

(Inter)Views: Engaging freshmen in primary research in the composition classroom

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Abstract

While literacy autobiographies, citizenship autobiographies, and family narratives are common first writing assignments in the freshmen composition classroom, they are usually followed by some kind of research proposal, annotated bibliography, or research essay. While there is nothing wrong with literacy and citizenship autobiographies or family narratives, do these kinds of writing assignments prepare students for the transition to conducting academic research that usually begins with secondary sources? This study offers an alternative approach by introducing students to academic research and writing by teaching them strategies in conducting primary research. This approach involves having students develop a professional resume and conduct a series of three semi-formal interviews with individuals within their majors, careers, and future professions. Students then write reflections for each interview and then synthesize the information and knowledge they have gathered into one final reflection document. The study that follows is a mixed method design, involving quantitative and qualitative data from a survey conducted online. The study was conducted at the University in West Texas during the spring semester 2010. The duration of the study lasted approximately six weeks and involved two composition classrooms with 25 students per class.

The study that follows is the results from the resume and interview assignments that I implemented in my freshmen English composition course during the spring semester of 2010 at the University in West Texas. In this study, I will explain the methodology and the underlying theory of why I decided to have my students create a resume and conduct semi-formal interviews for their first writing assignments for me. The reason why I chose these first two assignments is because I wish to show how important they are in setting the professional goal-oriented tone to the class as well as to the students' writing.

The questions that I ask and try to provide answers for in this study are:

- Why is it important to have freshmen engage in learning how to conduct primary research?
- How can primary research be effectively used in the composition classroom?
- What types of assignments and activities would be useful for students in conducting primary research?
- What would the structure of the classroom look like with students engaging in this type of research?
- What type of writing would the students be required to do within this primary research framework?

Definitions of terms

Ethnographic research – A type of research that involves students “going out into a discourse community” in order to ask questions about that specific discourse community.

Semi-formal interview – An example of a primary research strategy in which inductive and qualitative methods of research are employed in order to develop questions about a specific field or area of interest, to help narrow down the focus to a question(s).

Primary research – A type of research that focuses on engaging students in fieldwork, such as conducting interviews.

Reflection – A type of writing that involves having students write about their experiences, acknowledging and becoming aware of the patterns and deeper meanings of their purposes and goals and the strategies that they employ in order fulfill those purposes and achieve their goals.

Writing – An activity that involves students using rhetorical strategies in order to convey purpose driven modes of communication to an audience.

Literature review

I taught my first semester of freshmen composition at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in the fall of 2006. My previous experiences with teaching students writing were limited to the public school level, mostly the high school level. When I came to teach writing at the college level, I quickly noticed the differences, especially the higher expectations for students in the areas of research.

Theoretical framework

One of the challenges that I faced in designing the “interview” assignment was how to introduce students to primary research techniques without them just writing a traditional research essay. Donna Dunbar-Odom says (1999):

A major problem with traditional approaches to research writing is figuring out how to create a sequence of assignments that will offer students a taste of the experience of ‘real’ research, research they are committed to, rather than the production of yet another version of the always-already-written, one-side-or-the-other research paper. (Dunbar-Odom, p. 8)

Dunbar-Odom’s emphasis on “authentic” experiences within researching and writing assignments is a key point when it comes to re-evaluating the current pedagogies within the freshmen composition classroom, as well as designing the kinds of writing assignments that do not allow students to reproduce the “traditional research essay.”

Assignment design

The question that I was facing with redesigning the resume and interview writing assignment was what kind of assignment will push students beyond writing another traditional research essay? In my opinion, this is where the interview assignment makes the difference between students writing for a grade and students writing to learn. The interview assignment

breaks the monotony of viewing writing as a linear activity, where students use a narrative to explain how or why something is important to them or what they have experienced.

I wanted students to produce more actively reflective writing with their semi-formal interviews rather than merely passively retelling or recalling a past incident or experience. The interview assignment that I designed included having the students conduct a series of three semi-formal interviews from three different discourse communities: Academic, professional, or career (which could include family and close friends, professors, public school teachers, even upper classman who are currently majoring in their field of interest). I had the general plan figured out but my next task was to determine what types of writing activities that the students would need to engage in to prepare them for their interviews.

