

English 822: Responding to and Assessing Writing

Spring 2014—Wednesdays 7:20-10:00 PM

Prof. E. Shelley Reid

Robinson A439: Tuesdays 5:30-6:30 pm, Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 pm, and by appointment

Phone: 703-993-2772 (office) or 571-306-2772 (text message only, no voice)

Online: ereid1@gmu.edu, <http://engh822002Sp2014.pbworks.com>

Course Goals

English 822 is a topics course in composition studies: we'll look at how the linked scholarly investigations regarding how we respond to and assess student writing have developed over the last few decades and how those investigations resonate through the larger discipline of composition studies. We have some linked goals:

To trace and wrestle with some of the key scholarly lines of inquiry into responding and assessing, overlapping and uncertain though they sometimes become.

To develop strategies for communicating with a range of audiences about responding and assessing, since these are topics of common conversation in public spaces, school hallways, and political backrooms as well as scholarly conventions and journals.

To identify openings in the field for practice, innovation, and research that will contribute to student learning, faculty development, program development, and scholarly advancement.

To respond to and assess one another's writing in ways that support growth and engagement as writers, teachers, and scholars.

Course Tools & Expectations

The Books & Readings

Elliot and Perelman, *Writing Assessment in the 21st Century* (2012)

Huot and O'Neill, *Assessing Writing: A Critical Sourcebook* (2009)

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

If you have a laptop you can bring to class, please do so.

The Assignments and Grade Values, Very Briefly:

Collaborative Blog (20) and Responses (5)	25%
Complicated, Useful Advice Paper	20%
Action Proposal Proposal	15%
Major Project	35%
Community presence	5%

Revisions are always allowed; final drafts are due by May 7 unless otherwise specified.

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 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 have to miss a class, please contact me as soon as possible to let me know.

A strict **late work** policy is generally inappropriate for this class, given our emphasis on drafting and revising through the semester.

However, when you're asked to **bring a draft**, please make every effort to **bring something**—a half-draft, a version, your notes, an envelope scribble—so you can share your work and receive feedback from the community.

Beyond that, I expect that you'll mostly keep up with both the reading and the writing as assigned. We may be adjusting the class work as the semester goes along, so it's important that you stay in touch with the online syllabus. If you have to miss a due date, or 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: studying for a PhD 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

Writing about response and assessment is important: These are topics of constant public, political, and professional written dialogue. Composition practitioners and scholars need to be able to communicate on these issues easily in a range of registers, for a range of audiences. So you won't just write one massive research project at the end of the semester that nobody else sees. You should feel free to let these smaller projects lead into and overlap with one another—within your own oeuvre and within the classroom community generally.

Collaborative Blog: 10 posts (5 per partner), 500-800 words each, 20%.

With a partner, write for a general audience, including but not limited to your class peers, about what others are saying on a sub-issue of responding and/or assessing, and explain what you think is fascinating or important or wrongheaded or useful about those ideas.

Each week, one of you will locate and review an outside source—news article, blog, letter to editor, interview, student essay, program description, scholarly article, book/chapter, video, performance—to be the subject of that week's blog. You'll bring a draft of your blog to class: a brief summary of your source followed by an accessible, provocative, engaging, thoughtful, useful response to and/or analysis of some of its ideas.

This is a collaborative blog, so you'll share your draft with your blog partner for feedback, and consider making revisions before you post it.

- Each of you needs to post at least once about a scholarly article or book (section) published since 2009
- Each of you needs to post at least once about data gathered from a personal interview or program observation at one-remove or I-have-a-friend-who status

Blog entries will be assessed on clarity and relevance of summary, accessibility and engagingness of the written presentation, and insight or provocativeness of the thinking. Entries will be marked as **Honors**, **Satisfactory**, or **Unsatisfactory** based on these criteria. These marks may be *loosely* translated to 10, 8.8, and 7 on a 10-point scale. They may be revised. All six must be posted, but only the top 5 blog scores will be averaged at the end of the term.

Collaborative Blog Response: 10 responses, 5%.

Follow two class blogs and post an engaged, "and here's another thing" response (150-200 words) to one or the other each week there's a new post.

Complicated, Useful Advice Paper: 1000–1500 words, 3-5 sources, 20%.

Identify a fairly narrow question that a classroom teacher would ask about response to and/or assessment of student writing, and respond.

