit.

For this course, you will compile all you have learned into a Digital Portfolio of Learning and submit that twice: once at mid-term and again at the end of the semester. In that portfolio, you will have the opportunity to propose your own mid-term and final course grade in your Statement of Academic Achievement. Then, you will write reflections and include artifacts to support your statement. At the end of the semester, we will also meet during a grade conference to chat about your portfolio and what you learned during the course. By the end of that conference, you will know your final course grade.

Descriptive Grading Criteria

You must use phrasing from the Descriptive Grading Criteria throughout your Statement of Academic Achievement and Digital Portfolio of Learning, supporting them with concrete evidence from your work. Please feel free to ask for feedback at any point during the term if you want my opinion on your current grade and how you can improve it.

You're not assessing "effort" (i.e. "I worked really hard on this") but "achievement"—and providing concrete evidence from your work to support your claims about your achievement of the learning outcomes.

	· Demonstrates a high level of understanding and mastery of course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/reviewing assignments
A	o **[Insert course learning outcomes here]**
Outstanding	· Exhibits novel (new), insightful, and/or creative ways to show learning **OR** took several risks to try something new and creative
	· Shows frequent evidence of growth, turning weaknesses into strengths
B	· Demonstrates a good grasp of course learning outcomes
Good	· Exhibits a combination of standard and novel/insightful/ creative ways to show learning **OR** took one or two risks to try something new and creative
	· Shows good evidence of growth
C	· Demonstrates a satisfactory grasp of course learning outcomes
Satisfactory	· Exhibits standard ways to show learning **OR** maintained personal status quo regarding risk-taking
	· Shows little evidence of growth
	· Does not show satisfactory grasp of concepts and course learning outcomes
Incomplete	· Provides no evidence of creativity or risk-taking
	· Shows no evidence of growth

Tracking Assignments in Moodle

Even though you will not earn letter grades on individual assignments, I will still use Moodle as a place to track your assignments. Once you have completed an assignment, I will mark it as either "complete" or "incomplete" in Moodle's gradebook. In order for an assignment to be marked "complete," you must at least meet the minimum requirements listed on the assignment sheet. For example, if an assignment requires you to write a full four pages, and you submit only three pages, the assignment is incomplete.

Appendix B

Example Self-evaluation and Learning Portfolio

Please note: My self-evaluations are all based on and adapted from Susan Blum's work.

ENGL 213 Self-Evaluation 2

The point of this assignment is to ask you to use your reflections along with formal and informal writing assignments to make claims about your learning progress this semester. These claims will require evidence to support them from your work and/or readings.

This exercise will probably take you about 1-2 hours. Schedule the time for it. Get comfortable. Assemble your tools (laptop, books, beverage, and a snack).

Task 1: Assemble all your work since the start of the semester with a special focus on work since mid-term. This includes the following:

1. All pre-writing activities including outlines, notes on sources, etc.
2. All notes on class discussions and/or readings, chapter reviews
3. All formal writing assignments with feedback from peers and instructor
4. All formal and informal reflections
5. Goals tracking chart
6. Feedback from Self-evaluation 1

Task 2: Read it all.

Task 3: Please review your progress toward your goals.

1. Did you create new goals at mid-term? If so, what were they? What progress are you making? If you did not create new goals, are you still working on your goals from the start of the semester? What is your progress? Provide evidence.

Task 4: Please answer some questions about your course engagement with and preparations to be successful in this course since mid-term.

1. Approximately how much of the reading did you do? This includes reading assignment and feedback sheets, chapters assigned in the textbook, reviewing resources on Moodle, and reading your own sources for your Researched Argument(s).

- 90-100%
- 75-89%
- 50-74%
- 25-49%
- Less than 25%

2. Did you participate in class discussions? If not, explain why.

3. Were your assignments and activities submitted on time? Include in this your outlines, rough drafts, and peer-reviews. Number of late assignments, if relevant:

4. Did you talk about the class material outside the class?

- All the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

5. Which things did you tend to talk about? To whom?

6. Did you engage with course materials in other ways not already listed?

Task 5: Evaluate your work on Researched Argument 2.

1. What are some of its **strengths**? Provide examples.
2. What are some of its **weaknesses**? Provide examples.
3. Describe your **learning** from any aspects of working on RA 2. What are you taking away from working on this paper?
4. What are some of your **missed opportunities** for learning with this assignment?
    1. If you turned in work late, or incomplete, missed your conference or peer-review, consulted few or no resources—especially the requirements for assignments—you must consider these missed opportunities in your self-evaluation.

Task 6: Evaluate your work on your **News Web Article** and **Magazine Feature Article**.

5. What did you **do well** on these assignments?
6. What were some of your **obstacles**, and how did you overcome them?
7. Describe your **learning** from any aspects of working on these assignments.

Task 7: Address the learning outcomes for the class. Rate yourself according to the scale provided. Explain your ratings in the essay you write in Task 8.

Learning Outcome	Still Working on This	Feel Confident	Hire me now. I'm a professional writer.
Critically read and analyze a variety of texts.			
Invent, draft, revise, and edit effectively for various audiences and purposes, including, but not limited to, researched arguments, news reports, editorials, and features.			
Demonstrate proficiency in the use of bibliographic resources and other research tools to find, incorporate, and properly cite sources, according to MLA or APA style.			
Demonstrate proficiency in writing and editing news and feature articles in AP style.			

Task 8 Essay: Evaluate Your Overall Academic Achievement

In a well-written essay, please propose a letter grade for your work, based on the **Descriptive Grading Criteria** chart at the end of this document. Viterbo recognizes blends of these letters, too, so you may propose, for example, an AB or BC for your work this semester.

In making this self-evaluation of your work for the semester, you are making a debatable claim, just like the ones you're asked to make in writing assignments. You ***will need explicit evidence*** from your own work to illustrate

and support your claims. You should tie your evidence directly to the criteria in the descriptive letter grades chart.

Explain and support your self-evaluation by using direct evidence from your work for the class. Quote from your essay drafts, reflections, peer reviews, etc., OR insert images of the elements you are using to support and/or illustrate your claims. Again, this is just like the evidence, analysis, and interpretation that you are asked to provide in researched argumentative writing assignments. The evidence should primarily come from ***your own writing***.

- You might, for example, show your thesis statement/topic sentences/analysis from the first draft of your Researched Argument 1 or 2 and your final drafts and write about how they differ and why; what do they provide evidence of you learning how to do or do better? Explain what the comparison shows.

- You might, for example, quote writing from a first draft to show how you integrated source material into your own writing and compare that to an excerpt from your final draft to show what your improvement with this convention of academic writing. Explain what the quotes show.

- If you did not make revisions using peer or instructor feedback on drafts, account for that. Explain why.

Please note: I reserve the right to change the grade you've given yourself based on the evidence of your work in both completion and quality in relation to the standards of the class student learning outcomes.

Warning: While I always appreciate your hard work, you should not use hard work or effort as evidence for your grade. (i.e. "I worked really hard on my assignments, so I should get an A.") I will stop reading if your essay makes this argument. You need to evaluate your academic achievement.

Descriptive Grading Criteria

You must use phrasing from the Descriptive Grading Criteria throughout your self-evaluation, supporting it with concrete evidence from your work.

You're not assessing effort (i.e. "I worked really hard on this") but achievement—and providing concrete evidence from your work to support your claims about your achievement of the learning outcomes.

	· Demonstrates a high level of understanding of concepts and mastery of course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/reviewing assignments
A Outstanding	· Exhibits novel (new), insightful, and/or creative ways to show learning **OR** took several risks to try something new and creative · Shows frequent evidence of growth, turning weaknesses into strengths
B Good	· Demonstrates a good grasp of concepts and course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/reviewing assignments · Exhibits a combination of standard and novel/insightful/ creative ways to show learning **OR** took one or two risks to try something new and creative · Shows some evidence of growth
C Satisfactory	· Demonstrates a satisfactory grasp of concepts and meeting course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/reviewing assignments · Exhibits standard ways to show learning **OR** maintained personal status quo regarding risk-taking · Shows little evidence of growth
Incomplete	· Does not show satisfactory grasp of concepts and course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/ reviewing assignments · Provides little to no evidence of learning to make a determination · Shows no evidence of growth

You may write your essay here. Please double-space and use Times New Roman 12pt. font.

ENGL 104 Digital Portfolio of Learning

From the Syllabus:

Throughout the semester, you will use Microsoft OneNote to compile a Digital Portfolio of Learning that will include several components. First, it will include a Statement of Academic Achievement in which you will propose your own grade in relation to the Descriptive Grading Criteria described later in this syllabus. Then, you will include reflections and artifacts from your own learning to support your proposed grade. You will submit this portfolio twice: once at mid-term to determine your mid-term grade and again at the end of the semester to determine your final grade. In addition, we will hold a conference together at the end of the semester to chat about your portfolio and the learning that occurred for you in the course. You will know your final course grade by the end of that conference.

Requirements:

1. Using Microsoft OneNote, you will create an electronic portfolio that helps you build an argument for your course grade.

For Submission 1 at Mid-term:

1. Include a Statement of Academic Achievement

    1. Propose your own grade and tie it to the Descriptive Grading Criteria (table below). You may propose any grade Viterbo recognizes, which includes A, AB, B, BC, and C. If you think you have not met the course expectations by mid-term, you could propose an incomplete, but then we would work together to get you back to a satisfactory grade.
    2. Use concrete evidence from your learning in the course to support your claims

1. Readings
2. Discussions

- Writing (research, process, peer-reviews, etc.)

1. Reflections
2. Feedback from instructor and peers

3. Goals tracking from weeks 2-8

    1. For each Descriptive Grading criterion you write on in your Statement of Academic Achievement, you should include or upload at least one course-related artifact.
    2. Provide an explanation for each artifact articulating how it shows what you learned and connecting it to the Descriptive Grading Criteria.

Descriptive Grading Criteria:

Address all three grading criteria in your Statement of Academic Achievement.

A
 	
Outstanding
	1. Demonstrates a high level of understanding and mastery of course learning outcomes in essays, homework, and in-class writing/reviewing assignments
	    1. Align the writing task with audience, purpose, and context.
	    2. Use appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to support a thesis and unify the work.
	    3. Consistently apply disciplinary conventions, including organization, content, presentation, and style.
	    4. Communicate in direct, error-free language.
	    5. Read analytically
	    6. Consistently support claims with credible, relevant, and appropriate sources.
	2. Exhibits novel (new), insightful, and/or creative ways to show learning **OR** took several risks to try something new and creative
	3. Shows frequent evidence of growth, turning weaknesses into strengths

B Good	1. Demonstrates a good grasp of course learning outcomes 2. Exhibits a combination of standard and novel/insightful/ creative ways to show learning **OR** took one or two risks to try something new and creative 3. Shows good evidence of growth
C Satisfactory	1. Demonstrates a satisfactory grasp of course learning outcomes 2. Exhibits standard ways to show learning **OR** maintained personal status quo regarding risk-taking 3. Shows little evidence of growth
Incomplete	1. Does not show satisfactory grasp of concepts and course learning outcomes 2. Provides no evidence of creativity or risk-taking 3. Shows no evidence of growth

1. Course Engagement Reflection: Answer the following questions.
    1. Have you submitted all your assignments?

1. If you're missing assignments, which ones? What prevented you from submitting them?

    1. Did you submit all your assignments on time?

1. If not, which assignments were late? Explain why.

    1. Did you submit complete assignments?

1. If not, which assignments were incomplete? Explain why.
2. Did you revise and resubmit any incomplete assignments? Explain why.

