

English 488/697: Composition Theory—How Writers Learn

Spring 2017—Mondays 7:20-10:00 PM—Innovation 330

Professor E. Shelley Reid

Johnson Center 241: Mondays 4:00-6:00 pm, and by appointment

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Course Goals

English 488/697 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 identify key terms, principles, and research findings that serve as foundations for understanding how writers learn to write

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

To strengthen our abilities as writers and/or teachers to intentionally support the learning of writers across a variety of levels, genres, disciplines, and motivations

To expand our understanding of our own writing practices and our writing-learning processes so that our experiences inform our theories, and vice versa

To engage in structured inquiry into the experiences of "real" writers and use that information to help inform ourselves and others how theories intersect with practices

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 Blackboard.

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

Other Policies of Note

Attendance is expected. Personally, 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. Generally, then, ***I do not accept assignments after the deadline.***

But life happens and writers do run late. If that happens to you, ***you may write me to request a reasonable deadline extension.*** For a first request of one day or less, all I need is the request—no explanation necessary. If you need more than 24 hours or you've already made one request, you need to provide a few sentences to explain what's happening with your writing work that is slowing you down, and a few more sentences to explain how you think you can get back on track. (Unless it's a rare, documentable emergency, these notes should be about your writing choices or challenges, not your life.)

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: we will make it a high priority to give our ***professional respect and courtesy***—though certainly not always agreement—toward all 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: I join George Mason University in being 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.

Inclement Weather Policy

If Mason closes due to weather or other emergency, please check your email and the Blackboard site for updates. **We will proceed with required online class activities** during the week unless the weather severely limits students' access to online forums.

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%

Goals: To use writing as a learning tool; to engage with dynamic conversations as an equal partner; to reveal the complications in "how writers learn"; to build community

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 including **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: 5%

Post an engaged, “I see your point, and here’s another thing I would offer” response (50-200 words) to peer posts as directed. Remember that your goal is not to solve the difficulty, but to join the author in exploring it.

Learning Narrative and Parlor Extension

Learning Narrative, 1000-1500 words (5%)

Goals: To identify from exact experience how *learning to write* can happen; to begin the process of gathering data from “real” writers (yourself); to create, collectively, an understanding of common and varied writing-learning challenges

Describe for a peer audience one or two scenes from your personal history of “learning to write.” You need to go beyond a scene that shows you writing, into a scene that shows you learning—or being unable to learn—how to write (better). 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

Goals: To join a scholarly conversation about how writers learn; to practice using the terms and theories we've encountered in connection with lived experience; to begin to develop your own working theory about writing learning

Imagine that you enter a parlor. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion.... You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense....The hour grows late, you must depart....with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

Following the metaphor of composition scholar Kenneth Burke, bring your learning narrative into the parlor, and engage three other voices/texts from our class in a "vigorous discussion" and 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 online 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 before the last week of class.

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

Goals: To identify valid and feasible research questions that link individual interests to accessible data and conversations in the field; to set those questions into an initial context; to create an initial map for further inquiry

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%

Goals: To gather data from “real” writers and integrate it into ongoing conversations in the field; to present a focused, supported contribution to the discussion of “how writers learn”; to gain confidence as a writer and writing learner in the field

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 and thorough. The strongest projects will include analysis that delves into the open spaces, conundrums, difficulties, gray areas, and/or 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 5. Prepare a 5-minute presentation with visuals and handout for May 15.

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. Any 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 697/488: Composition Theory—How Writers Learn, Spring 2017

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 Class (7pm)	Blog Due
Week 1, Jan. 23	What is writing, and when and how do people learn it?	Naming: Concept 4, "Writers...Learn" ERes: Fitzgerald & Ianetta, "Common Misconceptions" and "Historical Views" ERes: Anne Lamott, "Sh---y First Drafts" (optional)		488: Post to blogs 2, 4, 6, & 8
Week 2, Jan. 30	Composing and Cognition, Part 1	Cross: Flower & Hays, "Cognitive" p. 253 ERes: Emig, "Twelfth Graders" ERes: Doyle & Zakrajsek, "Mindsets" ERes: Ambrose, "Mastery" **ERes: Murphy, "Writing Instruction" **Cross: Bizzell "Cognition" p. 367		1. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 1/29
Week 3, Feb. 6	Learning Composition "Skills" *Intensive Discussion #1	Cross: Rodgers, "Paragraph," p. 175 Cross: Hartwell, "Grammar," p. 205 DBase: M. Tremmel, "What to Make of the Five Paragraph Theme," <i>Teaching English in the Two-Year College</i> 39.1 (2011) **Online: Applebee, " Alternative Models " **ERes: Weaver, "Grammar"	Note: Access Database articles via the Articles & More tab on the library home page: http://library.gmu.edu . Enter the title of the journal, then choose a database that has the issue you need, then browse to find the correct full-text issue.	2. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/5
Week 4, Feb. 13	Learning Writing is Social, Part 1: School	ERes: Rose, "Average" Cross: Bartholomae, "Inventing" p. 523 Naming: Meta & Concept 1, "Writing is Social" **Naming: Intro and "Naming" **Cross: Bruffee, "Collaborative," p. 395	Learning Narrative: Post to the Wiki	
Week 5, Feb. 20	Researching Writing Learning, Part 1	ERes: Knoblauch & Brannon, "Emperor" ERes: Beaufort, "Learning to Write History" ERes: Schutt, "Qualitative Research" **IRB Certification, Online	Discussion Board: <i>Project Proposal Options x3</i> 697: IRB Certification Sign up for Conference: Wiki	3. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/19

