

CHAPTER 1

Writing: An Overview

PERSPECTIVE

Students seldom realize how much writing ability will influence their careers. Your course will be more likely to engage student interest if its practical value is readily apparent. To demonstrate this value, you might reproduce the following quotation as a class handout, on the board or on PowerPoint. We have found that it primes students for the upcoming term. They begin to sense the usefulness of writing in the “real” world and become more receptive to the instruction that will follow.

Purpose in Writing (p. 2)

Students often imagine that their purpose in writing is simply to get a good grade, or to fulfill an assignment. They may also overgeneralize their purpose for writing by stating that they want to inform the reader of something. To help students understand the idea of purpose on a deeper level, you might have jot down or brainstorm about what the writing occasion is, what reader or readers they are hoping to reach, and ways they could interest the reader or readers, perhaps by finding common ground with them, aligning with their values, or showing them something they may not have thought about.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Ask students to interview two working people about the kinds of writing they are required to do at work. Ask them to jot down their answers, and bring these findings to the next class. In addition to emphasizing reinforcing the relevance of writing for different kinds of jobs and careers, this assignment can also help prepare students for a more complex interview assignment later in the term. The interview could double as the first writing assignment.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Pair students and have them orally exchange a brief personal history. Next time the class meets, have students write down what they remember of their partner’s history. They will quickly see the importance of an accurate written record.
2. In order to show that a piece of writing may often have more than one purpose, bring in copies or show on a screen a public newsletter from a local organization or a report from your institution such as the President’s Report. Have students locate

places where the newsletter or report seems to do more than give information, but also to be directed toward a particular aim or audience. How do they know?

3. Have each student identify some personal situations (beyond those listed in the text) that require writing. This type of activity, along with the previous two, helps set the stage for a writing course.
4. Put students in pairs or groups of three, and have them discuss their experiences of writing in school, at home, and at work, as well as their hopes and fears for this course. This exercise can function as an ice-breaker, and can help students appreciate how writing takes place in a variety of contexts, some of which include their personal histories of writing. It may also help to prepare them for writing a literacy narrative, described in Chapter 6.
5. Start with a subject, such as going to university, and have students indicate how they would approach a writing project if its purpose were to (a) tell stories that make friends laugh; (b) explain to high school students how to prepare for university or college; or (c) explain to professors why students have difficulty adjusting. The class will see that different purposes require different approaches.
6. To introduce students to critical thinking, bring in two or three supposedly objective accounts of a major news item on a contemporary military or political issue which are taken from different kinds of media publications and which represent different interests. Ask students what purpose these articles serve besides providing information. This assignment could also introduce students to the idea of audience.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READINGS

Flower, Linda. "The Construction of Purpose in Writing and Reading." *College English* 50 (1988): 528-550. Print.

- Provides insights into how writers and readers work with purposes and explains how inexperienced and experienced writers "frame" their purposes differently. Acknowledges that while purpose may be signaled in a final text in apparently orderly and linear ways, writers usually have multiple purposes, some of which may be private, internal, and difficult to articulate.

The Audience for Your Writing (p. 4)

PERSPECTIVE

Audience is a difficult concept for students since they are most familiar with writing that is aimed exclusively at their instructor. The classroom situation often ties them to that assumption. You might attempt therefore to broaden their sense of audience, perhaps drawing a parallel between the ways in which writers and business people or marketers must target their audience. Explain that writers must be psychologists in a