    1. How many absences do you have? Include absences for any reason such as illness or athletics. Please explain why you were absent and how that affected your learning.
    2. At the start of each class, do you regularly have all your materials out and ready, or do you what until the instructor asks you to get out your class materials? This includes your textbook, notebook and writing utensil, and a computer or tablet (if you're using one).

1. If not, explain what prevents you from being prepared to start class.

    1. Have you completed all the reading assignments?

1. If not, explain what prevents you from completing the assigned readings.

    1. How do you participate during class? For this, participation includes contributing during discussions, taking notes, asking questions, following along in the text when applicable, etc.
    2. When it comes to being engaged in class, what are your strengths, and what would you like to continue to improve?

For Submission 2 at the End of the Semester:

1. Updated Statement of Academic Achievement
2. Updated information for Grading Criteria 1, 2, and 3 with additional artifacts from weeks 10 through 14.
3. Updated Course Engagement Reflection

How to Access OneNote:

1. From Viterbo's website, go to MyVU and login to your Microsoft 365 account
2. In the upper left, click on the dot grid to view all apps
3. Choose OneNote
4. Click +New Notebook

How to Use OneNote (these are links):

- OneNote Video Tutorials from Microsoft
- How to Use OneNote
- OneNote Tips and Tricks

Appendix C

Example Goals Tracking Assignment

ENGL 104 Goal Setting

Directions: For this course, you will need to begin the semester by setting two clear learning goals. When writing these goals, consider writing you've done in past semesters and think about areas you could improve. You can also read through the course description, course learning outcomes, and course readings and assignments to think about goals related specifically to writing we will do this semester.

Due Dates:

- Week 1: To earn a "complete" on this assignment, you will need to state

your two learning goals and have your goal tracking system set up (you can use the table below for yourself or create your own) and have your week two "plan" section completed for each goal.

- Week 4: In-class check-in
- Week 9: Submit progress. Reflect on first half of the semester in your Digital Portfolio of Learning first submission
- Week 10: Continue working on these goals, or create two new goals
- Week 12: In-class check-in
- Week 15: Submit progress. Reflect on second half of the semester in your Digital Portfolio of Learning second submission

Resources:

You will also need to think about which resources you'll use to help you reach your goals. For this course, you have the following resources available:

1. Me- Ask questions during class, visit my office hours, send an e-mail, or make an appointment
2. Your textbooks
3. Our Moodle site
4. The library
5. The OWL at Purdue
6. ARC
7. Google, Google Scholar, YouTube

Example Goal Tracking:

	Goal 1 Example: By mid-term, I will learn the literary terms and be able to use them in my own writing.	**Goal 2: What is your second goal?**
Wk. 2 Plan	**Example:** I will preview our chapter readings to determine the literary terms I would like to focus on and make a list.	
Wk. 2 Reflection	**Example:** I actually had time to preview the readings and fully read the chapter on symbolism. I learned the definition of symbolism and the way some authors have used symbolic items and actions in their works. I will add this information to my list.	
Wk. 3 Plan		
Wk. 3 Reflection		
Wk. 4 Plan		
Wk. 4 Reflection		
Wk. 5 Plan		
Wk. 5 Reflection		
Wk. 6 Plan		
Wk. 6 Reflection		
Wk. 7 Plan		
Wk. 7 Reflection		
Wk. 8 Plan		
Wk. 8 Reflection		

This article was peer-reviewed in a process that made both author and reviewer anonymous.

Boxes, Dolls, Peacocks, and Games: Visual and Physical Teaching of Writing

RICHARD JEWELL

"New Visions for College Writing" was the theme of the 2024 MnWE Conference at Normandale College in Bloomington, Minnesota. The editors of the *MnWE Journal* invited reflections on this concept. The following is not a scholarly essay but rather my story of teaching writing using a visual pedagogy. Though I taught it for almost four decades, it still is "new"—little used. Yet I found it highly successful in FYC (first-year composition), and many of its more advanced techniques also worked well in Comp II with first-, third-, and fourth-year students at state and Research I universities.

I began using visual methods in 1983 in my first college teaching assignments, FYC and third-year Comp II, both required. My state university was receiving national and regional listings as a Top Party School. The drinking age was 18. Most of my students were 18-22. I'd worked earlier with teens as a social worker, but now I was their teacher. How, I wondered, could I compete with whatever my students were exploring during nights and weekends?z

The answer was visualization with physical applications such as group work. Students found all these methods challenging, enjoyable, and effective.

Part I: Boxes and Dolls

Picture me in an FYC classroom with students seated in one large circle. On a small table in the middle, I set a 10 by 14" clear-plastic tray and three similar but smaller ones inside it. "Come watch," I beckon with my hands. "Closely around me."

I point at the large tray. "What is this?"

No answer. "A paper," I say. What are the three trays inside it?"

Someone might say, “Paragraphs?” “Close,” I say. “These are three body sections.” Then I take a big handful of Guatemalan worry dolls—1 inch each—from a bag and drop little bunches of them into two to four piles in each smaller tray. “And these?”

Usually someone answers, “Sentences!”

“Excellent,” I reply. “And each little pile,” I add, pointing at one, “is a paragraph.”

Then at the beginning and end of each pile, I place a twice-as-long, two-inch worry doll. “Here at the beginning of each pile,” I tell everyone, “is a topic sentence, and at the end, another sentence summarizing what the paragraph says: a subject sentence and summary sentence. Before you show a finished paper to anyteacher or boss, add these to your longer paragraphs.” (I will repeat this at least a dozen times throughout the term.) “Once you’ve done that, then you know exactly what you’re saying, and it will be time—at the very end—to write you conclusion and introduction.”

Then I place a carved elephant at the beginning of each body section. “Each of these,” I say, “is a topic sentence for the entire body section—for all of the paragraphs in its box. When you write your introduction, it should repeat in some way your three elephants—your three main body-topic sentences.”

I point again: “Introduction, body sections, and conclusion: tell them what you’re going to say, say it in the body, and tell them what you said. That is how you make yourself clear to your readers.”

As a teacher, you can develop many variations of this. Any trays, dolls, or objects will do (though the symbolism of human or animal sentences makes them seem more alive). For advanced FYC and Comp II students, drawing the equivalent on a whiteboard often works better. But for students in FYC—especially some who were not in the top quarter of their senior class and struggle to write more than a five-paragraph theme—the physical nature of this demonstration can be revelatory.

Problem

Why use visualization with physical applications? I taught five years at that party university, another five as a comp lecturer at a Level I research university, and eighteen where I settled into a tenure-line position in an

outer-suburb community college. What writing courses did I teach, and to whom? At the first and second schools, students primarily were 18-25 and middle-class; I taught both FYC and, to juniors and seniors, Advanced Research Writing (general) and disciplinary writing in five areas (e.g., "Writing in the Health Sciences"). In my final school, the community college, most of my students took Comp I and II in one year. The majority of students were first-year, first-generation college students ages 16-40 from low- or lower-middle-income families. A fourth to a half were people of color/immigrants/children of immigrants—a mix of Latin, Hmong, Somali, African Americans, and other Asians and Africans. Most students in all these schools and levels were able to learn faster and better using the visual and hands-on models of teaching I gave them, which I adjusted to each class's abilities and experiences.

So, what was the problem? It was their prior learning. The difficulty was *not* a lack of process. They'd learned that so much, in fact, one FYC class in the late 1980s actually groaned in unison when I said I was going to teach it. (I learned not to mention it, even though I still guided them through a simpler version using multiple drafts.) Many of them in high school and earlier to use, in exact order, eight, ten, twelve—even eighteen—steps: Peter Elbow on steroids.

Nor was there ever a lack of K-12 teachers' abundant training, earnestness, hard work, and decent pay. The problem lay elsewhere.

To wit, most students have learned in school to work with texts. Their natural mode of reading, internally, is oral. They "talk" their texts in their heads, sentence by sentence, neither looking ahead nor back. And all but perhaps the top quartile of them cannot easily organize their writing using their inner textual talking. I myself, when I read for pleasure, still have my oral voice working in my head, phrase by phrase. Images come and go with the words, but the verbal phrases are the center of my reading experience. And this is true of the great majority of FYC students.

Such reading is not necessarily a problem in pleasure or casual reading—until the reader turns to writing (or reading for learning and research). Then producing (or seeing) organizational units becomes necessary. And that is a mapping skill—an ability to work with visual units.

Do students even *see* organizational units in writing? Not much, if at all. In fact, the really good writing they read in textbooks is successful precisely *because* the transitions, topic sentences, and subtitles make the reading flow with few or no breaks in attention, keeping the reader from consciously noticing the essay or chapter's visual units.

As a result, even when we show students samples of well-written essays, they don't see the visual units unless they specifically are taught to do so. Instead, they just follow the road through the trees that the author has made and then wonder, when they are done with the exemplary paper, "How can I ever write like that?"

The better students, of course, get it, sooner or later. For a variety of socio-economic reasons, they have learned to see the organizational units. And often this top quartile also know how to outline in some manner—a boring, rigid, dying method of teaching the writing of first drafts. Far better methods exist for first drafts. But students who know how to outline an essay they've read are getting closer to seeing the visual units. Unfortunately, surveys show that a majority of students in high school and introductory college courses do not read assigned textbooks regularly, and few take notes. And the majority of today's FYC students spent their time in high school looking mostly at social images with little text on the small screens of their cell phones. It is no wonder that most FYC students cannot see the forest for the trees, and that this problem continues for many through several years of college.

And we, the writing faculty, are expected to show students how to build highways in all their papers for other classes. Once I learned to teach visual patterns, I saw my students learning how to organize about twice as fast as they did in my first ten years of teaching. Through visual teaching in FYC, almost all of them could transition in just a few months from high school to college writing. And better-prepared students and those in Comp II or upper-division comp received confirmation and clarity for what they had learned with difficulty, and became able to master their development of papers for majors, application letters, graduate schools, and professions.

Part II: Visual and Physical Simulations

Imagine the first week of my Comp I class in a room filled mostly with 16-

to 20-year-olds seated in a big circle. A fourth or more still are in high school, and they come from a variety of cultures. I stand before them in the last ten years of my career. "Over the weekend," I say, "you'll read the first chapter of your nonfiction literature assignment. Then you'll write a rough-draft paper of at least five hundred words. Get out your pens and paper: here's the pattern you must use." I want them to make raw notes to imprint them: handwriting or typing uses a different part of the brain than reading the formal sheet I'll give them later.

"You're all going to write several different kinds of rough drafts this term. Your five-hundred first draft this time will be an analysis. In it, you'll write what three different types of people—for example, a doctor, teacher, and parent—might think of this reading. Write at least 150 w. about what each type might say. Quote from the reading at least twice for each type of person, and your quotes must come from throughout the chapter you read, not just one section." With each requirement, I add to a list of them on the whiteboard so that they have yet one more way of processing the words of the assignment.

"This is just a rough draft," I add. Don't worry about grammar or spelling. Just let it flow. But I want it in five parts: start with one or two paragraphs for each type of viewpoint, and then an introduction and a conclusion." I draw the five parts as boxes on the whiteboard and ask them to do the same on their notepaper. And to make the visual organizing clearer, I say, "Now add to your drawing five subtitles: 'Introduction,' 'First Viewpoint,' 'Second Viewpoint,' 'Third Viewpoint,' and 'Conclusion.' Or you can name the viewpoints, if you want (like 'Doctor,' 'Teacher,' 'Parent'). Subtitles are used in most professions and majors, or at least an extra line space to indicate a new section is starting."