Barbara A. Morris' (2007) approach to designing and implementing a interviewing writing assignment helped me to get a grasp of the kinds of writing activities that the students would be doing, such as contacting an individual for an interview, developing appropriate questions to ask the interviewee, taking notes or recording the conversation, and then turning that information into a reflective essay (Morris, p. 287-92). While Morris had a different purpose for her interview portfolio, her approach to it helped me to better understand what my students needed from me as far as teaching them selecting who it was they were going to interview, how to conduct background research on that individual or department on campus using the university's website or just using the campus map to figure out where that department or individual's office was located, how to develop appropriate questions to ask based on their research, how to write a formal email, or how to best contact the individual or department for a possible interview. The next challenge that I faced was making the sure the students understood how to take notes or record important information while conducting their interviews.

Writing

William W. Wright (1991) suggests when teaching students an ethnographic approach to research and writing that the focus is on “thick description” as being “an ethnographic attention to context” (Wright, p. 103). The “thick description” that Wright describes includes more than just noting or recording about what a student “thinks” or observes about their culture, culture in general, or in a discourse community, but also reflecting on those intricate interactions with individuals and concepts within a culture or discourse community. Wright clarifies:

I do not mean to suggest that by teaching ethnography we teach students to stamp ‘take or leave it’ on their journals and papers. Rather we recognize their authority with the information and encourage them to see their work as the central content of the course (p. 105).

While Wright does focus on the ethnographic aspect of research, he makes a valid point, especially when considering composition as its own discipline that the content of the course comes from the students’ own research and writing efforts with minor instruction and guidance from the instructor. However, Wright points out that an ethnographic approach to teaching researching and writing might sometimes produce “incompleteness” in students’ work (p. 105). Wright equates this sense of incompleteness that can occur within ethnography as an opportunity “to encourage authority” in students’ researching and writing efforts (p. 105). What this translates into for the semi-formal interviews is that students might finish this particular assignment and still have more questions to ask their interviewees or other individuals that they would like to interview.

Methodology

I re-designed the resume and interview assignments from previous semesters prior to the beginning of the 2010 spring semester. I had developed this assignment from a previous version of it. The resume and interview assignment is the product of a four year evolution, starting in the

fall semester of 2006 at a University in Southwest Texas. The assignment description required the students to construct a professional resume, conduct three interviews, and write three reflection documents on each interview, as well as a final synthesis reflection document over all three reflections.

Before the students conducted their interviews, we spent two weeks in class discussing what primary research is and why it is important, how to develop effective interview questions, how to seek permission from departments on campus, we discussed how they planned to record the responses from their interviewees, and how to write reflectively about their interviews. Some students decided to conduct email interviews, which meant learning how to write a professional email. I had the students read sections in *The brief McGraw-Hill guide: Writing for college, writing for life* (2009) by Duane Roen, Gregory R. Glau, & Barry M. Maid as well as use the *OWL at Purdue Online Writing Resources and Lab*, dealing within constructing formal emails, how to develop effective interview questions, and how to effectively conduct an interview.

After each interview, I required the students to write a 500-800 word reflection of what they had gotten out of the interview, such as their own personal impressions and observations, any new knowledge, answers or insights from the interviewees. After the three interview reflections were completed, I required the students to synthesize them into one large document. This final reflective document required the students to fuse all three interview reflections into their own personally developed theme, a personal description of the interviewees' answers and responses, as well as any observations they made while in those discourse communities.

By reflecting on their interviews, the students would start to internalize the interviewees' answers and contextualize it and then project it back out. Since I was requiring students to write a reflection after each interview, by the time they got to the final reflection, where they

synthesized all three interview reflections into one, they would have had enough opportunity to reflect on their interviewees' responses and answers.

The difference this semester was that I presented the students with two options: Option 1) one interview with family member or close friend, one interview with someone from a campus department interview, and one interview with classmate interview, and option 2) three interviews with academics/professionals within their major or discipline of study. I used the first interview assignment I designed in 2006 (option 1) and the most recent version of it from 2008 (option 2) (Please *Appendices A-D*).

The course that the resume and interview was used in were freshmen English composition courses. The courses met twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday. The composition courses contained twenty-five freshmen students per each. The resume and interview assignment lasted for approximately six weeks, from January 19, 2010 through February 26, 2010.

During these six weeks, students learned how to create a resume and why a resume is important (I used pages 56 & A-28-A-31 from Roen et al.'s *Guide* & the *OWL*'s section on "Resumes"), students also learned how to seek out individuals to interview, as well as researched their degrees and majors (once again I used Roen et al.'s *Guide*, focusing on the pages dealing with field research and how to develop interview questions, 861-64 & the *OWL*'s section on "Conducting Primary Research" & "Interviewing").