way, anticipating how different kinds of readers with different characteristics will react or respond to their writing. This discussion should prepare students for understanding the importance of tone, and the differences among academic formal writing, business writing, informal personal writing, e-mails or text messages to friends that might be quickly dashed off.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. Have students write to actual readers who might supply a response. They could complain about a defective product, request a free product, write a letter to the editor in their local paper, join a blog conversation, or write a letter to their MP.
2. Have students identify the needs, attitudes, and expectations they have as readers when they read different kinds of materials—a textbook, an email from a friend, a magazine in a doctor's waiting room.
3. This idea is adapted from a site Space.com by Douglas Vakoch who describes a writing assignment by Jeffrey Lockwood (“Writing for an Extraterrestrial Audience,” July 17th, 2008): Have students in groups of three or four write a brief interstellar letter to an extraterrestrial audience who belong to a much older civilization than ours. This thought experiment may also function as a team-building exercise, as students struggle to reach consensus about how to communicate and what to emphasize. Afterwards, you may have students look at Douglas Vakoch's piece “How We Present Ourselves to Aliens” at <http://www.space.com/searchforlife/080313-seti-present-ourselves.html> (posted March 13, 2008).
4. Have students explore the question of audience for a Facebook or other social media profile. If they have a Facebook profile, how do they imagine their readers? How would they construct a Facebook persona to attract a date, to impress a future employer, or to communicate with friends from the past they rarely see?
5. Have students identify the needs, attitudes, and expectations they have as readers and how these factors influence their response.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Bring in writing samples aimed at a non-student audience. Have students identify how they respond and why.
2. Bring in samples of communication that are clearly inappropriate for their audience. Any faculty member's mailbox is full of examples. Have students identify the problems and suggest changes.
3. You might use YouTube to show commercials from different decades and ask students about the underlying assumptions made about the audience and purpose in

different periods. Another possibility is to look at pro-social ads such as the award-winning ad from “Three Minute Ad Age” which aims at teen-agers who thoughtlessly use the phrase “That’s so Gay” or the ad which aims to combat steroid use: see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD16K-fr7bg>> Have students discuss the ways in which these ads appeal to their audience.

4. Have students watch the latest version of the short video “Did You Know?” first shown at the 2007 National Council of Teachers of English at:
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8&feature=related>>.
This video, which emphasizes the exponential rate of change wrought by changing technologies (it mentions, for example, that the number of text messages sent every day now exceeds the global population)—has implications for how young people’s literacies are changing at an unprecedented rate. Ask students to discuss the ways in which the availability and speed of electronic communication affects our sense of audience, genre, and purpose.
5. Ask students to listen closely to the language patterns of people in different discourse communities: faculty in different disciplines, people having a conversation on a TV sitcom, people chatting in a cafe or restaurant, students speaking in class and students speaking with friends. What differences do they notice about academic and non-academic, or formal and informal patterns of communication?
6. Discuss the English classroom as a discourse community. Have students individually list what they think are its goals, values, assumed knowledge, rules, and nature. Then discuss and compare students’ expectations with yours.

EXERCISE ANSWERS (p. 7)

1. Passage 1 is aimed at a broad, general audience, including young people. To reach this audience, Hamilton has used short sentences and everyday words. He does not assume knowledge of terms such as antigens, but gives succinct definitions of these terms, helping his readers understand by likening antigens to “foes”
2. Passage 2 is aimed at an audience of educated adults. Its sentences are longer and more intricate than those in passage 1, and it uses a number of technical terms—helminths, polysaccharides, lipids—that would puzzle most readers in a general audience.
3. Passage 3 is aimed at students in the field of immunology. Because these readers will become specialists, the authors use more technical terms and provide a more detailed explanation than do the first two writers. Wyss and Eklund assume that the reader understands the basics of antigens and concentrate on presenting specialized information concerning them.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READINGS

Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of

Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy." *College Composition and Communication* 35.2 (1984): 155-71. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

- Explores the concept of audience in composition theory by pointing out that the audience is always, in a sense, an imaginary construct of the writer. Writers who aim to address an audience who exist as real people outside the text also invoke an audience through their choices in language, tone, and style. Both writers and readers construct meaning from the text, and writers are themselves an audience for the text they are writing.

Flower, Linda. "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in College Writing." *College English* 41 (1979): 19-37. Print.

- Shows how students can go from writer-oriented prose to reader-oriented prose and supplies excellent examples.