Then I tell them, "The assignment will be easiest for you if you write the three body sections first, one or more paragraphs each." I tap the three on the board for visual and physical emphasis. "Remember to do your introduction and conclusion last—after you already know what you're going to say. In your intro, tell me what subject you chose to write about from your reading. Then add all three viewpoints in one sentence each."

Next, I offer examples of a three-viewpoint group: butcher, baker, candlestick maker; high school student, college person, professional; etc.

Then we look together at a one-sheet student example of this type of analysis. I point to the topic sentence starting each paragraph: e.g., "A person from Africa might say about your reading that…." I employ another visual device by asking them to circle these topic
sentences. (For samples, see http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITEREAD/Analysis/default.htm.)

Today with AI? I would tell them it's easier, faster, more convincing to readers, and more pleasurable to come up with their own ideas than to use AI, at least at the beginning. I wuld add that AI can be useful in a later, research stage if you then verify what it says using scholarly or factual public sources. "I'll show you later this term," I would add, " how to use AI to start finding some sources that support your ideas. Don't use it now, though. I use an AI detector. And besides, it's faster and easier in this first draft to do your own." If I had any doubts about it, I would have them write their first draft by hand in the classroom.

The next time we meet, the fun starts. I place them in small groups three to four, with each person choosing a specific role, a technique I learned in a graduate-level course on how to manage groups.

"Count off by five (or six)," I say, to separate them from friends. "In your group, choose your role: a Facilitator, Recorder, Reader to the class, and if you have a fourth, a Social Encourager." Positive tension ripples through the room as I very briefly explain each role. When they have moved chairs to form their groups, I say, "Next, go to the student union. Pretend that each of your groups is a team of social science scientists. Choose, as a group, two or more people interacting with each other; watch them from a distance for six minutes. Or watch a counter salesperson's interactions. As good social scientists, don't let them know you're observing them. All of your group members should take very factual notes about what you see. Then return here."

Their group instructions are on the whiteboard when they return. I read them aloud. "1. In one minute, choose three types of people (entirely unrelated to whom you were watching): for example, a janitor, a policewoman, and a lawyer. You may be serious or silly in your choices [thus encouraging creative types].

"2. Facilitators, lead your group in developing 50+ words in four minutes each on how your three types would view the interactions you saw in the Student Union. Have your writer write down all 150 words in the twelve minutes you work on this. 3. Then for another two or three minutes, add a quick introduction stating each of the three points of view. If time allows, add a conclusion of any kind." As they work, I circle the room, asking if anyone has a question.

When the time is up, I say, "4. The reader of each group now will stand up, face the class (not me), and read your group's analysis aloud." All of this process creates a positive social pressure to perform. Students usually feel challenged, engaged, and effective in using these directions. Then I simply assign them their readings: from their reader, and from their textbook chapter on writing an analysis, which includes the specific assignment details and sample papers.

How do students like this? Some are quite serious about it; others make it into a game. Almost all respond positively. Some have told me in evaluations that at first they thought going to the student union in a group was just for a little fun, but then when they had to write their own paper at home, suddenly they realized, surprised and relieved, that they knew how to do it. The visual and physical activities deeply imbed the visual patterns.

An Essay's Organs

"Organizing" comes, of course, from the word "organ." In Latin and Greek, an "organ" is an implement or musical instrument—literally a "tool" with which one works. Indeed, the tools of organizing typically are 10-25% of the words and phrases in an essay counting if you count all of the words that are not strictly new content. Such words—topic sentences, summaries, transitions, introductions and conclusions—are a text's working tools. They support and channel the details into a readable flow.

After a few weeks, when my FYC students had written one or two first drafts, I would give them a "tool" training using a three-dimensional physical example and two-dimensional visual maps. In Comp II with its more experienced writers, I only used the maps.

In FYC, the physical example was a Russian nesting doll. Holding it up, I would say, "This is a book. Notice it has a head, body, and feet. The head is

the book's introductory chapter; the feet, the last chapter. The body is all the chapters between." I would take the outer doll apart, ask people to pass it around (for additional physical embedding), and then hold up the next doll within.

"This, I say, "is a chapter inside the book. It also has a head, body, and feet." I hand it around.

With the next doll, I say, "This is a body section in a chapter. Most chapters have several separate body sections." Then, next, "This is a longer paragraph with its own introduction, body, and conclusion."

Next, "This is a quotation inside a paragraph. A well-supported quotation has its own summary sentence before it, the quotation is the body, and its feet are a concluding explanation afterward."

For the tiny fifth doll, I say, "This is a sentence. A longer, well-developed sentence has a strong, clear, beginning subject, a middle verb, and often some details at its end."

I pause and look around at them. "Do you want to be clear to your readers? This is how: head, body, feet. Write any way you want in first drafts. But if you're writing for an audience, such as professionals in your future job, you need to revise your papers so your readers can see your dolls. Do you want your papers to flow like honey in the minds of your teachers and future work colleagues, or do you want them to struggle with each of your paragraphs to figure out what you mean? They need a simple-to-understand paper with organized sections, paragraphs, and sentences. We're going to work for several weeks on how to use the tricks of the writing trade to do this easily."

Immediately after, I'd start "Dolls II"—the "Boxes and Dolls" demonstration above in FYC only. Then, in both FYC and Comp II, we would start looking at visual maps of paragraphing, transitions, and sentences.

One way of working with paragraphs and transitions was simply to show them two-dimensional boxes for nine different types of paragraphs (introduction, conclusion, body section paragraph, transition paragraph, et al.). Each paragraph map showed a few words at beginning and end to identify its type or use (e.g., "Thesis," "First argument," "Topic sentence," etc.).

I then would ask them in small groups, using the roles above, to develop a short paper on any subject they wanted using most of the nine types of paragraphs and read it to everyone. I allowed students to be as creative as they wanted, even making up subjects, as long as they used the types of paragraphs correctly. Again, students found this challenging and fun.

Transitions were another mapping event. In class, everyone first received a one-page, single-spaced sample student essay, and I asked them in small groups to mark the thesis/main subject, topic sentences, and ending summary sentences in the introduction, conclusion, and sections and then compare results with each other. Second, especially in FYC, I then handed them a similar paper; however, its subject statements, topic sentences, and ending summary sentences all had been replaced by blank areas. I then asked the students, again in groups, to supply their own working as a group, and then read the results aloud to everyone. The papers with workable sentences and those without good ones became obvious upon being read, another example to the entire class.

We also looked at other types of professional and academic papers that they were not learning in the class, especially in Comp II. What did all these lessons accomplish? Many FYC students finally, and for the first time, "got it" about college and professional writing, many of them as if it were a revelation that once had seemed far out of sight. And Comp II students especially absorbed these lessons. Often they took the lead in producing group papers. For details, see two links:

http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/REVISE+EDIT/REVISE/BasicLayouts.htm and http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/REVISE+EDIT/REVISE/Paragraph.htm.

Part III: The Visual Sentence and Practice Rounds

What about writing sentences—especially for struggling students in FYC? We as a profession now mostly eschew teaching grammar or punctuation. And AI now will rewrite a student's paper for them. But not only are AI revisions less unique and interesting, but sentence-weak students can learn to make powerful and controlled sentences more easily using visual techniques. And for middle-of-the-road students, visualization helps them understand how to use several ways to avoid the deadly comma splice, and preferably some of

the minor punctuation errors that occur in fragments and run-ons. Much of resolving such problems has to do with combining two sentences properly, and with using more readable, orderly, subject-verb-modifiers sentences.

I decided that to accomplish this, I needed a visual symbol of the sentence. After much thought, I settled on the peacock. (The fox was a close second.) I explained to students that a peacock represents the "SVM" or "subject-verb-modifier" model of a sentence. I said, "In the clearest writing for professional readers, the subject—the head—comes first, followed closely by the main verb or body. Then, usually, are the added phrases: the peacock's showy tail feathers. I drew a peacock on the whiteboard using several colors of markers and then pointed out, "If you erase the head or the body of the peacock, your bird—and your sentence in English—dies." (I also explained that a command has an understood subject.) "The remains of the bird," I added, "whether just the head, the body alone, or either of them with the tail feathers—these are sentence fragments. They are in danger of making your professional papers sound like you were poorly educated."

"What about the beautiful feathers on a peacock?" I asked. "Keep them mostly on the tail, where they often are very helpful. But whatever you write, do not place long feathers on the beak of your bird. It won't be able to see where it is going, and your sentence will trip over itself with punctuation or grammar errors." I then told them an experiment I performed comparing two very similar classes, same times of day, same types of students (including the four to five guys in each who sat in the back wearing baseball caps). One of the classes was allowed to use many long introductory phrases; the other was required to avoid all introductory phrases unless they were one to three words long. The class using the long introductory phrases had 25% more sentences in their final papers with punctuation or grammar errors. (And just to be fair, I gave everyone in the first class a slightly increased point total because it was unfair that they weren't taught how to avoid long introductory phrases.)

I also said, "If you use too many introductory phrases, readers will become impatient and tired because they have to concentrate harder to wait for the subject and verb. "For example," I said, "consider this sentence: "In the morning, before dawn, after the dew was gone, hungry, pacing, restless, thinking of its dreams from the night before, wondering about breakfast, the peacock waited." I then would add, "First drafts? Write your sentences

in any way you want. But then, in later drafts, try to place your subject and verb near the start." I also taught students that the head feather on a peacock symbolized how you can add a few modifying words before or immediately after the subject. William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Márquez are two examples of writing using SVM-peacock sentences: both often write 100-200 word sentences, yet they are very readable: they start with their subject and then quickly get to the verb. For more on peacocks, see http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/REVISE+EDIT/EDIT/Sentences.htm.

And then (in FYC but usually not Comp II), I would add a physical imprinting method for SVM-peacock sentence making. Students would sit in one large circle and take turns, one at a time. The first person would start with a noun or pronoun. The next would repeat it and add a verb. The third person would repeat them and add modifiers. Then the next person would start with a new subject. Typically I asked students to complete three rounds. This better imbedded in them that easily-read sentences are composed of three primary segments: subject, verb, and modifiers.

Taming the Comma Splice

The SVM-peacock model, along with the large-circle rounds, also helped me teach comma-splice avoidance. I would explain that SVMs—peacocks—almost always must be divided by punctuation, but never by just a lonely comma. Each SVM—each peacock—almost always must be divided. The first student had to offer a complete sentence. The next would repeat it and add a period, comma conjunction, semicolon, or semicolon-conjunctive adverb-comma (e.g., "; however,"). And the third student then would repeat the previous student and add another divider and complete sentence, etc. In FYC, I added the four types of dividers to the whiteboard, especially in classes needing more help with writing, and point to each one not yet completed. Generally, Comp II (and more advanced FYC) groups simply needed the same explanation with SVM markers, and no practice rounds. While FYC students in evaluations found the peacocks somewhat to very helpful, Comp II people found the peacocks only somewhat helpful on average, but the SVM modeling much more helpful.

My students wrote papers with far better sentence structures and fewer punctuation errors when I started teaching them the SVM-peacock visual model. Poorer students demonstrated better control of their sentences and

used fewer comma splices. And better-experienced writers showed more masterful playfulness with how to write their complex thoughts using accurate dividers of two sentences, rather than just simple periods.

