

# English 697: Composition Theory—How Writers Learn

## Spring 2016—Mondays 4:30-7:10 PM—Robinson B106

Prof. E. Shelley Reid

**Robinson A439:** Mondays 3:30-4:30 pm, Thursdays 5:30-6:30 pm, and by appointment

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### Course Goals

English 697 is a core course in composition studies. As writers, we operate daily under a range of assumptions, our own and others', about how writers produce and improve their writing. Through readings, discussions, and independent projects in this course we will move beyond assumptions to focus on underlying theories and research that seeks to help us better understand these processes. We have some linked goals:

To understand "composition theories" as an evolving, dynamic conversation to which we can all contribute and which is not set apart from our "practice" as writers

To identify key terms and principles that serve as foundations

To strengthen our abilities to see and act upon key strengths, opportunities, and challenges that define contemporary writing programs

To understand and build practices based on the range of (sometimes competing) professional identities that WPAs can develop

To identify opportunities for practice, innovation, and research that will contribute to student learning, faculty development, program development, and scholarly advancement

### Course Tools & Expectations

#### The Books, Readings, and Tools

Villanueva and Arola, *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, third edition (2011)

Adler-Kassner and Wardle, *Naming What We Know* (2015)

Additional readings accessible via university library databases, accessible through the library's E-Reserves, or posted on our wiki.

If you have a laptop or tablet you can bring to class, please do so. It would be helpful if you have or create a Gmail account for use during class writing activities.

### The Assignments and Grade Values, Very Briefly:

Difficulty Blog	20%
Learning Narrative (5%) and Parlor Extension (15%)	20%
Project Proposal and Initial Bibliography	15%
Learning Investigation Project (35%) + Presentation (5%)	40%
Community Presence & Intensive Discussion Questions	5%

### Other Policies of Note

**Attendance** is expected. I get bored with classes where there's just talking and taking notes, so you can expect each class to include a high amount of non-replicable interactive learning. If you're not with us, we can't really help you make up the experience—and more importantly, we'll have missed your particular contributions that evening. If you miss more than one class for reasons other than alien abduction or kidney donation, your Community grade will drop significantly. (See Community Presence below.)

**Late work** poses challenges for writers in a course like this: writers learn in large part by writing and receiving feedback, and your missed deadline will likely limit your feedback, force you to compress a learning process into fewer days, and put you further behind for upcoming projects.

But writers do run late. If that happens to you, you may request an extension of up to 3-5 days, but only if you meet with me (f2f or virtually, preferably in advance) so we can talk about what's happening with your writing work that is slowing you down, and create a plan for your continued success. Note that any second request for an extension could require significantly more thorough explanations.

Exception: There are no extensions on the Project Draft or Final Project deadlines unless you're experiencing a rare, documentable emergency. (The draft is an ungraded task that you shouldn't be starting at the last minute anyway, so you will have *something* to share, and the final comes in too late to allow much leeway.) A 5%–15% grade penalty will apply to late Project work.

Beyond that, I expect that you'll mostly keep up with both the reading and the writing as assigned. If you start to feel that you're falling behind, please let me know as soon as you can so we can work out some alternatives. Please don't suffer in silence under the gray cloud of doom: graduate school is supposed to be difficult but I truly don't intend it to be dire.

Although it goes without saying, sometimes saying it is important, especially for an interactive class: you should maintain an attitude of **professional respect and courtesy**—though certainly not always agreement—toward other members of the classroom community.

**Students with disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities are legally entitled to certain accommodations in the classroom. Students requesting such accommodation must present faculty with a contact sheet from the Office of Disability Services (703-993-2474). I will gladly work with students and the ODS to arrange fair access and support.

**GMU Nondiscrimination Policy:** George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or age. Mason shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

## Assignments

**Powerful writers are flexible writers:** We'll write regularly and in multiple modes this semester. We'll write to learn and to demonstrate learning; we'll write to support one another and to investigate our own work as writers. We'll write formally and informally, privately and in shared spaces, about concepts and about data, at home and in class. Whatever we do and don't know about how writers learn, all evidence augers against one-shot achievements, so you won't just write one massive research project at the end of the semester. You should feel free to let any of the writing projects lead into and overlap with one another—within your own investigations and within the classroom community generally.

### Difficulty Blog: 8 posts, 150-300 words each, 15%

We're reading intensively this semester, and writing can be a productive way of engaging challenging readings. Rather than have you summarize or report on overall texts—writing to demonstrate that you've conclusively learned something—this assignment asks you to identify a difficult moment and explore that difficulty, so that you give yourself space to gain insight without necessarily drawing too-quick a conclusion. We'll do this writing in a public space, so that everyone has the opportunity to learn from each other's inquiries.