The students also learned how to construct a formal email (Roen et al.'s *Guide*, page A-32 & the *OWL*'s section on "Email Etiquette"), as well as engaged in developing interview questions (*Guide* "Writing processes," pages 285-88 & the *OWL*'s section on "Starting the Writing Process"), practiced in mock interviews with classmates, and then conducted their semi-formal interviews. The class was structured around the interviews, allowing class time

(if necessary) to conduct their interviews. Out of the six weeks, three days were devoted to “workshop” days, where the students were given time to ask questions, conduct their interviews, and start writing their reflections.

I explained the assignment description and the grading rubric for the resume and the interviews to the students before they began and asked them if they had any questions. At the beginning of the semester, I explained to the students that they would be required to construct a portfolio (I had the students read pages A-1-A-4 from Roen et al.’s *Guide*). I also explained to the students that we would be using PBWorks—a free online collaborative workspace—for uploading the writing they would be doing during the course of the semester. I explained to the students that this type of electronic portfolio (“e-portfolio”) would be web-based, that is that accessible through the Internet. Once the students were done with their interviews and reflections, I had them submit their writing in our online wiki space.

I decided to have the students create “e-portfolios” because I wanted to emphasize the accessibility and ‘living” nature of the documents they were creating. John Zubizarreta (2009) claims, “Electronic media choices have introduced an array of strategies for archiving, organizing, and reflecting on information about a student’s learning” (Zubizarreta, p. 58). E-portfolios present a shift from “more static paper models that often are reviewed only by the instructor” (p. 59). E-portfolios also provide students with the opportunity to keep “live” writing, where they can go back and make changes or add new information. Because of the nature of e-portfolios, students were also aware that their interviewees could be able to view their reflections on the wiki site.

Below are the goals and objectives that the resume and the interviews assignment met:

Goals

- Goal 1: To introduce students to genres of writing and the use of rhetoric within various professions
- Goal 2: To introduce students to various methods of professional and academic research (using primary and secondary sources) and writing

Objectives

- Objective 1: Students will construct a professional resume
- Objective 2: Students will conduct a series of three interviews and write reflections on each of one of them, as well as one large reflection synthesizing all of them together

The overarching goal of the English composition course was to have the students construct an electronic, web-based/electronic portfolio, containing documents that focused on their majors, future professions, or fields of study.

Method

I conducted a mixed-method survey using SurveyMonkey.com. I chose to use SurveyMonkey.com because of its user friendliness and because it is accessible. The survey was administered after the resume and the interview assignment was due, not prior. The survey contained eight quantitative questions that were based on the Likert Scale Model, with the answer options: Strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The students were not required to reveal their identities or give out any personal information the survey. The survey was voluntary and no extra credit was given to those students who took the survey. I received IRB approval and had my students sign a consent form at the end of the semester.

Prior to having the students fill out the survey online, I asked them to share their thoughts on what they thought of the resume and interview assignment. The survey was administered during class. Thirty-two out of fifty students participated in taking the survey. The questions that were asked in the survey:

1. I felt that the resume was a good first writing assignment.

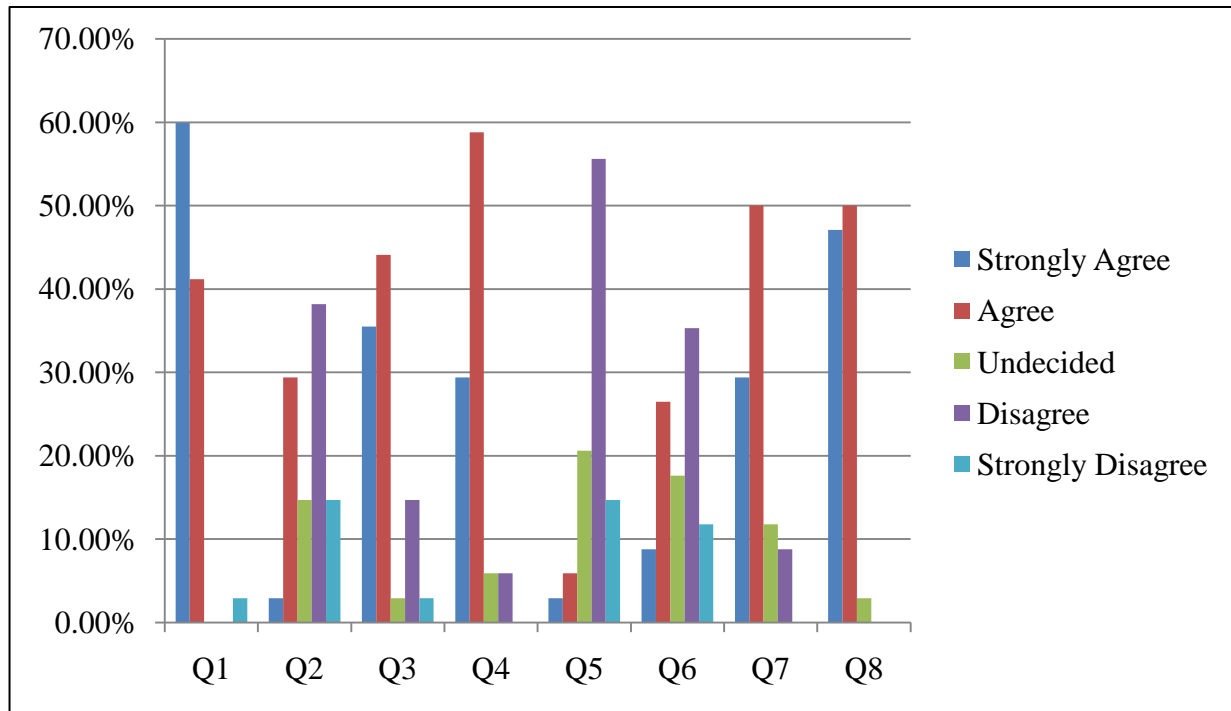
2. I had difficulty in locating individuals to interview.
3. I had enough time to conduct all three interviews before the due date.
4. Contacting the individuals, developing questions to ask them, and then conducting the interviews challenged my thinking and writing.
5. Writing a reflection for each of the three interviews was not necessary.
6. Writing one large reflection for all three interviews would have been better.
7. The instructor provided assistance in locating and showing me how to find individuals to interview.
8. Writing the interview reflections was clearly presented by the instructor.

Below are the results from the survey:

Figure 1.1 Survey Fall 2009 (raw data)

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I felt that the resume was a good first writing assignment.	59.9%	41.2%	0%	0%	2.9%
2. I had difficulty in locating individuals to interview.	2.9%	29.4%	14.7%	38.2%	14.7%
3. I had enough time to conduct all three interviews before the due date.	35.5%	44.1%	2.9%	14.7%	2.9%
4. Contacting the individuals, developing questions to ask them, and then conducting the interviews challenged my thinking and writing.	29.4%	58.8%	5.9%	5.9%	0%
5. Writing a reflection for each of the three interviews was not necessary.	2.9%	5.9%	20.6%	55.6%	14.7%
6. Writing one large reflection for all three interviews would have been better.	8.8%	26.5%	17.6%	35.3%	11.8%
7. The instructor provided assistance in locating and showing me how to find individuals to interview.	29.4%	50%	11.8%	8.8%	0%
8. Writing the interview reflections was clearly presented by the instructor.	47.1%	50%	2.9%	0%	0%

Figure 1.2 Survey Spring 2010



Quantitative data analysis

Almost all of the students who participated in the survey felt as if the resume was a good first writing assignment. If I had to speculate on why the students viewed the resume this way, I would say that it is a way to connect what they have done either in high school or shortly after high school, and what they are planning on doing or are currently doing in college now. In many ways, a resume is a “living document” that the students can go back and update or change as they see fit. A resume is also somewhat of a goal or plan that can allow the students to view their accomplishments, and future goals, strategically.

The second question addressed the interview process. The results were an interesting mix with 38.2% disagreeing that they experienced trouble in finding individuals to interview; however, 29.4% of students that agreed that they did have trouble in locating individuals to

interview. I am speculating that this mix between those students who disagreed and those that agreed in locating individuals to interview is a beneficial feature of this assignment because on one hand, the assignment was not too difficult that students could locate someone to interview, as well as it was not too easy of an assignment that students sought out just anyone to interview.

In questions three, 35.5% of the students strongly agreed and 44.1% agreed that they had enough to conduct all three interviews. However, 14.7% disagreed that they had enough time to conduct all three interviews. I can only speculate that the nature of this assignment caused that imbalance between being too easy of an assignment or too difficult of an assignment. Various elements could have been a factor, such as depending on how the students went about setting their goals for the interviews, how much time they spent developing their questions, or how well they planned their interviews around their other schedules, or if their interviewees contacted them back promptly or not, or if at all. Another factor that might have played a role was that many students had never experienced an assignment such as this one. Some of the possible telltale signs of what I speculated above in question three are apparent in question four, where 58.8% of students strongly agreed and 29.4% of students agreed that contacting individuals, developing questions, and conducting the interviews challenged their way of thinking and writing.