Conclusion

Empowering students with visual and physical activities became a marker of my teaching style. However, the teaching of writing still remains an oral-textual tradition. This is unfortunate for many students: bright, well-prepared learners handle oral-textual learning well but can develop their writing faster with some visual methods. And the average college student, especially—and even more so those who struggle with writing—can literally leap forward at times by practicing visual and physical paradigms for writing.

I used many traditional methods, too. This essay is not to deny them. Responses to readings, thorough research, sample papers, and plenty of process with multiple, increasingly-complex rough drafts—all were part of the brew I mixed for students. I also never graded students' drafts, instead giving them marks of completion when the next step of a draft was sufficient. To receive an "A," they needed to finish at least one final high-quality, well-edited draft with as many earlier drafts as needed, limited only by the time of the term's end.

How did students respond? Generally, they rated my classes highly in course evaluations and the "grade your teacher" online sites. I developed a reputation as "tough but fair." Many students took a second writing class from me. I also received major student-body best-teacher awards at two schools and a number of citations from individual students at others.

What did I think of all this? Some of my favorite comments from students came when they told me how they had succeeded with papers in other classes or at their jobs. I've been retired for five years but still receive thank-you emails about their successes. It is their success that counts. But I must admit, boxes, dolls, peacocks, and games made most of my writing classes a joy.

—

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Mirage or Memory: How Writing Prompts May Generate False Memories

DANIEL RUEFMAN

When I began my sabbatical research in August of 2023, the topic of false memories was not something that I had anticipated spending the next two months trying to understand. The overarching goal of this investigation was to examine the impact that trauma has had on writing pedagogies. This initial qualitative investigation would conduct a series of surveys and interviews with instructors and students who have taught or enrolled in writing courses at accredited two-year and four-year colleges, paying close attention to how personal traumatic experiences (PTEs) presented in classrooms immediately prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I had expected to encounter students and instructors wrestling with many of the same life experiences that I struggled to come to terms with as a first-generation college student, and later as a professor (e.g. mental illness of a parent, varying degrees of physical and emotional abuse, child-loss, etc.). However, as the first student surveys rolled in, one of the short answer responses described how an assignment enabled a student to "recover memories" that they had little to no recollection of to begin with and how those memories were a catalyst for conflict within that student's family. As I delved more deeply into this student's responses, the subject of false memories emerged as a significant part of this student's experience, causing me to consider how the design of a writing assignment at a two-year community college could potentially generate false memories. By gaining an understanding of how false memories are formed, then analyzing assignment prompts, this article explores how course projects could be contributing to the creation of false memories and provide steps that may be taken to minimize this risk in the future.

Literature Review

Understanding False Memories

False memories have been a subject of interest in the field of clinical psychology for most of the 20th century. According to the American Psychological Association (2018, April 19), a false memory is "a distorted recollection of an event or [. . .] of an event that never actually happened. False memories are errors of commission, because details, facts, or events come to mind, often vividly, but the remembrances fail to correspond to prior events." False memories, often referred to as recovered or illusory memories, can vary in severity, and those who have experienced personal traumatic experiences are often predisposed to them. In minor cases, individuals may simply recall specific details that do not align with veritable fact. One example from my own life occurred in during my freshman year of college, when I was struck by a drunk driver. When questioned by police at the scene, I described the vehicle that struck me as a white Ford Expedition. Luckily, a good Samaritan witnessed the accident, then proceeded to follow the driver onto the interstate as they fled the scene. After calling 911, police executed a stop, then arrested the driver on suspicion of DUI and charged them additionally with a hit-and-run. What shocked me in the weeks to follow was the fact that the SUV turned out to be a white Nissan Pathfinder, not a Ford Expedition, despite the fact that (even today) I can close my eyes, envision the front of the vehicle barreling toward me, and see very clearly the Ford emblem displayed on its grill. This memory is vivid for me—but clearly that recollection was not supported by the evidence.

When minor cases of false memories occur, they can have massive consequences, particularly when concerning eye-witness testimony during criminal investigations. Consider then the extent of the damage that can occur in extreme cases, when memories of events that never took place are implanted into a person's memory. Research conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Loftus during the "memory wars" of the 1990s focused on the phenomenon of "repressed memories." Throughout her investigations, Loftus demonstrated how fabricated memories were being implanted in patients by therapists, and were not, in fact, recovered memories that had been

repressed due to trauma (Patihis et al., 2014). During an interview on the podcast Speaking of Psychology, Loftus explains:

Some patients were going into therapy—maybe they had anxiety, maybe they had an eating disorder, maybe they were depressed, and they would end up with a therapist who said something like well, many people I've seen with your symptoms were sexually abused as a child. And they would begin these activities that would lead these patients to start to think that they remembered years of brutalization that they had allegedly banished into the unconscious until this therapy made them aware of it [. . .] My work showed that you could plant very rich, detailed false memories in the minds of people. It didn't mean that repressed memories did not exist [. . .] but there really wasn't any credible scientific evidence for this idea of massive repression, and yet so many families were destroyed by this unsupported claim. (Luna, 2019)

Although Loftus does not discount the possibility that repressed memories could exist, she does demonstrate that, under certain circumstances, memory can be manipulated, causing people to recall things that are either inaccurate or never happened.

Generating False Memories:

Despite how complicated our cognitive processes are, creating false memories in the clinical setting is remarkably simple. According to Loftus's earlier research, false memories can be implanted through a blend of trust, misinformation, imagination exercises, and repetition (False Memories, 2013; Scoboria et al., 2017). To better understand how this occurs, it may help to think of false memory creation as a four-step process:

1. A person of authority gains the trust of a subject (client, student, etc.);
2. That authority uses the power of suggestion (e.g. leading questions) and claims supported by anecdotal evidence to allude to a repressed memory;
3. The authority prompts the subject to "remember" when something might have happened to them, encouraging them to add in their own details; and

4. The authority encourages the subject to imagine how they might feel in certain circumstances, leading to something that Loftus terms "imagination inflation."

To better observe this process in action, allow me to revisit one of my own false memories—the memory of the night that I was struck by that drunk driver. First, when the firefighters arrived on scene, I immediately recognized my friend's stepfather. I had known him for approximately three years prior to seeing him on the scene that night, and following that event, a friendly face immediately had my trust. As an EMT checked my vitals, he did his best to keep me calm, then casually asked me about the vehicle. I described it initially as a white SUV. So far, so good. However, then he began asking leading questions, about the kind of SUV that I thought it was. Initially, I did not remember, but then he asked me to close my eyes and think carefully. Did I see a logo? Maybe a round name plate—like Ford? Or did I see the head of an animal—Dodge maybe? When I closed my eyes, I saw a pair of blazing headlights just before the collision, and a round logo on the grill between them. The Ford logo. He asked me to consider the size. Was it a smaller SUV, like an Explorer, or was it a larger SUV, like an Expedition. Given how large the vehicle seemed to me at the time, I thought it had to be the big one—the Expedition of course. Over the next ten minutes, as we waited for the state troopers to arrive, my friend's stepdad continued to ask me questions about what happened—repetitive questions that had those details circulating through my mind. Once the police arrived on scene, I had a very detailed description of the SUV—a description that I knew was accurate. That is until the state trooper picked up a piece of plastic on the ground nearby. That plastic was a piece of the fender of a Nissan Pathfinder, and it matched the white Nissan Pathfinder that they had pulled over 5 miles north on Interstate 90.

Understanding the Risks and Benefits

As alluded to earlier, there are several risks associated with false memories. According to the American Psychological Association (2018, April 19), illusory memories can often be just as vivid as those derived from authentic experiences, with all the same repercussions. This means that false

memories of negative experiences can induce the same traumatic responses in individuals who previously did not exhibit those symptoms (Otgaar et al., 2017). Likewise, as individuals with existing diagnoses of PTSD and depression are particularly susceptible to memory distortion, creating new false memories may have a compounding effect that complicates and endangers their road to potential recovery (Otgaar, et al., 2017). Moreover, depending on subject of these memories, they can often lead to social isolation, family rifts, and can often have legal implications, particularly when included as testimony in criminal or civil cases.

Though there are many negative implications to bear in mind, false memories do have some limited, therapeutic benefits as well. One application of false memories that emerged from Loftus's research came in the form of diet modification, particularly for individuals who are struggling with chronic health conditions brought on by obesity. In one case study, Loftus determined that it was possible to implant false memories to make people more averse to fatty foods. According to Loftus, "[We] planted a false memory that you got sick eating strawberry ice cream. People told us they didn't want to eat it as much" (False Memories, 2013). Similarly, Loftus went on to explain that researchers have also successfully implanted positive memories about healthy foods, and as a result helped individuals to make healthier dietary decisions. Today researchers are continuing to explore whether implanting false memories through hypnotherapy might help some patients to counter their physiological responses that are derived from associated with negative experiences which impact patients with various forms of PTSD and anxiety disorders.

Research Questions

With a basic understanding of what false memories are, where they come from, and the positive and negative implications associated with them, the next step is to determine whether they indeed pose a risk to writing students. For this reason, this investigation will focus on the following research questions:

1. To what extent could writing assignments generate false memories in

students? 2. If so, what steps can instructors take to manage this risk in the future?

Methods

Participants

This inquiry focused primarily on how undergraduate students responded to writing assignments in two first-year composition courses. Preliminary findings were based off a sample of 92 undergraduate students, enrolled at ten different institutions across various states. Among them, 23 students were sampled from two-year colleges in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, while 69 students were enrolled at public four-year universities in Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania.

Data Collection

The first data collection tool employed during this investigation was a qualitative survey that was initially designed to examine the impact of trauma on the undergraduate writing student experience. This survey consisted of ten multiple-choice questions, intended to gain insights into how trauma might have impacted writing courses. Additionally, two short-answer questions provided students an opportunity to explain how trauma presented during specific assignments and describe their response.

In addition to this survey, an artifact analysis of two assignment prompts was conducted. These prompts were volunteered by instructors, and both were actual assignments that sampled students referred to in their narrative responses. A rubric was devised, based upon the prior research of Dr. Elizabeth Loftus. This rubric evaluated the writing prompts according to the four step process (outlined previously) that led to the generation of false memories in Loftus's previous studies. Reading the assignment prompts through that lens, each one was evaluated to determine whether there

was evidence that instructors tried to establish trust with students, used of suggestive language to guide student responses, and incorporated imaginative exercises or repetition that might result in imagination inflation. Artifacts were then scored according to a three-point scale in each area of interest (See Table 1).

	High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
	3	2	1
Step One: Evidence of Trust	Prompt makes significant effort to establish trust with students	Prompt makes some effort to establish trust with students	Unclear whether prompt attempts to establish trust with students
Step Two: Suggestive Language	Prompt makes significant use of suggestive language	Prompt makes some use of suggestive language	Prompt does not make significant use of suggestive language
Step Three: Students Elaborate Take Ownership Over Memories	Prompt requires students to explore and elaborate on potentially traumatic memories	Prompt offers students the option to explore and elaborate on potentially traumatic memories	Prompt does not require students to explore and elaborate on potentially traumatic memories
Step Four: Imagination Inflation	Prompt requires students to use imagination to fill gaps in memories	Prompt offers students the option to use imagination to fill in gaps in memories	Prompt does not permit students to use their imagination to fill in gaps in memories

Table 1: Rubric utilized to assess false memory risk for assignment prompts.

Two assignment prompts were examined as a part of the artifact analysis: one from a memoir essay assignment, sampled by a first-year writing course at a community college in western Pennsylvania, and another from an auto-ethnographic essay assignment in a first-year writing course at a four-year university in Minnesota.