You should strive to achieve some tricky balances. You should try to identify at least a few of the complications of the situation and also provide reliable, not-too-frustrating advice, even if that advice is of the “if...then” variety. You will need to refer to scholarship from the field (at least two sources from our common readings, at least one that you locate on your own) but you should try to avoid overloading your reader with scholarly hoo-hah. You will want to give enough information to show how the situation works, but try not to make the essay so long that your readers will be asleep before they finish. And you should assume that your audience is genuinely puzzled but not completely without experience, knowledge, or strong preferences.

You may experiment with writing that takes place along a continuum of fairly informal (“Dear Jonah,”) to somewhat formal (“Many teachers wonder...”). Assessment criteria will be discussed further in class as the project develops.

Action Proposal Proposal, individual or collaborative: 1000–1500 words, 15%

Working alone or collaboratively, draft a proposal for a proposal: describe what kind of research or assessment action a scholar, teacher, or administrator—like you or guided by you—might realistically become involved in within the next year or two, what need(s) that would fill, what steps would be needed, and what resources that would involve. (Bonus: use an “I-have-a-friend” site.)

Part 1: Identify the research or assessment question(s), the site(s) for study or measurement, some key steps involved in this project, the resources required, and some anticipated benefits of conducting this action.

Part 2: Briefly summarize two similar actions/studies reported in the literature. Briefly identify a few features of these actions/studies that should be replicated in the proposed action/study (why?) and a few that might be altered/avoided (why?)

Part 3: Identify a community of practitioners who would benefit from the information gathered: how? Also identify at least two possible journals which might publish your eventual article about this action/study.

Part 4: Works cited list.

Note: This need not be a research proposal. You do not need to have your IRB clearance or your financing in order; you do not need to already know your statistical modeling method or precisely what kind of coding you would use on student writing. Your main goal here will be to identify and focus a research question or assessment need and begin to imagine how to take action on that need in an informed, complications-aware way.

I'm your target audience, since this is more exercise than live-wire project; however, you may keep "academic deans who fund assessment projects" and "WPA Grants Committee members reading Applications for Researcher Support" as shadow audiences in mind, if you'd like. This project should be written as academic-school-formal.

Major Project: *Likely 5000–7000 words, 35%*

Investigate a question related to responding or assessing, and propose your answer, analysis, or argument. Draw on scholarly research in the field, but take your analysis into the open spaces, conundrums, difficulties, or un(der)analyzed sites that give you room to add new perspectives, even if you're not adding new data.

If you *are* collecting data, please check with me early to see whether you want to do this as a "classroom project" or with IRB approval. Length here is approximate, not "cast you off the island": meanwhile, if you have a reason to work on a project *significantly* shorter than 15 pages or longer than 20, or you'd like to work in a format other than text-only, please check with me about it.

We'll work in stages: a proposal, a research conference, a draft, a revision. This is a scholarly-formal genre, designed to be suitable to revise upward/tightward toward a publication submission or condense downward/outward to become a conference presentation. On the last day of class, you'll tell us which direction you're currently thinking could be most likely, and why. ("Neither" won't be taken as an appropriate answer, not in a field with so much room and need for current, smart, well-targeted, informed scholarship from a range of perspectives. ☺)

English 822: Issues in Responding to and Assessing Writing, Spring 2014

From *Assessing Writing* (AW), *Writing Assessment in the 21st Century* (WA), GMU Electronic Reserves (ER) and Library Databases (DB)

	In Class	Reading Due	Writing Due	Reminders
Week 1, Jan. 22	Key questions for R&A Theories of Response Teams and plans	DB: Elbow: “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking” ER: Harrington, “What is Assessment?” AW: Yancey, “Looking Back”	In class: Field maps In class: Initial theory draft	
<i>Responding for Learning</i>				
Week 2, Jan. 29	Responding as faculty feedback/instruction: common (con)texts	DB: Sommers, “Responding to Student Writing” ER: Daiker, “Learning to Praise” DB: Lunsford & Lunsford, “Mistakes are a Fact” DB: Sprinkle, “Written Commentary” DB: Straub, “Reading and Responding”	Bring a commented student essay	Blog A1
Week 3, Feb. 5	Responding as faculty feedback/instruction: complications and communities	DB: Sperling & Freedman “A Good Girl” DB: Sommers/Rutz: “After the Drafts/Response” ER: Knobloch & Brannon, “Emperor...No Clothes” DB: Ferris, “Responding to Student Writing” DB: Baker, “Get It Off My Stack”		Blog B1
Week 4, Feb 12.	Evaluating student writing	ER: White, “Using Scoring Guides” ER: Wilson, “The Broken Promises of Rubrics” ER: Murphy, “Assessing Portfolios” AW: Durst et al. “Portfolio Negotiations” (Ch. 13) DB: <i>Skim</i> Dryer, “Scaling Writing Ability” ER: VanderStaay, “Resisting Reform” OR Uchmanowicz, “Politics of Cross-Institutional”		Blog A2
Week 5, Feb. 19	Peer and self assessment	DB: Huot, “Toward a New Discourse” DB: Brammer, “Peer Review...Students” OL: Reid, “Peer Review” DB: Patchan et al., “A Validation Study” ER: Ferris, TBA	Proposal, CUA Paper	Blog B2