Lunsford, Andrea A. and Lisa Ede. "Representing Audience: 'Successful' Discourse and Disciplinary Critique." *College Composition and Communication* 47 (1996): 167-80. Print.

- Offers a thoughtful and critical review of the concept of audience.

Magnifico, Alecia Marie. "Writing for Whom? Cognition, Motivation, and a Writer's Audience." *Educational Psychologist* 45.3. (July-Sept. 2010): 167-184. Print.

- An interesting psychological perspective, drawing on cognitive theory which emphasizes the role of the individual in the writing task, and a sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes the role of communities and context. Discusses the way the idea of an authentic audience has been complicated in the new media communities, where writers can choose whether to participate in conversations where they may ask advice, offer suggestions, and negotiate meanings online.

New Media Genres (p. 8)

PERSPECTIVE

For many students who text several times a day on a daily basis, the ideas of writing emails with complete sentences, commas, capital letters, and correct spelling may seem slightly old-fashioned, so it is worth emphasizing that there are also discourse communities in electronic communication.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. **Texts:** Have students bring to class examples of what they think are effective or ineffective text messages, share on the board, and then discuss what makes them effective or ineffective.
2. **Tweets:** Writing tweets can be a useful way to help students learn to be more concise in their writing. You can have students tweet or e-mail a tweet form of their thesis statement or a tweet summary of a reading assignment. You may want to discuss in class the advantages and disadvantages of such brevity.
3. **Blogs:** One of the key advantages to blogs is that it makes student writing public. Students should then develop or identify a theme or area of interest for their blogs, then create a blog spot. The various writing assignments can be tied to their blogs. Drafts and the development drafts should be to prepare for a blog posting and culminate in a blog posting. By the end of the semester, the students should have developed several blogs in their area of interest. It is crucial to stress to students that since their blogs are public, there is absolutely no room for plagiarism.
4. **Graphics:** Have students find a graphic argument such as a political cartoon. Working in groups, have the students rewrite the argument as if it were to appear as a standalone text. Discuss whether the graphic alone, the text argument alone or the graphic plus text is more effective and why.
5. **Graphics and Text:** Since our communications are increasingly visual, you may set up an assignment where students use visuals interspersed with text, perhaps using one of the many available programs to create an illustrated essay (you will have to explain that copyright rules also apply to most visuals they find on the web.) Use the projects as the basis to discuss basic principles of writing such as audience, purpose, and organization.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Give examples from your own experience of how you might use different styles and tone in emails or texts to different people, and invite students to share their own examples.

You can also have fun with opening up a discussion about different forms of salutation and sign-off in emails. When do they start an email with “Hello” and when do they begin with “Hi”? When do they have no salutation? Some people with business experience may sign off “Regards” or “Sincerely” while a small intimate group of friends may sign off with much more warmth. Students will enjoy looking at something they do automatically on a regular basis with an analytical eye.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READINGS

Hawisher, Gail E. and Charles Moran. "Electronic Mail and the Writing Instructor." *College English* 55(1003): 627–43. Print.

- Explains why e-mail can and should be an important part of a writing class.

Kathleen Blake Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key." *College Composition and Communication* 56 (2004): 297–328.

- Calls for new ways to envision the materials of composition in this age of multiple literacies, where, for example, visual and network literacies interact with print literacies. Asks that we consider how technological literacies might be used rhetorically.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Writing in the 21st Century*. NCTE (2009).1-9. Web.

- Points out that we need new models of teaching as digital technologies become more and more interwoven with our composing and reading practices. For example, we now write much more in others' company, use blogs as a kind of pre-writing, and must learn to sift through increasingly large amounts of information available at our fingertips.

(a) EXERCISE ANSWERS (p. 10)

1. This cryptic message is incomplete. The student should include the instructor's name, his or her name, and a complete sentence.

2. Although the student uses the word "sorry," the tone is presumptuous. 'Hey' is too informal for this context, and the 'family trouble' should be more fully explained in a complete sentence.