Preliminary Findings & Discussion

Student Survey Responses

As I mentioned previously, the initial goal of this research was not intending to address the topic of false memories explicitly. Instead, these surveys were intended to determine the impact that personal traumatic experiences have had on post-secondary writing pedagogies. This initial student survey returned 92 student responses (23 from two-year colleges and 69 from four year universities). Of those responses 72 had described course assignments that required students to engage with the subject of personal traumatic experiences, with an additional 15 students indicating that writing about personal traumatic experiences was an option in at least one of their writing courses.

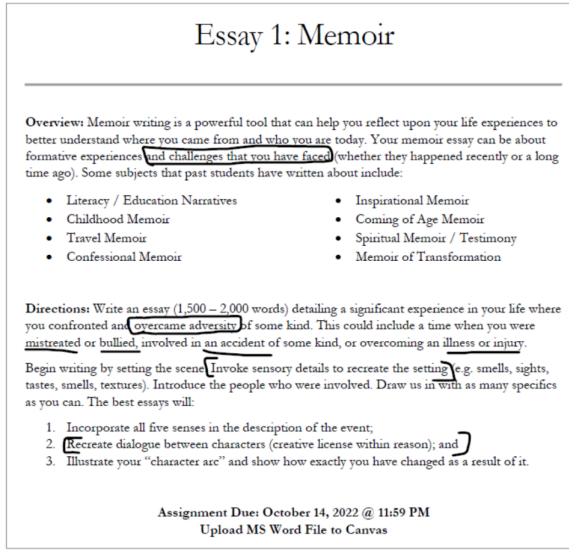
The suggestion that false memories may have impacted the student experience first emerged in response to the short answer portion of the survey, specifically in response to the following prompt: Describe your experience with an assignment that may have been impacted (directly or indirectly) by personal trauma. At first, students described a variety of personal narrative assignments that asked them to explore moments of personal growth or change— assignments which seemed rather innocent on the surface. However, as I read about a personal memoir assignment, one student mentioned "recovered memories." According to this response, "I didn't remember a lot about what happened. But when I write about it, I start [to] remember. It was weird. Like new memories came up that I didn't even know were there." At first this student response seemed to be an outlier, but as the survey accrued more responses, the following responses stood out:

- "Writing about the attack made me start to doubt what really happened. Its like I couldn't tell if it was real. I thought I knew the truth but now I'm not sure."
- "I felt like I had to come up with a good story for the assignment. I think I might have exaggerated some parts just to make it more interesting."
- "I wrote about something really personal for my assignment, but when I read it after class was over, it didn't feel like my story anymore."

- "[Dad] called me a liar when he read it over for me. Now we don't talk and I don't know what to do."

Several students mentioned changing memories and confusion in response to writing assignments that invoked trauma, and three mentioned a degree of social isolation (with friends or family members) as a result. Although it is difficult to say whether these students were actually generating false memories or not, the word choices of these students seemed to imply that something may have been going on with their memories while completing their assignments. Add in the comment about someone no longer talking to their father because of an assignment, and it seemed that (in the very least), a supplemental investigation was warranted. Artifact Analysis

One of the assignments discussed by the students in the survey was a memoir essay, assigned in a first-year composition course at a community college in western Pennsylvania (See Figure 1). This assignment required students to produce a 1,500-2,000 word essay exploring a significant experience in the student's life when they "overcame adversity." Although the prompt does not require students to explicitly explore a past trauma, this assignment does leave the option open for students to revisit a potentially traumatic memory if they choose to. The language used in the assignment prompt also appears to be moderately suggestive, making an assumption that students have overcome adversity, and then providing leading language to guide students toward the subjects of bullying, accidents, illnesses and injuries. However, the element in the prompt that is perhaps the riskiest is the mention of "creative license." In this case, as the instructor directly encourages students to incorporate descriptive writing that appeals to all five senses and re-create dialogue "within reason," which could run the risk of manipulating memories through imagination inflation. Overall, the memoir assignment prompt scored 8 out of a potential 12 points, which indicates that this assignment, as designed, carries a moderate risk for generating false memories in students.



Essay 1: Memoir

Overview: Memoir writing is a powerful tool that can help you reflect upon your life experiences to better understand where you came from and who you are today. Your memoir essay can be about formative experiences and challenges that you have faced (whether they happened recently or a long time ago). Some subjects that past students have written about include:

- Literacy / Education Narratives
- Childhood Memoir
- Travel Memoir
- Confessional Memoir
- Inspirational Memoir
- Coming of Age Memoir
- Spiritual Memoir / Testimony
- Memoir of Transformation

Directions: Write an essay (1,500 – 2,000 words) detailing a significant experience in your life where you confronted and overcame adversity of some kind. This could include a time when you were mistreated or bullied, involved in an accident of some kind, or overcoming an illness or injury.

Begin writing by setting the scene. Invoke sensory details to recreate the setting (e.g. smells, sights, tastes, smells, textures). Introduce the people who were involved. Draw us in with as many specifics as you can. The best essays will:

1. Incorporate all five senses in the description of the event;
2. Recreate dialogue between characters (creative license within reason); and
3. Illustrate your "character arc" and show how exactly you have changed as a result of it.

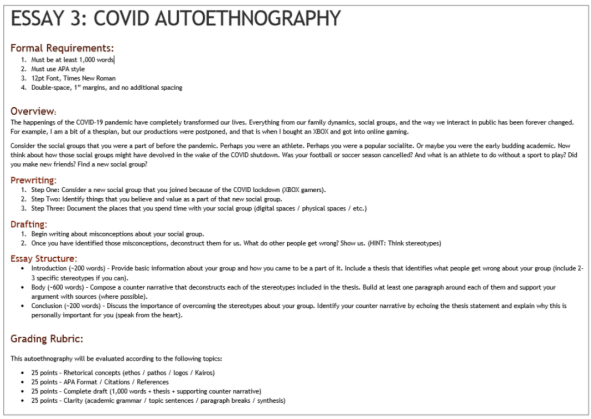
Assignment Due: October 14, 2022 @ 11:59 PM
Upload MS Word File to Canvas

Figure 1: Memoir essay writing prompt form a two-year college in Pennsylvania

Figure 1: Memoir essay writing prompt form a two-year college in Pennsylvania

The second assignment that arose from this investigation was an autoethnography essay assigned by a professor at a mid-sized, four-year university in Minnesota. Unlike the memoir assignment above which provided students with an option to explore experiences that might be considered traumatic, the autoethnography assignment required students to explicitly write about the COVID-19 pandemic, arguably the most significant collective trauma of our current generation (see Figure 2). This assignment prompt also had suggestive language, making an assumption that the social lives of students had been significantly changed, and it attempted to support this assumption with an example from the instructor's own life (bolstering the instructor's ethos). Not only this, but the example from the instructor's life (their new involvement with an XBOX gaming community) could be seen an attempt to garner trust with some of their students. Suggestive language continues throughout the overview of the assignment, as the instructor suggests some ways that student lives might have been changed, with signal words like "perhaps" and "maybe" to subtly guide students toward topics.

However, it is also worth noting that this assignment does not explicitly encourage the use of "creative license" or other phrases which would lead me to believe that imagination inflation might be a problem. Overall, this assignment prompt scored an 8 out of 12 as well, indicating that this to may also carry with it a moderate risk for creating false memories.



ESSAY 3: COVID AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Formal Requirements:

1. Must be at least 1,000 words
2. Must use APA style
3. 12pt Font, Times New Roman
4. Double-space, 1" margins, and no additional spacing

Overview:

The happenings of the COVID-19 pandemic have completely transformed our lives. Everything from our family dynamics, social groups, and the way we interact in public has been forever changed. For example, I am a bit of a thespian, but our productions were postponed, and that is when I bought an XBOX and got into online gaming.

Consider the social groups that you were a part of before the pandemic. Perhaps you were an athlete. Perhaps you were a popular socialite. Or maybe you were the early budding academic. Now think about how these social groups might have devolved in the wake of the COVID shutdown. Was your football or soccer season cancelled? And what is an athlete to do without a sport to play? Did you make new friends? Find a new social group?

Prewriting:

1. Step One: Consider a new social group that you joined because of the COVID lockdown (XBOX gamers).
2. Step Two: Identify things that you believe and value as a part of that new social group.
3. Step Three: Document the places that you spend time with your social group (digital spaces / physical spaces / etc.)

Drafting:

1. Begin writing about misconceptions about your social group.
2. Once you have identified those misconceptions, deconstruct them for us. What do other people get wrong? Show us. (HINT: Think stereotypes)

Essay Structure:

- Introduction (~200 words) - Provide basic information about your group and how you came to be a part of it. Include a thesis that identifies what people get wrong about your group (include 2-3 specific stereotypes if you can).
- Body (~600 words) - Compose a counter narrative that deconstructs each of the stereotypes included in the thesis. Build at least one paragraph around each of them and support your argument with sources (where possible).
- Conclusion (~200 words) - Discuss the importance of overcoming the stereotypes about your group. Identify your counter narrative by echoing the thesis statement and explain why this is personally important for you (speak from the heart).

Grading Rubric:

This autoethnography will be evaluated according to the following topics:

- 25 points - Rhetorical concepts (ethos / pathos / logos / Kairos)
- 25 points - APA Format / Citations / References
- 25 points - Complete draft (1,000 words + thesis + supporting counter narrative)
- 25 points - Clarity (academic grammar / topic sentences / paragraph breaks / synthesis)

Figure 2: Autoethnography essay prompt from a four-year university in Minnesota.

Figure 2: Autoethnography essay prompt from a four-year university in Minnesota.

Conclusions

It is important to note that differentiating between false memories and memories rooted in authentic experience is very difficult. For that reason, this study does not have sufficient data to determine whether the "recovered memories" disclosed by the students in their surveys were authentic memories or not. However, I would suggest that comments offered by students indicating that these memories were "confusing," caused tension with family members, and that some students may have exaggerated claims while completing those assignments indicate that we cannot rule

illusory memories out as a possibility either. After a close reading of two assignment prompts, it became clear that some of the strategies used by psychologists to implant false memories during clinical research were also observable within the context of some writing assignments. This would indicate that there could be a moderate risk in students developing false memories, at least within the context of the sampled projects. This risk could be reduced by analyzing the design of those assignments and taking a few key precautions.

1. Do not require students to engage with PTEs in the context of a writing assignment. Writing is highly therapeutic. It reduces the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), enhances emotional processing, reduces anxiety and depression, and promotes social support. For those reasons, a subset of the student population will continue to explore their personal traumas in the context of almost any writing assignment. However, for writing to have these therapeutic benefits, the individual must be prepared for the experience. If a trauma is too recent, or too severe, it is simply not recommended to have students explore those traumas within the context of a course assignment. For that reason, it is recommended that instructors not design assignments that force students to explore the topic of trauma. As traumatic experiences place individuals at higher risks of being impacted by false memories, it is vital to provide students with alternative options to ensure that no additional harm is done.
2. Have resources ready for those occasions when students choose to write about their PTEs. On those occasions when student do engage with personal traumatic experiences (either directly or indirectly), it is essential that instructors be prepared. Many colleges and universities require instructors to list mental health resources that are available on campus within their course syllabi. This is a good first step. However, with how overburdened counselling centers on campus have become, and as funding for mental health on college campuses continually falls short of student need, simply including campus resources is not enough. For this reason, instructors should compile a list of regional resources as well. Provide direct numbers for regional crisis centers, as well as reputable national helplines. When a student
3. Avoid suggestive language when designing assignment prompts. Individual trauma responses differ greatly from one person to the next.