You should write for yourself and for an audience of your peers. Each blog post should include

- A brief quotation from one of the recently assigned readings: **a sentence or two that you find difficult:** in what it says, in how it says it, in what it implies, in how it is supported or challenged by other information you know.
- Several sentences explaining, as precisely as you can, what might be going on that makes this sentence or idea difficult for you: its language or assumptions, your experiences or assumptions, its position relative to other inquiry in the field, etc. You should avoid "some things are hard in some ways for some reasons" generalities by indicating exact terms, events, and/or texts that provoke your reactions.

- Several sentences explaining some possible ways around, through, or past the difficulty: given that both the author and you are reasonable, engaged scholars trying to communicate with one another, what can you propose? These sentences need not solve, firmly answer, or dismiss the difficult questions you posed.

Your post may be in informal prose, since writing style will not be part of its evaluation, but it should be readable for a peer audience and clearly focused on one idea.

Blog posts will be assessed primarily on the insight and specificity of the analysis you provide: how do you identify and connect difficult elements to give yourself some purchase in the conversation and enable others to see the complications, intrigues, and/or possible options or workable approaches more clearly? Posts will be marked as **Honors**, **Satisfactory**, or **Unsatisfactory**. These marks may be *loosely* translated to 10, 8.8, and 7 on a 10-point scale.

### **Difficulty Blog Response: *In-class writings*, 5%**

Post an engaged, "I see your point, and here's another thing I would offer" response (50-200 words) to peer posts during our class writing time. Remember that your goal is not to solve the difficulty, but to join the author in exploring it.

### **Learning Narrative and Parlor Extension: 5+15%**

***Narrative, 1000-1500 words:*** Describe for a peer audience one or two scenes from your personal history of "learning to write." Your learning event(s) may feature grand revelations or mild intuitions, they may show you as successful or struggling, they may involve schools and assignments or less formal settings, they may be from your distant past or focus on more recent events. You should treat this as a research assignment, with yourself as your data source, and so your first responsibility is to represent as much specific, relevant detail about the/each event as possible. If you can pose some tentative hypotheses about *yourself as a writing learner* (not just as a writer, but as one who learns), you may do so, but you can also feel free at this point to identify key elements of the puzzle that is you, as an engaged writing learner.

Post a copy of your Narrative online for peer feedback. The Narrative will be marked as **Honors**, **Satisfactory**, or **Unsatisfactory** (5, 4.4, and 3.5 on a 5-point scale), based primarily on timely completion, the careful detail provided, and the beginnings of your analysis.

***Parlor Extension, 1500-2000 words:*** Bring your narrative into the front parlor, and engage three other voices/texts from our class in your analysis of your own writing learning. Your goal should still be to explore the puzzle rather than to conclude narrowly about what happened; you might choose voices that represent alternate views to help broaden your inquiry. You should try to create a sense of conversation: rather than dropping in a single quotation from another source that "explains" your work, you should take the time to represent others' views thoughtfully and in relation to one another as well as to your own experience. You may revise your earlier narrative as needed. This conversation may take the form of a "traditional"

academic essay, or may involve additional elements such as dialogue, footnotes, visual design, or approaches from other genres as you seek to represent your parlor experience.

Post a copy of your Parlor Extension online for peer feedback. Revise and post to the wiki the following week. The Parlor piece will be letter-graded, with criteria discussed in class as the deadline approaches. It may be revised for a new grade by the last week of class.

### **Project Proposal and Bibliography: 1000–1200 words, +5-7 source annotations, 15%**

In preparation for your Learning Inquiry Project, draft a proposal for your upcoming research. We'll discuss possible topics, questions, and research strategies in class.

**Part 1:** Identify the research question(s), the exigency/need for this kind of inquiry, and the relevance to (part of) the ongoing conversation about learning to write. What's open to debate, and how will your data contribute to ongoing analyses of that question?

**Part 2:** Refer specifically to two or three sources in the field to help explain the validity or context of your question, show a model of the approach you plan to take, and/or support the value of the results you might achieve.

**Part 3:** Identify the likely site(s) or participant(s) for your study, the kind(s) of data you plan to collect, and some key steps involved in collecting and analyzing your new data. Address ethical research processes, and explain any possible challenges or complications of collecting data.

**Part 4:** Provide a project timeline, in table form, with at least six dates between now and May.

**Part 5:** Annotated bibliography of 5-7 sources, only two of which may come from our course readings. Use MLA or APA citations, and provide a 150-200 word annotation for each source.

For this project, your target audience is Prof. Reid. Your goal is to define a project that is focused, completable, and relevant to ongoing controversies. Proposals will be letter graded based on addressing all key elements (rather than creating the perfect project design) in an organized, insightful, field-aware manner.