	In Class	Reading Due	Writing Due	Reminders
Week 6, Feb. 26	Special cases: MLLs & New Media	<i>AW</i> : Hamp-Lyons, “Challenges of Second” (Ch. 21) <i>DB</i> : Ferris & Roberts, “Error Feedback in L2” <i>OL</i> : Sommers, “ Response Rethought ” <i>OL</i> : Reilly and Atkins, “ Rewarding Risk ”	Version 1, CUA Paper	
<i>Assessing for program continuity</i>				
Week 7, Mar. 5	Assessment basics: Tools and systems	<i>OL</i> : CCCC Position Statement <i>AW</i> : Williamson, “Worship of Efficiency” (Ch. 4) <i>AW</i> : Huot, “Toward a New Theory” (Ch. 10) <i>AW</i> : Moss “Can There Be” (Ch. 5)	Stack o’ questions	Blog A3
BREAK	BREAK	BREAK		
Week 8, Mar. 19	Assessment: College writing programs	<i>AW</i> : O’Neill, “How Does Writing Assessment” (Ch. 25) <i>ER</i> : Broad “Textual” <i>AW</i> : Hamp-Lyons and Condon, “Questioning” (Ch. 19) <i>DB</i> : Brannon & Scott, “Democracy, Struggle”	Proposal: Major Project; schedule research conferences	Blog B3
Week 9, Mar. 26	Assessment: K12 programs	<i>ER</i> : Duke & Sanchez, Selections TBA, <i>Assessing WAC</i> <i>WA</i> : Deane, “Rethinking K-12” (Ch. 4) <i>WA</i> : Swain & LeMahieu, “Assessment...Inquiry” (Ch. 2)		Blog A4
Week 10, Apr. 2	Assessment: Other programs	<i>AW</i> : Haswell & McLeod, “WAC Assessment” (Ch. 15) <i>AW</i> : Carter, “A Process for Establishing” (Ch. 16) <i>WA</i> : Hundleby, “Does it Work? (Tech/Prof Asmt) (Ch.6) <i>WA</i> : Leydens & Olds, “Complicating” (Ch. 14)	Version 1: Action Proposal Proposal	Blog B4

Large-scale testing: placement & accountability

	In Class	Reading Due	Writing Due	Reminders
Week 11, Apr. 9	Testing 1: College/Basics	WA: Perelman, “Mass-Market” (Ch. 24) WA: Baldwin, “Fundamental Challenges” (Ch. 18) WA: Peckham, “Assessment and Curriculum” (Ch. 9)	Draft: Major Project	
Week 12, Apr. 16	Testing 2: School/Complications	WA: Persky, “Writing Assessment...NEAP” (Ch. 3) WA: Inoue & Poe, “Racial Formations” (Ch. 19) OL: Scott-Clayton, “ Do High-Stakes Placement Exams ” AW: Royer & Gilles: “Directed Self-Placement” (Ch. 14)		Blog A5
Week 13, Apr. 23	Assessment & Testing: Skynet	WA: Burstein, “Fostering Best Practices” (Ch. 11) WA: Herrington & Moran, “Writing to a Machine” (12) ER: Ziegler, “Computerized Writing Assessment” ER: Brent and Townsend, “Automated Essay Grading” OL: Skim Perelman, “ Critique of Shermis... ”	Version 2’s, as needed	Blog B5
Week 14, Apr. 30	Wrap-ups	Greatest Hits: TBA		Blog A6, Blog B6
May 7			Major Project	