Although some experiences may be viewed as universally traumatic (e.g. witnessing a death, imprisonment, etc.), not all individuals will respond in the same way to that trauma. This means that while the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020 impacted most people across the United States in some way, the trauma inflicted was not universal. It is vital to not make assumptions about what does and does not constitute a traumatic experience. Going further, when a student is engaging with an experience that is potentially traumatic to them, it is essential to avoid using suggestive language that may influence how they process that experience. For example, there is a subset of the population which may not have been significantly hindered by the lockdown experience. Using suggestive language that labels the experience as "traumatic" poisons the well for those individuals, which may actually result in a false memory that inflicts some level of trauma on students who may not have described the experience as traumatic.

4. Minimize the use of creative license to reduce the risk of "imagination inflation." Imagination inflation is one of the ways that an individual internalizes and assumes ownership of a false memory. It is the repetition of imaginative exercises which allows a thought to be developed and internalized, which then creates a new subjective "truth" for that individual. The writing process, by nature, is incredibly repetitive. Just consider how prewriting exercises allows you to begin with an idea, and how that idea evolves as it is guided through several drafts. Although creative license is appropriate for some writing genres (e.g. fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, etc.), academic assignments where students engage with trauma should limit a student's use of creative license to avoid establishing an environment that could risk students fostering false memories. This is not to say that we should eliminate creative license completely from writing courses. However, instructors should consider the rhetorical purpose and goals of their assignment, and then select the level of creative license that is appropriate to help mitigate these risks.

To better understand how false memories might be generated within the context of the writing classroom and the risks that this may pose to student health, additional research is necessary. Sample data that was explored in the context of this preliminary investigation is from a relatively small

sample, and the variety of writing assignments employed in writing classrooms vary greatly from one institution to the next. However, by taking steps to better understand how false memories are created, instructors will be able to continue to develop trauma informed pedagogies that will support their students and create healthier, more productive classroom environments.

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Success in the face of distress: A brief look at emotions and the writing process

KIA THOMPSON

It's Friday, late afternoon and your final student writer for the day has shown up with rapid speech, fidgety hands, and a look of despair. The student, demonstrating the hallmarks of an overwhelmed writer, tells you they waited last minute to start their assignment—due on Monday morning. This prompts you to ask yourself, why did they wait so long?

The role of emotions in the writing process is not to be underestimated. Driscoll and Powell (2016) inadvertently discovered what role emotions play in the transfer of writing skills while observing 13 student writers through a five-year study about writing development. Three categories were used to group writers' emotions: generative, disruptive, and circumstantial. Writers who expressed generative emotions about their writing used words like "confidence and enjoyment" (Table 1). Disruptive emotions were the opposite of generative emotions. Writers who expressed disruptive emotions used words like "hate and fear" (Table 1) and did not produce the kind of writing they desired. Writers who experienced circumstantial emotions used words like "frustration and confusion" (Table 1). Circumstantial emotions were of special interest to the researchers because unlike the other two emotions, circumstantial emotions reflected an emotional state contingent on the writer's situation (e.g., the writer could not find sources). Furthermore, how the writer managed their emotional state resulted in generative or disruptive emotions.

Putting our distressed student writer in context, our bodies first feel before our minds do (Ames, 2024; Hull & Brooks-Gillies, 2022). Meaning, the student probably felt upsetting emotions when the writing assignment was given (perhaps because the assignment triggered a negative memory about writing). To avoid the unpleasant feelings, the student put their assignment off, which explains why the writer showed up for help last minute, anxious

and scared. So what can a writer do to turn their circumstantial emotions into generative emotions? The writer took a good first step by scheduling a session for help. Also, the writer may benefit from a writing plan worksheet to begin their writing process. The tutor can provide the worksheet for the writer to complete during the session (if the writer is comfortable) or for later. Below are the worksheet questions.

> What am I writing?
>
> Why am I writing?
>
> What do I need to do to generate writing?
>
> Who can help me in my writing process?
>
> How will I know my writing plan is working?
>
> What might interfere with my writing process?
>
> What will I do if my writing plan is not working? (Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, 2011)

The worksheet has self-reflective and action-based elements. Key components in shifting circumstantial emotions to generative ones (Driscoll & Powell, 2016; Driscoll & Wells, 2020). Ultimately, the writer in our scenario may need more time to complete their assignment. However, the writing plan worksheet is a tool that can help them establish and reach their writing goals, along with managing overwhelming emotions before they start. Anecdotally, I used it for my MnWE presentation, and this article and it helped!

Unfortunately, higher education assumes that improvement in writing hinges on knowledge and skill set alone, and overlooks how emotional dispositions impact writing ability (Driscoll & Powell, 2016; Driscoll & Wells, 2020). I certainly agree. I also hope to find more studies with bigger sample sizes that look into the role of emotions in academic writing because what is happening to the writer is also happening to their writing. Simply put, success may depend on it.

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AI AND INSTRUCTION IN WRITING AND ENGLISH: STATEMENTS FROM THE MNWE COMMUNITY

Catching the Technological Lightning

A. P. LAMBERTI

When I presented at MnWE on my use of ChatGPT in a service-learning writing course, an audience member expressed initial surprise that I would use AI at all. Although they went to on to explain that my reasoning ultimately became clear to the audience, the question remained with me. Why *are* writing instructors using AI? Perhaps more helpfully, how might we consider artificial intelligence in teaching and learning beyond its practical applications?

My teaching career now is long enough to be littered with technological innovations that, upon their arrival, were widely heralded as "disruptive," "innovative," etc. Some have persisted (LMS platforms) while others appear to have faded (where did all the MOOCs go?). As a teacher of professional communication, I have needed to act as an early adopter to keep up with industry trends and standards. At the same time, I need to combat misconceptions that workplace writing is largely an instrumental, skills-based endeavor—the implication being that its disciplinary content knowledge is theoretically thin at best. The result is an instructional challenge: incorporating tech tools into a curriculum, yet in a manner obviously meaningful to both colleagues and students.

Defining *what* AI means, however, feels like a different question than when I've pondered it with other technologies. Our authority to shape its future direction seems to be a fast-disappearing opportunity. Granted, there is a great deal of hand-wringing about future apocalyptic AI scenarios, but it nonetheless is true that AI is distinctive from other tech. Its particularly complex use of algorithms, capacity to autonomously make decisions, lack of transparency regarding its internal processes, and rapidity of evolution already have distinguished its latest forms from even its own earlier versions.

The differences play out in their curricular suggestions for the writing classroom. For one, ethical tool use when writing long has been addressed

by instructors and their curricula. We often work with students to develop information literacy, especially regarding digital content. Suspect information is cast in the writing classroom as unusable, if not disturbing. Certainly AI-generated information can be suspect as well. The challenges to understanding AI's internal decision-making processes, though, suggest that we now might work with writing students to take more of an advocacy stance, demanding clear explanations and accountability from the technology and the information it produces.

AI's difference also can be felt in its implications for privacy and security. Again, privacy issues in writing curricula are not new, often discussed within the context of publishing work. Students in my editing class study the history of U.S. copyright law and its overlap with public domain and definitions of authorship. Still, the large data models that drive so many AI platforms, with their wholesale web-scraping methods, raise the stakes for student writers. We might consider asking our students to attempt tracking the origins of certain AI-generated content and see if they can identify specific parties who are affected by those models. What does it mean for a minor child's security, for instance, when an AI image generator deepfakes their photo into a different visual?

My writing pedagogy has needed to respond to AI even as I attempt to recover from its future shock. Meanwhile, the tech's differences from other tools have complicated my understanding of what it means to teach mediated writing, both functionally and philosophically. At some point, I anticipate that AI's evolution will reframe the question posed during my MnWE presentation, to instead ask whether its adoption is an option at all. During this time of nebulous until-then, my hope is to take advantage of my mere human agency and guide its role in the classroom.

Incorporating ChatGPT into a Business and Professional Writing Assignment

JAINAB TABASSUM BANU

It was a fine Spring afternoon. Everyone had their lunch and was in an excellent mood of sharing their insights. I attended MnWE 2024 virtually but could still feel the scholarly and friendly vibe of the conference. I presented my paper titled "Chat with It, Don't Copy and Paste: Teaching Ethical Consideration of Using ChatGPT in a Writing Classroom" under the panel "AI Ethics". While reading my paper, I shared what I do to incorporate ChatGPT in my Business and Professional Writing courses. I am happy to share the assignment with the readers of the MnWE journal.

What I Do:

First, I break the ice and let the conversation about AI melt in my classroom as Flower Darby suggests that instructors need to introduce ChatGPT and talk about it in the class. Since Business and Professional Writing is an upper-division course, my students come to the class with a minimum knowledge about AI in writing contexts. I have noticed that some of my students already use ChatGPT to compose their documents. Joseph M. Keegan writes in The Chronicle of Higher Education that many students are seen submitting their works "entirely copied from ChatGPT". So, the question regarding the pedagogical use of ChatGPT centers around "to what extent" students can use ChatGPT in their writing processes. What is expected? AI-generated or AI-assisted writing?

To explore these questions, I designed an assignment for my student. The assignment is a traditional Interview Q/A assignment for Business writing students. This is what I usually do in the 5th week of the course when students already have their job documents ready for a particular job position

at a specific company. This semester, I encouraged my students to prepare a set of interview questions based on the job position and company they aspire to work in. Then I told them to write answers to those questions and use ChatGPT afterwards.

First, I observed how they use ChatGPT independently. I noticed that my students write the question in the chat box and ask ChatGPT to generate answers. The answer they got as a response to the given prompt was what we call ChatGPT-generated answer: without context, without personal touch and without personal connection. ChatGPT can do freewriting, but it cannot write freely. It generates texts only based on the prompts provided by human writers.

Then, I encouraged my students to provide enough information about the job position and their backgrounds and then see what answer is generated by the writing tool. Surprisingly, my students were never convinced by the answer. Instead of submitting an AI-generated answer, they edited their answers and submitted an AI-assisted answer sheet. Finally, my business writing students wrote a reflective memo and shared their honest experience of using ChatGPT in their writing process.

I provided them with the following prompts for the reflective memo:

1. Were you familiar with ChatGPT before doing this assignment?
2. What prompts did you provide to ChatGPT along with the interview questions?
3. Could ChatGPT contextualize the answers? What have you noticed?
4. What about ChatGPT's choice of words? Do you use the same or similar words while writing your answer?
5. In your opinion, do you find ChatGPT a reliable writing tool?
6. How did ChatGPT help or hinder you from revising your answer? What changes did you make in your own writing after reading ChatGPT-generated texts?
7. Will you use this Chat bot in the future? If yes, in which writing situations do you think ChatGPT can be a useful tool?

What I Learned from my Students' Responses:

What I got to know from the reflective notes of my students is that most of them were familiar with the use of ChatGPT even before I introduced it to them in one of my writing workshop classes. They came up with a few cool ideas of using ChatGPT for writing their answers. A few of them just wrote about their background and the job they target and let ChatGPT write the answer for them. They used prompts like "write the answer based on this:".