Date	In Class	Reading Due For This Week's Class	Writing Due This Class (7pm)	Blog Due
Week 6, Feb. 27	Researching Writing Learning, Part 2 *Intensive Discussion #2	<p>Online: Phelps, "Internal Language Barrier," <i>Young Scholars in Writing</i> 14 (2016)</p> <p>Cross: Perl, "Composing Processes," p. 17</p> <p>ERes: Rogers, "Longitudinal"</p> <p>**DBase: Dave & Russell, "Drafting and Revision," <i>RTE</i> 44.4 (2010)</p> <p>**DBase: Godbee, "Toward Explaining...Talk," <i>RTE</i> 47.2 (2012)</p>	Conferences	4. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 2/26
Week 7, March 6	Composing & Cognition, Part 2	<p>Naming: Using Threshold Concepts Intro</p> <p>Naming: Concept 5, Cognitive</p> <p>Online: Mulcahy, "A Case Study," <i>Young Scholars in Writing</i> 10 (2012).</p>	Project Proposal & Bibliography	
SPRING BREAK				
Week 8, March 20	Learning Writing Processes	<p>ERes: Anson, "Process"</p> <p>ERes: Reid, "Peer Review"</p> <p>Cross: Sommers, "Revision," p. 43</p> <p>**Cross: Ede & Lunsford, "Audience Addressed," p. 77</p>		5. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 3/19
Week 9, March 27	Learning Writing is Social, part 2: Identity *Intensive Discussion #3	<p>Cross: Flynn, "Composing as a Woman," p. 581</p> <p>DBase: Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue," <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 58 (1988)</p> <p>Online: Inoue, "Intro: Antiracist Writing Assessments"</p> <p>**DBase: Matsuda & Silva, "Cross-cultural Composition," <i>Composition Studies</i> 27.1 (1999)</p> <p>**DBase: Ferris & Roberts, "Error Feedback," <i>Journal of Second Language Writing</i> 10.3 (2001)</p>		6. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 3/26

Date	In Class	Reading Due For This Week's Class	Writing Due This Class (7pm)	Blog Due
Week 10, April 3	Learning Writing is Social, part 3: Genre & Discipline	Naming: Concept 2, Forms Online: Hummel, " Community Writing Centers ," <i>Young Scholars in Writing</i> 9 (2011) **Online: Devitt, " Teaching Genre "	<i>Learning Narrative Parlor</i> Draft: Post to Wiki Sign up for Conference: Wiki	
Week 11, April 10	Learning Writing Multimodally	ERes: Takayoshi & Selfe, "Multimodal" Cross: Yancey, "Made Not Only," p. 791 DBase: Bring a source from your Project to share Other: Bring an intriguing multimodal text to share **Online: Miller and Shepherd, "Blogging"	Conferences Learning Narrative Parlor Extension: Friday 11:59 pm 4/14	7. Post by Sunday 11:59 pm 4/9
Week 12, April 17	Learning Writing (for) Outside a Writing Class <i>*Intensive Discussion #4</i>	DBase: Williams, "Tutoring and Revising," <i>Journal of Second Language Writing</i> , 13.3 (2004). Online: Clark and Fishback, " Writing and Learning in the Health Sciences " Online: Kiefer & Leff, " Client-based Writing " **DBase: Wardle, "Mutt Genres," <i>College Composition and Communication</i> 60.4 (2009) **DBase: North, "The Idea of a Writing Center," <i>College English</i> 46.5 (1984)		8. Post by MONDAY 5:00 PM 4/17
Week 13, April 24	Learning Writing with Basic Writers	Cross: Shaughnessy, "An Introduction," p. 291 DBase: Navarre Cleary, "How Antonio," <i>Journal of Basic Writing</i> 30.1 (2011) **DBase: Bird, "A Basic Writing Course," <i>Journal of Basic Writing</i> 32.1 (2013)	<i>Major Project Draft: Post Online</i>	
Week 14, May 1	Learning Writing: Overview	Naming: Chapter 7, TC in FYC OR Chapter 8, TC in the Major TBA: Reread one earlier text		
Friday May 5			Major Project Due	
Final			Project Presentation	

May 15				
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