### **Learning Investigation Project & Presentation: 3000-3500 words + 5 minutes, 35% + 5%**

Investigate a question concerning How Writers Learn. The strongest projects will likely inquire into a particular corner of this question: specific writers, writing classes, genres, stages, or approaches. You need to **bring some new data** to this discussion, via interviews or surveys of one or more other writers, and/or via analysis of other writers' work. All participants must grant informed consent for their information to be used in this project.

You may also include your own experiences as a writing learner, and you will need to refer to relevant published work in the field. This project does not require a minimum amount of data

or a specific number of outside sources; we will work through the proposal and drafting stages to ensure that your arguments are both of interest to people in the field and supported by sufficient examples to be received as credible. The strongest projects will include analysis that delves into the open spaces, conundrums, difficulties, gray areas, and/or un(der)analyzed scenarios of this question, ones that give you room to ***add new perspectives to the field***. This is not a literature review explaining what everyone else says.

You should write in formal academic prose for an educated audience of writing teachers, learners, and scholars. Length here is approximate, not “cast you off the island”: meanwhile, if you have a reason to work on a project *significantly* shorter or longer than 10-12 pages, or you’d like to work in a format other than text-only, please talk to me about your ideas. You may work collaboratively with one or more other students on your data gathering; to propose to work collaboratively on the final written project, please talk to me early in the process.

Your project will be considered a “Classroom Project”—shareable only within the boundaries of this class—unless you complete IRB Certification as a Human Subjects researcher and submit an IRB proposal. If you think, or if at some point you start to think, that you might like to use your work here for a thesis, presentation, or publication, you should go through the formal IRB processes.

Schedule a research conference. Submit a draft online for review by Week 13. Submit your revised project by May 6. Prepare a 5-minute presentation with visuals and handout for May 9.

### **Community Presence and Discussion Questions: 5%**

In addition to general preparedness for and participation in class, English 697 students will be expected to participate in all four “Intensive Discussion” meetings. For each, the last 30 minutes of class will be reserved for discussing the starred readings in more depth. Only students who have completed those readings and prepared discussion questions in advance will be invited to stay.

Three or four discussion questions should be submitted by the start of class time on an Intensive Discussion day. These need to be honest, specific, and provocative—“How does someone teaching under Common Core make Britton’s category of *transactional* writing engaging for developing writers?”—rather than generalized, summative, and/or “teacher-like” (“What are key characteristics of Applebee’s ‘social model’ of writing?”). Your questions should also demonstrate some of the breadth of your reading, so writing three questions about ideas on the first two pages of one article wouldn’t be your best approach.

All students start with a 4/5 for this grade. Missing more than one class, missing an Intensive Discussion, or missing a Discussion Question assignment will lower that grade by up to 1 point; regular and thoughtful class contributions, engaged discussion leadership, and/or particularly insightful DQs will raise the score.

## English 697: Composition Theory—How Writers Learn, Spring 2016

From *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (Cross) *Naming What We Know* (Naming), GMU Electronic Reserves (ERes) and Library Databases (D'Base)  
 Starred Reading Assignments \*\* are **required** for English 697 students

Date	In Class	Reading Due For This Week's Class	Writing Due This Week	Blog Due
Week 1, Jan. 25	What is writing, and when and how do people learn it?	<b>Naming:</b> Concept 4, "Writers...Learn" <b>Database:</b> Skim Fulkerson, "Comp in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century"		
Week 2, Feb. 1	Composing and Cognition, Part 1	<b>Cross:</b> Flower & Hays, "Cognitive" p. 253 <b>ERes:</b> Emig, "Twelfth Graders" <b>ERes:</b> Doyle & Zakrajsek, "Mindsets" <b>ERes:</b> Ambrose, "Mastery" <b>**ERes:</b> Murphy, "Writing Instruction" <b>**Cross:</b> Bizzell "Cognition" p. 367		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 1/31</i>
Week 3, Feb. 8	Learning Composition "Skills"  <i>*Intensive Discussion #1</i>	<b>Cross:</b> Rodgers, "Paragraph," p. 175 <b>Cross:</b> Braddock, "Topic Sentences," p. 189 <b>Cross:</b> Hartwell, "Grammar," p. 205 <b>DBase:</b> M. Tremmel, "What to Make of the Five Paragraph Theme," <i>TETYC</i> 39.1 (2011) <b>**Online:</b> Applebee, " <a href="#">Alternative Models</a> " <b>**ERes:</b> Weaver, "Grammar"		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/7</i>
Week 4, Feb. 16	Learning Writing is Social, Part 1: School	<b>ERes:</b> Rose, "Average" <b>Cross:</b> Bartholomae, "Inventing" p. 523 <b>Naming:</b> Meta & Concept 1, "Writing is Social" <b>**Naming:</b> Intro and "Naming" <b>**Cross:</b> Bruffee, "Collaborative," p. 395	Learning Narrative: Post to Wiki	
Week 5, Feb. 22	Researching Writing Learning, Part 1	<b>ERes:</b> Knoblauch & Brannon, "Emperor" <b>ERes:</b> Beaufort, "Learning to Write History" <b>ERes:</b> Schutt, "Qualitative Research" <b>**IRB Certification, Online</b>	<i>Project Proposal Options x3</i> IRB Certification	<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/21</i>