I encourage my students to focus on 3 P's while crafting a professional document: professional, personable and persuasive. So, some of my students decided to write their answers first and then wrote prompts like "reword it", "rephrase it" and "make it sound better". The answer ChatGPT then generated had a different "P": Polished! A few of my students showed a resistance against ChatGPT-generated polished answers. They wrote, "but, this is not my voice. This is not how I write". I was glad that they decided to stick to their own unique voice which is always growing dynamically.

How MnWE 2024 Added More Insights to my Assignment:

The name of ChatGPT is self-referential. It is a Chat bot! When my students chatted with this tool, they provided personal information. I personally feel uncomfortable with and unsure of providing my personal information to any non-human chat bot. When a couple of my students did it, I felt obligated to talk to them about the security issue of making ChatGPT write for them. I told them that their information is not safe with ChatGPT. It has no autonomy of its own which would guarantee a safety net for the students' voices and information.

My assumption was confirmed after listening to an expert at the MnWE 2024 conference. One of the presenters in the panel "AI Ethics", Jaqueline Herbers from Viterbo University shared some concerning insights about how AI like ChatGPT and Grammarly are capable of using writers' information for many tech companies' gains. Her presentation was thought provoking to me. After the conference, I held another open discussion about ChatGPT and AI with

my students and shared what I learned from the panel. MnWE 2024 enhanced my knowledge about AI in writing.

All I say is that ChatGPT can only provide fish to the hunger-stricken individual whereas writing teachers teach them how to fish. The writing scholars are doing a wonderful job to incorporate ChatGPT and other AI tools in the current world with AI. The more we talk and write about it, the more we share our ideas with each other, the better support system we can create for our students! Let's meet in the next MnWE and share some more cool ideas!

Scary Tools for the Toolbox: Observations from the 2024 AI-Themed MNWE

L HORTON

The 2024 MNWE Conference provided the perfect opportunity to reflect on a full academic year's worth of focused concern for the impact of AI on college writing and for strategies around coping with it. I presented on the utility of the AI toolbox and its drawbacks at the 2024 Lake Superior Summit on the Teaching of Writing and English as a Second Language in February—a conference that has a somewhat different vibe.

First, my general attitude towards AI is skeptical and intensely critical. However, my impulse with this, as with any new technology, is to assess its potential as a useful tool and to try to determine what it is good at or what it is useless at. In its current form ChatGPT 3.5 and 4.0, since those are the versions I have experimented with, have some very limited potential utility, some moderately useful functions, and a great number of time-wasting, reputation-destroying traps for the inexperienced or unwary.

The mood at MNWE was different—in some ways more engaged and curious, but in some ways far more cynical or even paranoid. Some presenters were actively researching the kinds of questions I'm raising in this essay. Others were dismissive, suspicious, or wary of the technology. Some related that they had pivoted to hand-written-only assignments, and some refused even the idea of trying the tech themselves out of an (over-) abundance of caution. Possibly because of data scraping or identity theft—the concern was very genuine even if the feared result seemed a bit nebulous.

My colleagues at the Lake Superior Summit had a much more positive or optimistic view of the technology than I was prepared for. To the point that there were several discussions where I felt it necessary to actively raise concerns about proposed approaches. One presentation went so far

as to suggest the chatbot as a useful starting point for research—which it categorically is NOT.

A large language model (LLM) can produce text based on a given prompt—the more specific the prompt the more targeted the produced text. However, as multiple anecdotes and several in-depth articles have explained, an LLM is not equipped to verify or fact-check because it was never designed to evaluate its training data. If asked for source suggestions on a project, it is equally likely to produce citations on outdated, unreliable, or completely fabricated references. At the same time, its citations will look entirely plausible because of what it was designed to do well—produce polished-looking text that adheres to a specific template and prompt. The question then becomes, who is responsible for fact-checking or verifying the veracity of materials and the time required to do that? The student? The instructor? Who is held responsible for errors, mistakes, or other issues? Clearly anyone but the developers of the technology (pending litigation notwithstanding).

Given this situation, how do we instruct students in this evolving environment?

First, it is clear that we need to do more experimentation ourselves with this technology. Try the kinds of searches or prompts that a student in our courses might try.[1] Do some adjustments to the prompt. Analyze the results considering a few factors: How much tweaking was needed before the chatbot could approximate a useful response? How close was the response to what could be an acceptable or passable assignment submission? How obvious was it that the prose was bot-generated? What kinds of telltales remained? How many were acceptable versus unacceptable?

Beyond giving the toolset a try, what implications do your results have for your assignments? Does the assignment invite genuine, personal reflection? Is the student asked to engage with the subject and share their own perspective or relate their direct experience on some level? If a chatbot can produce an acceptable response, perhaps consider adjusting the assignment.

What advice do you take away for your students? Might they use a bot to brainstorm around a particular topic? To generate talking points? To

switch their own style from one register to another (code switching)? To see what the standard format for a particular kind of document might be? Determining potential use cases and recommending some of them can demystify LLM-based AI for your students and demonstrate your familiarity and confidence.

Discussion of the tech and its potential with my own students and with a recently graduated family member yielded some fascinating results. First, many students are still unaware of these tools—remember that not all of our students have equal access to or experience of technology. Second, many students value the idea of time-saving toolsets and are fully ready to use them if they can be relied upon. That said, they generally want to turn in quality work, and if the tools are not reliable (or if we can adequately articulate where they are or are not to be relied upon). They are no more eager to waste their time, money, and energy than we are.

The bottom line of these somewhat scattered observations is this: tools as such are morally neutral and innovation is cyclical. While it is clearly important to engage with and understand these developments, there is no need for fear. What is needed is communication and trust. Tell your students what your expectations and prohibitions are, explain why, and trust that the enormous ongoing investment they are making in their education will motivate them to diligently endeavor to learn what we have to teach.

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[1] An ongoing project at UMN is actively pursuing this angle on the problem. No doubt similar studies are taking place at other institutions, but this official activity does not absolve individuals from our responsibility of direct action and better-informed understanding.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION: A MNWE CONVERSATION

Developmental Education in the MNSCU System

YANMEI JIANG

The following document is an attempt to re-cap the developmental education reform movement in our state system, and to offer an alternative viewpoint to the narrative embraced by the system, which is being used to eliminate stand-alone remedial coursework at all MinnState institutions.

Background

For the last decade, more and more colleges, and even entire state systems, have been "reforming" developmental education. Much of this reform focuses on eliminating standalone, remedial courses in English and Math that are meant to strengthen the academic skills of underprepared students. The dominant narrative regarding this elimination is that such classes are a barrier, largely affecting under-privileged students, because many students who begin in these classes fail to complete college-level courses. The push to eliminate these classes has now officially reached Minnesota.

In 2018 MinnState rolled out a Developmental Education Strategic Roadmap (DESR) for schools to implement by the beginning of 21-22 school year. This roadmap offered schools some leeway to decide what works best for their college and their student population—populations which differ widely across the state (not to mention the nation). To be sure, the roadmap laid out a variety of guiding principles, such as offering accelerated course options, aligning learning outcomes across the state, and implementing multiple measures p lacement.

In early January, an email from the system office trickled down to faculty, mandating, "All developmental education coursework will be in a corequisite format tied to a college level course by Fall 2026." This means

the outright elimination of standalone remedial courses in English and Math in favor of corequisite coursework (taking a college level Math/English class at the same time as a support course).

However, the process by which this decision was made is not entirely clear. Apparently, a "Leadership Action Team" was assembled, consisting of presidents from various MinnState colleges and universities. This team was given national and system-specific data to review, and then made recommendations to the Chancellor. A PPT presentation titled "Corequisites and the Future of Developmental Education in Minnesota" was delivered to the leadership council; however, the use of data on some slides was questionable.i The MinnState leadership took the presentation at face value in decision-making, and the Chancellor signed a directive to eliminate standalone developmental education courses and implement corequisite courses by Fall 2026.

A workgroup consisting of MinnState administrators, deans, faculty, advising staff, and students from MinnState colleges and universities was quickly assembled to develop a comprehensive plan by June 30, 2023 (Leadership Council, 2022). The workgroup is charged with the following responsibilities: defining the scope of the work, identifying groups or individuals responsible for the work, defining an infrastructure, identifying resources, and defining the timeline. The new initiative was purportedly built upon decade-long developmental education reforms in math, reading, and English: forming developmental education workgroup in 2016, implementing Developmental Education Strategic Roadmap (DESR) from 2017-2021, and implementing the math pathway co-requisite at community colleges.

Problems

This edict comes on the heels of another systemwide directive to identify and implement multiple measures placement practices by July 1, 2024 (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 2022). Framed as another barrier, traditional placement practices have given way to various versions of "guided

self-placement," in which students have the right to place themselves in college-level classes.

DESR identified seven strategic goals, one of which is to "[i]mprove the accuracy of course placement by implementing a multiple measures placement program at all colleges and universities" (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 2018). This strategic goal should have been achieved before MinnState took any drastic action on developmental education, let alone issuing a mandate to eliminate standalone courses and adopt the corequisite model on all campuses—for all students below college-level cutoffs regardless of students' academic, professional, financial, and personal needs; the demographics of the student body; the location of the school and its connection to the community.

Both mandates have rendered the original DESR null and void, and an initial spirit of cooperation between system and college has given way to mandated actions. The expertise and experiences of educational practitioners are overlooked or purposely dismissed to meet MinnState's demands, which are dictated by the board of trustees. The top-down management of education, evidenced by MinnState's sudden decision to take a one-form-fits-all approach to developmental education, reflects the global trend of the emerging "new professionalism" across all public sectors—transferring business logics into the public sector and replacing the ideals of public service with market rationale (Anderson & Herr, 2015).

Proponents of eliminating standalone remedial courses and/or adopting the corequisite point to large increases in the numbers of students who take and pass college-level English and Math courses when they avoid standalone remedial courses. They often refer to Bailey et al. (2010)'s seminal work on traditional developmental education's ineffectiveness to make this case. Although reformers now advocate to either eliminate standalone courses or adopt the co-requisite model, Bailey et al. (2013) explicitly stated, "We do not advocate—nor do we believe that the results of our research support—the elimination of developmental education, the placing of all students into college courses, or the wholesale conversion of developmental education into a corequisite model" (p. 2). However, recent research has shown that the initial positive impacts of corequisites dissipates or disappears beyond the first year (Jaggars and Bickerstaff, 2018; Kane, et al., 2020; Ran and Lin, 2022).

Standalone developmental education should still be part of the strategy because data exist that show those who are able to persist in, and complete, remedial coursework may graduate and transfer at higher rates than those who took corequisite classes alone (Saw, 2019). Chen (2016) did a study for National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) with a nationally representative sample of two-year public students and found:1) remedial students who completed remediation had higher graduation rates than nonremedial students; 2) weakly prepared remedial students had better academic outcomes; 3) well-prepared remedial students did not have reduced outcomes compared to nonremedial students. Therefore, we cannot conclude that remediation is a barrier, and the uniform approach to developmental education reform will inadvertently hurt students who could benefit the most from such a program (Goudas, 2021). Given this, the goal should be to offer students as much support as possible to persist and complete coursework, and not to eliminate standalone courses, which also eliminates sufficient time for students with dedicated developmental education faculty.