For question five, “writing a reflection for each of the three interviews was not necessary,” 55.6% of the students disagreed. This is an indication that reflecting on each interview was useful for the students to not only see the value of the interview, but also to reflect on the information they had gotten from the interview as well as utilize that information to form a new perspective. However, 20.6% of the students were undecided. A possible reason that they

were undecided might have been because they had not engaged in an assignment such as this before.

In question six, “writing one large reflection for all three interviews would have been better,” 26.5% of the students agreed that writing one large reflection over all three interviews instead of one for each one would have been better. However, 35.3% of the students disagreed that it would have been better to write just one large reflection of three. This question provided the most spread out data set, because one category was not greater or less than half than the other. A reason for this might have been because that each student had their own interpretation of the purpose of this assignment, and therefore their goals and expectations changed as they started begin to engage in the assignment.

The remaining two questions on the survey focused on how effective or ineffective the instructor provided assistance and how well the instructor introduced and explained the assignment. Question seven, “the instructor provided assistance in locating and showing me how to find individuals to interview,” 29.4% of the students strongly agreed and 50% of the students agreed that the instructor provided some kind of assistance in helping them locate individuals to interview. The exact strategies and tactics included assisting the students in locating individuals to interview included:

For question eight, “Writing the interview reflections was clearly presented by the instructor,” 50% of the students agreed and 47.1% of the students strongly agreed. One of the reasons why the numbers favored this side of the scale was because I had examples of students’ interview reflections from previous semester to show students as well as allowing them to work on the interview reflections in class “workshops.”

Another reason that students felt as if they understood how to write out the reflections was because I offered them the opportunity to email me drafts before they turned them in. While I encouraged students to share their reflection drafts with their peers in the classroom, I did not require them to engage in peer review sessions. One of the reasons why I chose not to incorporate a peer review element in this assignment was because I felt that it was too early in the semester to expect the students to understand what type of feedback to give in a peer review session. I wanted to show students how I read over their documents and make comments to give them a framework in which they can use for future assignments within the class.

Below is the final question (question 9) I asked the students on the survey and the student responses:

What did you like or not like about the resume and interviews? Please respond below.

I liked the interviews because since I did the professional interviews it gave me confidence in approaching professionals in the workforce.

This was a great project to do. It's an ice breaker for us not only to find out about our careers but to present ourselves as future professionals.

The interviews were an amazing idea. After interviewing some people I had a completely different perspective on some of the options I was confused about. Because of the interview, I think my confusions slimmed.

I really liked the fact that we were able to get other perspectives on the major/job field we are interested in. It honestly helped a lot because now I know what some of the ups and downs are and I can more realistically consider these jobs. The resume is good too because it will help us in the future.

I didn't like the fact that it was very difficult to locate the interviewer, I liked the whole idea of the interviews because it gave me an opportunity to meet my soon to be professor and get their opinion on how they felt about their career and its challenges.

I enjoyed this project to a very high extent. It tested not only my communication skills but helped me gain confidence for future projects. Meeting people who have had experience that I don't yet have given me an excellent idea of what to expect in coming years.

What I liked about this project was being able to interview people that I already knew and I didn't know. I was able to meet new people and know more about the person that I already knew.

What I didn't like is that people didn't respond. I know that they are busy but they can respond by saying no or yes.

I felt that the one large reflection for all three interviews wasn't necessary since we did one per person, but if it is necessary then the large reflection should be 2-3 pgs instead of 3-5 pages, in my opinion. This assignment was a fun and great experience. It really helped me out.

This was a great assignment because I was able to see my profession from different people. I previously have not done that.

It was ample time to do the assignment. I believe that if I did not do a reflective interview on each interviewee I would not have had such a strong final reflection without the other reflections.

Qualitative data analysis

Many of the students saw the benefit of interviewing someone within their major or future career/professions. By conducting the semi-formal interviews, the students got to put a face or name to the major or career/profession they are going into one day. Based on the “thick description” (borrowing from Wright’s description) in the students’ reflections, they did more than observe or simply note down what the interviewees’ said, but many students also made a connection with the knowledge and information between interviewees, as well as to their own understanding and expectations from their majors and future careers/professions.