3. Again the email is incomplete, and too informal. The whining tone will probably not lead to success.

4. The student has not demonstrated a sincere attempt to understand the assignment or the instructor's expectations. Because the request to do it differently lacks a question mark, and because it does not explain what the student wants to do, it sounds more like a rude demand than a polite request.

(b) EXERCISE ANSWERS (p. 10)

Sample tweets (fewer than 140 characters)

1. In Katherine Briggs' magical new story battle with river monster threatening mankind interrupts honeymoon
2. This year u can register for fall & spring courses together to secure your spring courses. U can add or drop later if needed.

Level of Diction (p.12)

PERSPECTIVE

Most students will eventually write in a variety of circumstances requiring a number of different levels of diction. Therefore we should ensure that they can select and use the proper level for any writing occasion. Students who speak and write nonstandard English pose special problems; fortunately several helpful techniques are available. If students are inexperienced writers who lack fluency, you might allow them to write early journal entries and the first couple of papers in nonstandard English to ease their introduction to writing. It's frequently counterproductive to treat a dialect as wrong, as this often results in a backlash that hinders learning. Explain that because edited standard English is the dialect used in school and business, students who master it will have more opportunities and more power to influence others. One good approach is to have students discuss the different kinds of English they might use in an online community, a job interview, a face-to-face meeting with a casual friend, an interaction with a customer or boss at work, and a classroom discussion.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Have students write different versions of one short assignment, directing them at different audiences and using different levels of diction. If they write about some college problem, one version (informal and colloquial) might be directed to friends at home, a second (informal) to their parents, and a third (formal) to the university or college president.

EXERCISE ANSWERS (p. 15)

1. This is formal–informal diction. Informal elements include loose sentences that, except for sentences 6 and 9, are relatively short; the use of the pronouns I, me, and my; and the colloquial expressions yells and tough. Formal elements include parallelism (“I am” in sentences 1–3, and “I have” in sentences 5 and 7–9) and the absence of contractions.
2. This is informal diction. The language is casual, familiar, and frantic rather than stately and serious. The passage includes two original and highly figurative examples of slang—”short-circuiting themselves into hot little twitching death balls” and “charred-in-the-

flankers”—as well as such less flamboyant slang and colloquial expressions as “gets them queer,” “hot-in-the-pants,” “God knows where else,” and “winds up.” The first and third sentences are long, but the remaining five are relatively short. All are loose rather than periodic, and none of them shows parallelism or balanced construction. Although Wolfe uses one term, ethology, which even a sophisticated audience might not know, he defines it for his readers.

The Qualities of Good Writing (p. 16)

PERSPECTIVE

Effective writing, of course, depends on the writer’s grasp of purpose and audience. No one would expect a letter to a friend to have the same tone, or level of polish as a magazine article. You can help students understand that strong writing is a function of context. Students and instructors often have a different sense of what makes for good writing. What we see as well developed and significant they might see as tedious and pompous. Good writing instruction helps students to understand that our sense of good writing is not arbitrary but stems from how readers receive writing.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Bring in a newspaper article, magazine article, and professional essay on the same topic. Have students identify textual differences, account for them, and identify what is common to the texts. Note the common qualities that may be features of good writing; also have students identify places where the writer clearly is aiming for a specific audience.
2. Have students rank three different versions of the same paper or memo. One version might be vague and general, another ineffectively organized, and the third a clear example of good writing. Compare student rankings and discuss the reasons for their decisions.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READINGS

Appleman, Deborah, and Douglas Green. “Mapping the Elusive Boundary Between High School and College Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 44.2 (1993): 191–99.

- Provides a concise account of the trade-offs involved in establishing what constitutes good academic writing.

Carter, Michael. “The Idea of Expertise: An Exploration of Cognitive and Social Dimensions of Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 41.3 (1990): 265–86. Web.