Date	In Class	Reading Due For This Week's Class	Writing Due This Week	Blog Due
Week 6, Feb. 29	Researching Writing Learning, Part 2  <i>*Intensive Discussion #2</i>	<b>Cross:</b> Kirsch & Ritchie, "Beyond the Personal," p. 485 <b>Cross:</b> Perl, "Composing Processes," p. 17 <b>ERes:</b> Rogers, "Longitudinal" <b>**Dbase:</b> Dave & Russell, "Drafting and Revision," <i>RTE</i> 44.4 (2010). <b>**Dbase:</b> Godbee, "Toward Explaining...Talk," <i>RTE</i> 47.2 (2012)		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/28</i>
Week 7, March 7	Composing & Cognition, Part 2	<b>Naming:</b> Using Threshold Concepts Intro <b>Naming:</b> Concept 5, Cognitive <b>Online:</b> Mulcahy, " <a href="#">A Case Study</a> ," <i>Young Scholars in Writing</i> 10 (2012).	Project Proposal & Bibliography	
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>				
Week 8, March 21	Learning Writing Processes	<b>ERes:</b> Anson, "Process" <b>ERes:</b> Reid, "Peer Review" <b>Cross:</b> Sommers, "Revision," p. 43 <b>**Cross:</b> Ede & Lunsford, "Audience Addressed," p. 77		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 3/20</i>
Week 9, March 28	Learning Writing is Social, part 2: Identity  <i>*Intensive Discussion #3</i>	<b>Cross:</b> Flynn, "Composing as a Woman," p. 581 <b>Cross:</b> Villanueva, "Memoria," p. 567 <b>Dbase:</b> Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue," <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 58 (1988) <b>**Dbase:</b> Matsuda & Silva, "Cross-cultural Composition," <i>Composition Studies</i> 27.1 (1999) <b>**Dbase:</b> Ferris & Roberts, "Error feedback," <i>Journal of Second Language Writing</i> 10.3 (2001)		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 3/27</i>
Week 10, April 4	Learning Writing is Social, part 3: Genre & Discipline	<b>Naming:</b> Concept 2, Forms <b>Online:</b> Johnson and Kruse, "Articulating Claims" <b>Online:</b> Hummel, " <a href="#">Community Writing Centers</a> ," <i>Young Scholars in Writing</i> 9 (2011) <b>**Online:</b> Devitt, " <a href="#">Teaching Genre</a> "	<i>Learning Narrative Parlor Draft Sign up for Conference</i>	



Date	In Class	Reading Due For This Week's Class	Writing Due This Week	Blog Due
Week 11, April 11	Learning Writing Multimodally	<b>ERes:</b> Takayoshi & Selfe, "Multimodal" <b>Cross:</b> Yancey, "Made Not Only," p. 791 <b>Dbase:</b> Bring a source from your Project to share <b>Other:</b> Bring an intriguing multimodal text to share <b>**ERes:</b> Miller and Shepherd, "Blogging"	Conferences Learning Narrative Parlor Draft: Friday 11:59 pm 4/15	<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 4/10</i>
Week 12, April 18	Learning Writing (for) Outside a Writing Class  <i>*Intensive Discussion #4</i>	<b>Dbase:</b> Williams, "Tutoring and Revising," <i>Journal of Second Language Writing</i> , 13.3 (2004). <b>Online:</b> Clark and Fishback, " <a href="#">Writing and Learning in the Health Sciences</a> " <b>Online:</b> Kiefer & Leff, " <a href="#">Client-based Writing</a> " <b>**Dbase:</b> Wardle, "Mutt Genres," <i>College Composition and Communication</i> 60.4 (2009) <b>**Dbase:</b> North, "The Idea of a Writing Center," <i>College English</i> 46.5 (1984)		<i>Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 4/17</i>
Week 13, April 25	Learning Writing with Basic Writers	<b>Cross:</b> Shaughnessy, "An Introduction," p. 291 <b>Dbase:</b> Navarre Cleary, "How Antonio," <i>Journal of Basic Writing</i> 30.1 (2011) <b>**Dbase:</b> Bird, "A Basic Writing Course," <i>Journal of Basic Writing</i> 32.1 (2013)	<i>Major Project Draft: Post Online</i>	
Week 14, May 2	Learning Writing: Overview	<b>Dbase:</b> Fulkerson, "Comp in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century" <b>Naming:</b> Chapter 7, TC in FYC <b>OR</b> Chapter 8, TC in the Major		
Friday May 6			Major Project Due	
Final May 9			Project Presentation	