Some of the students expressed a level of frustration when the potential interviewees did not respond back to their emails or had to cancel. This could be reflected from discrepancy in numbers in question two, the difficulty in locating individuals to interview, and in question three, having enough time to conduct all three interviews before the due date, in the survey. Because of the possibility of students ending up with “incomplete research,” teachers and students would have to think of strategies and tactics in order to finish the assignment by a particular due date.

Another possibility is that teachers would have to either negotiate grading scales and/or allow the students more time to do their interviews.

Findings in the students' writing

In this section of the paper, I discuss my findings in the students' writing based on the resume and interview assignment, as well as the grades the students earned.

The resume

All of the students turned in the first part of the assignment, which was the professional resume. Besides explaining the importance of a resume and showing them examples, I offered to read over the students' resumes and give them some helpful feedback or suggestions as to what they could tweak or improve in order to receive full credit. Almost all of the students took me up on this offer. Misspelled words were a common issue in the students writing. One of the largest issues that students struggled with was trying to organize their resumes in order to make them effective.

Depending on what they wanted to emphasize the most in their resumes, I instructed students to list their interests, education, goals, extracurricular activities, etc. as to how they would like someone to "see" them from an academic and professional standpoint. Many of the students took my suggestions and altered their resumes before turning them in for a final grade. I encouraged the students to use the university's writing center in the library for an additional set of eyes to read over their resumes. I also encouraged the students to read over one another's resume in order to get an idea of how their peers were constructing theirs.

The interview assignment

One of the reasons that I allowed the students to send me drafts of their interview reflections was because I wanted to become familiar with their writing styles and to see if they

had any issues within their writing. I was not only checking for grammar and punctuation misunderstandings, but if the students fully comprehended the assignment. I usually gave students detailed feedback in my comments during the formative stages of assessment.

The more detailed types of comments I gave usually dealt with global issues, so I offered explanations and examples of what the students could do to alter it. I tried not to misinterpret the meaning in their writing, although I cannot be completely sure of this. I also tried to avoid the run-of-the-mill types of comments, such as “Excellent work!” or “Very good description!” Instead, I tried to offer the students explanations on why it was excellent or examples of what I meant by good description (Nancy Sommers, 1982). While this seems time consuming to do in the early stages of drafting, there is a benefit when it comes to the summative part of assessment because there is usually less to comment on when issuing out the final grade.

Occasionally, I offered feedback or suggestions for misspelled words, misused words (i.e. “defiantly” for “definitely,” or “there” for “their”), although I rarely had to comment on possible sentence re-arrangements. In the case of the students whose first language was not English, I spent a little more time commenting on sentence structures, such as missing verbs, verb tenses, missing articles (i.e. a, the), use of prepositions, repetition of information, and run-on sentences. Many of the students who did take me up on my offer to read over their drafts before turning them in for a final grade did usually alter their writing based on my feedback and suggestions.

Many students I noticed during the formative and summative stages of assessment struggled with the APA format/style. A few students revealed to me that they had been taught or had used MLA in high school. So when it came to citing direct quotes from their interviews, they little difficultly. The students who did take me up on offer to read over their drafts before they

submitted them for a final grade did tend to take the feedback and suggestions that I offered them and make the changes or further alter their documents to better fit the APA format.

However, a few students still struggled with understanding the APA format and style of writing (the page dimensions, acceptable font sizes and styles, and how to construct a cover sheet). I think that this is my fault because while we discussed what APA formatting is before they started writing their reflections, we concentrated too much time on *how* to write in APA, but not *why* we should use it in such an assignment. I think that by explaining and exploring why it is important to use APA formatting for writing the interview reflections would have helped the students to connect the type of research with the kind of writing that is expected with that type of assignment.

As for the reflection aspect of the interview assignment, many of the students offered enough “thick description” by elaborating on the questions and interviewees’ responses and connecting them with their own knowledge, experiences, or interests in their majors and future careers/professions. A few students did just produce transcripts of the interviews—listing the questions they asked their interviewees and the responses they received. However, the students who did just offer their interview reflections in form of transcripts with minor analysis did still produce description rich final reflections with the information and knowledge they had received from the interviewees.

While grading the interview reflections, I noticed that one of the students had converted his documents into PDF files and I could not comment on them. I decided to write him a separate “note” offering comments on each reflection. I considered trying this out on the other students’ regular MS Word document files, but decided against because I wanted them to see my feedback and comments with their writing at the same time.