- Offers a good perspective on the skills instructors may need to develop in students

Lawson, Bruce., Susan Ryan, and W. Ross Winterowd, eds. *Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Reading Student Writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1990. Print.

- Offers a good overview of the issues involved in how teachers read student writing

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR VIEWING

The Agenda - Broadcast - Andrea Lunsford | The Myths of Digital Literacy Video." 2 Oct. 2009. Web. 24 Jan. 2012.

- An interview with the well-known Director of Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University about the Stanford Study of Writing she organized. She acknowledges that the effect of the internet on writing her extensive is huge, as “audiences are everywhere.” She claims that students know what is appropriate. “Good writing is writing that makes something happen in the world.”

Writing and Ethics (p. 16)

PERSPECTIVE

Discussion of how language shapes our moral consciousness can be a good way to introduce the importance of critical thinking. Instructors may wish to encourage students to think about the ways in which writing is much more than a set of skills, and may be directed toward social ends that have moral implications. When students understand that writing can influence others to support a decision or to take action, they can also ask questions about how that action affects others, individually, locally, and globally.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Since most writing, even expository writing, contains at least an element of persuasion or argument, instructors might explain that the study of rhetoric traditionally implies the study of how language is used to influence or persuade an audience to accept the point of view expressed by a writer or speaker. Aristotle notes that speakers rely on logical, emotional, and ethical appeals to sway an audience. How does a writer or speaker inspire trust? In order to understand ethics as a set of moral principles that may guide the conduct of an individual, a society, or a profession, instructors may invoke the concepts of fairness and respect. How are writers fair or unfair in their selection of evidence, their treatment of counter-arguments, and their attitude toward their audience? How do writers demonstrate respect for their audience, for themselves, and for their subject? Each of the writing strategy chapters as well as the chapters on writing about literature, the library

research paper, and primary research strategies contains an “Ethical Issues” section and accompanying “Teaching Strategies.” You can use these teaching strategies to help students understand the ethical implications involved in each of these kinds of writing.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Bring in different historical and/or contemporary writing samples that have been used to persuade or motivate people—a political speech, a school or company mission statement, an advertisement, a letter to an editor, a newspaper column. Ask students to consider not only how the writer or speaker attempts to influence the audience, but also to consider the ethical dimensions of this influence. What seems to be the writer’s larger motivation in writing or speaking? Does this motivation go beyond self-interest and promote the good of a larger community? What might be the short and long-term consequences of following the writer’s lead?
2. In a January 1998 article called “Rhetoric: Coming to Terms” in the *English Journal* published by the National Council of Teachers of English, Brenda Lamb gives a brief overview of evolving definitions of rhetoric, including its negative associations with the use of language to manipulate at others’ expense. Sophists of Plato’s day ignored the idea of virtue and used language skillfully to mislead an audience. Where can students find language that is powerfully persuasive, but unethical in its aims? Have students bring in examples from social or historical contexts.
3. Ask students to think of how using language as a veil to obscure meaning can also be unethical. You may wish to refer students to George Orwell’s famous essay “Politics and the English Language” (available on-line at <http://www.k-1.com/Orwell/pol.htm>), and ask students to find examples of “doublespeak” from the daily newspaper.
4. Ask students to consider how much communication in our technology-driven, capitalistic society is governed by what Steven Katz called “the ethics of expediency.” See citation below.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READING

Porter, Kevin. “A Pedagogy of Charity: Donald Davidson and the Student-Negotiated Composition Classroom.” *College Composition and Communication* 52.4 (2001): 574-611. Web. 12 March 2012.

- Drawing on philosopher Donald Davidson’s “principle of charity,” Porter explores ways that a charitable reading of student texts, by peers and instructor alike, assumes that students are rational beings with coherent beliefs. A charitable reading of student work that includes a willingness to be persuaded encourages dialogue, especially in a multicultural classroom where students have different beliefs and backgrounds. Although it does not exclude constructive critique, a “pedagogy of charity” emphasizing respect for writers promotes learning more successfully than a “pedagogy of severity” that focuses on errors.