It has been widely reported that the pandemic has led to grim educational outcomes and significant learning loss (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.; Education Policy Innovation Center, 2022). Preexisting educational disparities among students from under-resourced and marginalized communities have been exacerbated (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). Researchers have pointed out the urgency to address the dire consequences of learning loss through recovery and intervention efforts (Anderson, 2022; Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2022). Given the pandemic's disproportionate impact on community college students (Brock & Diwa, 2021), it is time for us to re-evaluate developmental education reforms so that we can re-envision models supported by sound research, centered on community needs, and validated by educators—in order to meet wide-ranging academic needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations:

Nearly all of the states that have made drastic developmental education

reforms by trying to either eliminate developmental education courses or enforcing the corequisite model were forced to do so by the legislature, such as Florida, Tennessee, Louisiana, and California. MinnState is not under legislative pressure yet to take immediate action since HF 3252, which addresses multiple measures placement in developmental education, has been tabled in Minnesota State senate. Therefore, Minnesota State should consider the following recommendations.

First, MinnState should wait until Multiple Measures Course Placement Phase II is finished in spring 2024 to make the decision. According to Barnett et al. (2020)'s CAPR report, the multiple measures practice gave students of color and students from low-income backgrounds more access to college-level courses (more in English than in math). Nevertheless, there has been no evidence that it contributed to reducing equity gaps among subgroups. Gains in college-level enrollment and completion in math are insignificant and are diminished in the third semester. Magnitude of impacts on English were larger, but it diminished overtime. MinnState, therefore, should consider how to develop more equitable placement practices for minoritized students and then provide targeted, sustained academic and financial support.

Second, MinnState should address the true reasons that lead to dropout and incompletion among community college students, instead of focusing on blaming developmental education. Adult students, who constitute about 1/3 of community college population, often quote life responsibilities as the main reason for incompletion (Crosta, 2013). In a survey of more than 50,000 students from ten community college campuses from 2017 to 2018, researchers found that the top ten challenges community college students experience are as follows: work, paying expenses, family and friends, online expenses, parking on campus, developmental courses, faculty, health and disability, doing college-level course, and registering for courses (Porter & Umbach, 2018). Among the five principles of developmental education Bickherstaff et al. (2022) identified, the second principle is to "[p]rovide targeted and tiered supports to address students' academic and nonacademic needs" (p. 2). CUNY's Start and ASAP will be good examples on how to accomplish this goal (Azurdia & Galkin,

2020; Miller et al., 2020). Research should also be conducted to find out how to retain students, especially those who fail the first try of a corequisite class.

Third, instead of taking a "one-form-fits-all" approach by enforcing the uniform adoption of the corequisite model, MinnState should consider a holistic approach to address the most challenging issues faced by community college developmental students (Goudas, 2021). Colleges should have the freedom to choose the model and delivery method that best fit their students' needs (Bickherstaff et al., 2022, p. 2). Florida, for example, not only provides students with extra support but also gives colleges the flexibility to choose from four developmental education models: corequisite, compressed, contextualized, and modulized. The law also mandates tailored programs. CUNY also has many forms of developmental program: corequisite, Start, CLIP, and workshops throughout the academic year.

Fourth, policymakers should seek broad collaboration with community organizations to provide support for students. Minnesota State has recently started collaborating with Adult Basic Education on more than two dozen community college campuses, a new corequisite model that has been successfully implemented ("Dev Ed/ ABE Toolkit," n.d.). MinnState should take a more proactive approach in coordinating the collaboration with ABE.

Call to Action

Educator practitioners should challenge broad policies that resulted in unfavorable social conditions for underachievement and education policies that led to inequities in education, especially the policies that further disenfranchised the poor and the marginalized students (Anyon, 2014). Educators must also pay attention to critical policy praxis by engaging in analysis and actions at the same time to counter neoliberal policies so that the paradigm could shift from data-driven policymaking to democracy-driven decision-making (Horsford et al., 2018). Therefore, educators should

actively participate in policymaking instead of only passively resisting policies imposed on them. When education leaders engage in inequitable approaches to education reform or policymaking, they need to be called out and held accountable (Anderson, 2009). Only by doing this can education leaders move away from inequitable education reform and policymaking.

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An International Graduate Teaching Assistant's Unique Experience at the MnWE Conference

NASIH UL WADUD ALAM

I am Nasih Ul Wadud Alam, MA in English, North Dakota State University. Born and brought up in Bangladesh, I use English as an additional language. I am also a person of color. And I am proud of my identity, culture, and heritage. I came to study in America in August 2022. Previously, I had a torrid experience while attending conferences in Bangladesh. I found the scholars there condescending towards others. For that reason, I developed a negative attitude towards paper presentations and attending conferences. After arriving in America, I still harbored a lot of negative beliefs towards conference presentations.

My department budgeted USD 1000 yearly for every student. Because of my myopic perspective, I did not really utilize it well. The thought of flying dreaded me. Moreover, I become so homesick, and love my family so much that I did not want to live separately from them even for a day. I miss Fargo when I go out of town. After attending the conference in Bloomington, I immediately thought about returning home. Fargo has turned out be a place of significance. Yes, it is more than a home. The reason for not going to some other conferences was emotionally made. I did not have the courage to travel so far and live apart from my family. Instead of coming up with excuses, I should have made better arrangements. Yes, to some extent. But again, I have always time to present again later. There is time for all of us to bounce back. I look forward to using whatever grants or funds I receive for presenting my future topics at the conference.

In the last two years, I attended four conferences in total in America. All of them were online. The MnWE conference of 2024 is the first one I attended face-to-face. In fact, my conference journey (online) began with the MnWE

conference. In March last year, I sent my proposal on "Alternative Grading." Lo and behold! My proposal was accepted. I said, "wow." Although it was an online presentation, I thoroughly enjoyed my time. After that, I got more confidence in attending some other presentations online. When I saw the topic, "Mental, Physical and Emotional Health," this year, I thought about sending the abstract of one of the book chapters that is under review somewhere in America. My paper was not only accepted but also received a grant of USD 30 for aligning well with the conference theme. After receiving the email, my wife and I decided to use our credit cards to go to Normandale Community College with our children to attend the conference. Thankfully, I received USD 330 from my department for the conference after I got back to Fargo. If it was not the end of the school year, I would receive USD 670 more from my department for conference travel funds. I blasted that opportunity.

Presenting the face-to-face conference for the first time was an amazing experience. I attended the conference on the 13th of April. I wanted to attend the conference on time. But I am not good at finding new locations. My PhD student wife, who went to Boston earlier to present her paper earlier in March, attended the conference online. I hovered around the NCC parking lot for quite some time. I did not see the directions clearly. I was cursing myself and the whole world for not being able to attend the opening session, where I was supposed to receive the grant of USD 30. I attended one session. It was on looking for new visions in literature. The topic was good, but I found some of the answers unconvincing. This is what happens in literary studies.

After attending that session, I had to attend another conference online. I thank the NCC staff for giving me the flexibility to attend another conference from their computer lab. It was a conference on "Early British Literature." Because of attending the conference, I missed the lunch session. I still miss it. The food was free. It would have been wonderful to eat all the delicious items. That literature conference was boring. I did not listen well to others. It is my habit. If the speakers do not present their topic by creating interest, I close my ears and focus on writing texts to my wife. I only become active during my presentation. The problem with literature conference is manifold. For example, I want to present a paper on Kamila Shamsie. Others have not read her, let's presume. Then, my audience might find my topic unappealing, or my arguments might go over their head. In that case, I will have to know

how to present my argument in a rhetorically appealing way. Unfortunately, I found it missing in that online conference.

My session would have started at 1:00 P.M. I entered the room early. I sat at the back. My fellow presenters went straight to the podium first. I followed them. We had four presenters in our session. One of them attended the conference online. Our session on "Mental, Physical, and Emotional Health" was lively, emotional and entertaining. All of us were extremely passionate about the topic. My fellow presenters and I nailed it. The presenters spoke about the importance of empathy while interacting with students and becoming cognizant of students' and their instructors' mental and physical health. The session was engaging and therapeutic. All of us spoke our heart and let our emotions out. We laughed and shed some tears along the way. From 1:00 P.M. to 2:15 P.M, we were in a maze.

At the beginning of the essay, I spoke about having bad experiences in the conferences in Bangladesh. After attending the conferences and meeting with so many lovely colleagues and people from Minnesota, I have now got different perspectives. It was not only an intellectual jorney from Fargo to Bloomington. It was a spirtual journey of sorts. I healed myself by purifying my soul from the negative mindset. Thanks to MnWE for being my healer.

The writer is an MA, NDSU. He lives in Fargo, North Dakota.

About MnWE

Mission and Vision: MnWE's mission is to help transform writing and English into teaching and learning experiences using practical methodologies that serve students best. Our vision is to bring scholarly ideas and practical pedagogy together to help create the future of our disciplines.

Who We Are: The MnWE Coordinating Committee facilitates all MnWE activities as unpaid volunteers. The committee is comprised of university and college tenure-line and adjunct faculty, graduate students, administrators, editors, and high school faculty who teach advanced writing and English in the high schools.

What We Do: Minnesota Writing and English–MnWE–offers a two-day academic conference each spring in the metro area of Minnesota or occasionally in Greater Minnesota. Our annual conference is held in person and online simultaneously, which allows us to host speakers from around the world. Our annual gathering has been described at times as being better than some national conventions.

Annual MnWE Conference: The MnWE Conference includes interactive plenaries during lunch, free time to talk with colleagues, entertainment, and many daily roundtable breakouts. Our roundtable sessions confound the usual conference style by replacing typical formal presentations with nontraditional, interactive events. Roundtables begin with several presenters talking for several minutes each. After the short presentations, they and the

audience discuss the viewpoints and experiences that have been offered. Most breakouts offer small groups where we encourage presenters to offer the new, the untried, and the old-but-revised in order to precipitate friendly, respectful questions and thoughtful answers.

MnWE also sponsors an online *MnWE Journal*, issued free online yearly; an online newsletter, issued six-times-per-year; and the *MnWE News*, which is privately circulated and free to over 2500 English and Writing faculty (see below to subscribe). Both the *Journal* and the *News* offer teaching ideas, updates about our academic disciplines and events, reviews, and resources.

Subscribing to the *MnWE News*: If you are not on the listserv and would like to join it, simply send your request and email address to richard at jewell dot net. We always enjoy signing up new list members.

History of MnWE: MnWE was started officially by Richard Jewell, an Inver Hills College tenured faculty member, who had taught previously at both the University of Minnesota and St. Cloud State University. In January 2007, he asked Donald Ross at the University of Minnesota if the two of them might work to develop a joint conference in their two systems and throughout the state.

When Donald agreed, Richard then went to the annual MnSCU English and writing discipline meeting in Minneapolis in February to ask whether its members would like him to develop an annual state conference that would include all Minnesota colleges and universities.

About eighty faculty from throughout MnSCU were present; they voted by over 80% to support the conference. A founding committee coordinated by Richard formed immediately to organize the first conference.

The initial committee has grown to include several dozen active members and MnWE representatives at their schools who come from campuses in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. The conference and the newsletter reach out to all states surrounding Minnesota.

Members of the committee represent a wide diversity of college and university professors, instructors, and graduate students from University of Minnesota campuses, Minnesota and Wisconsin state universities and public two-year colleges, and a variety of nonprofit and for-profit private colleges

and universities. We also are proud to include graduate students in the conferences and on our committee, and we are glad to see an increasing number of high school faculty attending the conferences, who teach college writing and English in their schools.

The first conference was in fall 2009. Attendance normally varies from 150 to 200. Richard Jewell continues to serve as the General Coordinator. In about 2011, two additional central positions were added: Larry Sklaney as Conference Coordinator, and Danielle Hinrichs as Conference Program Coordinator. Both of them have, since 2015, been Conference Co-Coordinators.