I feel as if I need to explain why I chose not to incorporate peer review sessions into the assignment. At first sight, the interview assignment appears to be designed for engaging students in peer review sessions where they can share and read over one another's writing, offering constructive feedback and suggestions. I have attempted using peer review sessions with this interview assignment before, providing them with a framework, such as things to look for in the writing or the kinds of questions to ask about the writing.

However, I quickly noticed that many of the students either did not provide the necessary feedback or suggestions as to how to improve their writing or sought me out to validate a suggestion they had made about another students' writing. While I was not acting as the "holder of knowledge," but more of as a guide, I still felt that the students would not make or move on a comment or suggestions until they got my approval. Another factor that complicated incorporating peer review sessions was the nature of this assignment.

In order to have a successful peer review session, students would need to have drafts. While many of the students were successfully getting their interviews done and writing their reflections on them, not all of the students were at the same place or stage. This was because many students were waiting on their interviewees' approval to conduct the interview, or they had just conducted the interview and were just starting to write out their reflection on it. I encouraged the students to use the university's writing center in the library for an additional set of eyes to read over their interview reflections. I also encouraged the students to read over one another's reflections in order to get an idea of how their peers were constructing theirs.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was the scope. The study only involved one teacher and two composition classes. The teacher designed, implemented the assignment, collected it,

and graded it. While the resume and interview assignment was conducted previously at another university, this was the first time that this assignment had been used with freshmen at the University in West Texas. Ideally, more than one instructor would need to use the resume and interview assignment in their classrooms, preferably setting up against a control group, and then repeating it over the course of two or three semesters in order to prove replicability.

Conclusion

I have been using a continuously evolving version of the resume and interview assignment in the freshmen composition classroom. What would I change after this current evolution of this resume and interview assignment? I am sure that I would continue to alter the assignment descriptions and the grading rubrics, as well as my approach to how I introduce or structure my classroom, especially with the kinds of activities that prepare students for conducting their interviews. Many writing assignments produce a certain level of exigency that requires students to act or think about their motivations, goals, and purposes. However, with the “interviews” assignment there is a heightened sense of exigency, possibly because they do not only have to meet a deadline for a writing assignment but also have an “outside (real) audience” that they will be interacting with via their interviews.

An unexpected development that I did not anticipate was that many students seemed to use the interviews as a springboard for developing a research question(s) to research. While the theory backing this assignment seems to be solid and the pedagogy seems to be successful, more research and studies within this area are needed to prove this approach’s replicability and validity. For teachers interested in using this approach an assignment, I strongly suggest that they take it and make it their own otherwise it will be as if the teachers are merely “copying and pasting” ideas as their own and not truly seeing the underlying value, and theory, of them.

Appendix A

Choice 1: Spring Semester 2010 Writing Assignments #1 (Resume) (10% of your grade) & #2 (Interviews) (10% of your grade)

Writing Assignment 1: A professional resume (electronic submission to your PBWorks wiki pages). This assignment will be due on _____.

A series of three interviews conducted in three different communities: *personal*, *department on campus*, and *peer/classmate*. Students will write a reflection of each interview. The reflection will range between 500-800 words. After all three reflections are written, students will synthesize them into one piece of writing, adding any new information or insight you have gleaned through this assignment. This final synthesized piece of writing will range between 900-1,200 words. Writing will be in APA style.

Writing Assignment Breakdown

- 1 professional resume (create one or improve the one you already have)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 1 (family member or close friend interview)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 2 (someone from a campus department interview)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 3 (classmate interview)
- 900-1,200 word final document, synthesizing all 3 interviews into one paper

Appendix B

Choice 2: Spring Semester 2010 Writing Assignments #1 (Resume) (10% of your grade) & #2 (Interviews) (10% of your grade)

Writing Assignment 1: A professional resume (electronic submission to your PBWorks wiki pages). This assignment will be due on _____.

A series of three interviews conducted in three different communities: *professional, business, or academic*. Students will write a reflection of each interview. The reflection will range between 500-800 words. After all three reflections are written, students will synthesize them into one piece of writing, adding any new information or insight you have gleaned through this assignment. This final synthesized piece of writing will range between 900-1,200 words. Writing will be in APA style.

Writing Assignment Breakdown

- 1 professional resume (create one or improve the one you already have)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 1 (someone within your profession)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 2 (someone within your major or discipline)
- 500-800 word reflective document of Interview 3 (someone within your field in general)
- 900-1,200 word final document, synthesizing all 3 interviews into one paper

Appendix C

Writing Assignment #1: The Resume Grading Rubric

A check mark indicates that you receive full credit.