Katz “The Ethic of Expediency: Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust.” *College English* 54 (March 1992). 255-27. Web.

Academic Honesty and Avoiding Plagiarism (p. 18)

PERSPECTIVE

Of course, with the proliferation of paper mills, the sheer amount of information on the Web, and the cutting and pasting practices that some students have developed in high school, plagiarism is a vexed issue in the academy. Even though plagiarism is less a risk for personal writing than it is for research or source-based writing, it can be a good idea to have a discussion early in the term about this issue. Students who are being asked to join an academic conversation or use academic discourse but speak in their own voice, and contribute something fresh, may feel overwhelmed by what seem to be contradictory requirements. While buying a paper is a clear example of intentional plagiarism, accidental plagiarism; students who have downloaded music and movies from Torrents may have confusion around what constitutes plagiarism in university writing. Rather than assuming an aggressive stance, you could explore with students the reasons why people might plagiarize, intentionally or not. Do make sure that students understand the consequences of plagiarism so they will not be able to claim later that they didn’t know.

TEACHING STRATEGY

You can structure your writing assignments to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism in many ways: You can have students write an early draft of a paper in class, and then have them significantly revise this draft and turn in both drafts. If you confer with students about their progress along the way, even by email, you will have a sense of whether they are doing their own work. You can require oral presentations on papers and have them field questions from the audience afterwards. Rather than giving open or general choice of topics, you can give specific restrictions in your assignments, for example, by requiring them to refer to a class discussion or an essay you have studied in the book. You can also base assignments on local, current issues that are unlikely to be on the Web.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Have students look up an extended discussion of plagiarism such as one of the following links. Then have them write a summary of what they learned about plagiarism.

Procter, Margaret. *How Not to Plagiarize* - University of Toronto. Web. January 24, 2012. <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>

Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship – University of California at Davis. Web. November 18, 2015. <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/files/plagiarism.pdf>

Stolley, Karl and Allen Brizee. "Is It Plagiarism Yet?" Purdue Online Writing Lab. Web. January 22, 2012.

2. Have students take the "Academic Integrity Tutorial" from York University, available at the following link
http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/
3. PowerPoint presentations available on the Internet could be especially helpful for visual learners. One such presentation that focuses on APA style is done by the Calgary Board of Education. Be sure to check out the terms of fair use for PowerPoint presentations you find online!
4. In order to get students to think critically about the different goals, expectations, and codes of different discourse communities, including the different rules around plagiarism in different contexts, you might follow Chris Anson's suggestion (see citation immediately below) have students examine specific citation practices that led to accusations of plagiarism, unpacking the assumptions, goals, and values of that discourse community.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTOR READINGS

Anson, Chris. "Fraudulent Practices: Academic Misrepresentations of Plagiarism In the Name of Good Pedagogy." *Composition Studies* 39 (Fall 2011): 29-43. Print.

- Anson argues that the definition of plagiarism changes according to context, and conventions around unattributed material in some military and civic contexts differ considerably from the rules and expectations in academic communities. To get students to move beyond simplistic rules into higher order thinking, you could have students study a range of textual and discursive practices in different communities.

Whitaker, E. "A Pedagogy to Address Plagiarism." *College Composition and Communication* 44 (1993):509–14. Print.

- Offers a number of useful techniques for shifting the plagiarism issue from a battle between instructor and student to an effective opportunity for learning.

Zwagerman, Sean. "The Scarlet P: Plagiarism, Panopticism, and the Rhetoric of Academic." *College Composition and Communication* 59 (2008): 676-710. Print.

- An article that raises questions about the ethical implications of anger-fuelled campaigns against plagiarism, and the way the technology of plagiarism-detection software may create a climate of distrust that contributes to the problem. He recommends that paying more attention to the process of writing and critical thinking makes plagiarism much less likely, as students become more invested in what they have to say.