This assignment is due on: _____.

GRADING SCALE

7 check marks = 98: A, 6-5 check marks = 89: B, 4 check marks = 79: C, 3 check marks = 69: D;
2-0 check marks = F.

Student's Name: _____

- Does the resume follow the template provided (or an approved template)? _____
- Is the resume consistent throughout (i.e. font size for headings, text fonts, etc.)? _____
- Does the resume display the student's best achievements, activities, organizations, awards, etc.? _____
- Does the resume list at least two references? Or state "references upon request?"

- Are all words, names, schools, etc. spelled correctly on the resume? _____
- Are acronyms spelled out in full? _____
- Is the resume relatively free of non-standard academic uses of English? Are deviations of style/usage appropriate and effective? _____

Total Grade: _____

Appendix D

Writing Assignment #2: The “Interviews” Grading Rubric

Each check mark indicates that you have engaged in the required tasks in order to complete the assignment. A check mark indicates that you receive full credit.

This assignment will be due on: _____.

GRADING SCALE

15-14 check marks = 98: A, 13-11 check marks = 89: B, 10-8 check marks = 79: C, 7-5 check marks = 69: D; 4-0 check marks = F.

Student’s Name: _____

- You stayed in constant contact with your composition teacher and any team members during the construction of portfolio one and has the necessary documentation to prove it (i.e. emails, plans, phone numbers, class meetings/discussions) _____
- You have arranged a visit(s) to your campus community(ies), have proof of the email that you sent to conduct an interview, as well as the response of the individual(s) _____
- You have developed appropriate questions that you plan to ask individual(s) within various discourse communities, with constructive feedback from any peers, and composition instructor (i.e. in-class conferences or separate conferences with me outside of class) _____
- You have adequately reflected on the answers or responses from the staff, faculty, or individuals from the various discourse communities, as well as proof (i.e. that the those individuals have approved the use of that information within an academic document or in a presentation on campus) _____
 - Reflective interview papers (three writings, each 500-800 words each):
 - 1 from an academic community _____
 - 1 from a personal/professional community _____
 - 1 from your campus/professional/academic community _____
 - Final writing (Synthesizing all three interview reflections into one, between 900-1,200 words):
 - Does the writer describe the various communities/observations/answers in detail? _____
 - Is your paper relatively free of non-standard academic uses of English? Are deviations of style/usage appropriate and effective? _____
 - Is there a logical flow to your ideas? _____
 - Is each paragraph unified? _____
 - Are there effective transitions between your paragraphs? _____
 - Does the writer exhibit appropriate appeals and an awareness of audience, purpose, and context? _____
 - Does it encourage the reader to read the document? _____

- You have shown that you have fully reflected on the primary research (i.e. the interviews)

Total Grade : _____

Appendix E

Survey

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey. The purpose of this survey is to determine the effectiveness of this writing assignment in this English class. You are not required to identify yourself anywhere on this survey. All results are considered anonymous. If you choose not to answer the survey, your grade will not be penalized in this class. Please mark an “X” for your best selection.

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I felt that the resume was a good first writing assignment.					
2. I had difficulty in locating individuals to interview.					
3. I had enough time to conduct all three interviews before the due date.					
4. Contacting the individuals, developing questions to ask them, and then conducting the interviews challenged my thinking and writing.					
5. Writing a reflection for each of the three interviews was not necessary.					
6. Writing one large reflection for all three interviews would have been better.					
7. The instructor provided assistance in locating and showing me how to find individuals to interview.					
8. Writing the interview reflections was clearly presented by the instructor.					

References

- Dunbar-Odom, D. (1999). Speaking back with authority: Students as ethnographers in the research writing class." *Attending to the margins: Writing, researching, and teaching on the front lines* Eds. Michelle Hall Kells and Valerie Balester. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook. 7-22.
- Morris, B. A. (2007). Use of the personal interview as a teaching tool in English composition." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 34(3), 287-92.
- Roen, D., Glau, G. R., & Maid, B. M. (2009). *The brief McGraw-Hill guide: Writing for college, writing for life*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
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- Zubizarreta, J. (2009). Electronic learning portfolios (Chapter 4)." *The learning portfolio: Reflective practice for improving student learning*. Ed. John Zubizarreta. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009. 55-71.