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BUILDING INTERCULTURAL EMPATHY THROUGH WRITING:

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING ALTERNATIVES TO ARGUMENTATION

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Writing assignments that focus on nonargumentative discourse can take many forms. Such assignments can prompt students to produce individually constructed writing, or they can be more collaborative in nature. They can focus on traditional formats, following MLA citation guidelines, using Times New Roman 12-point font, maintaining one-inch margins, and following standard rules of English grammar, for example, or they can stray from such ink-on-paper guidelines and allow for a broader definition of what constitutes text. The decisions made when crafting an assignment that focuses on nonargumentative discourse will depend on, as with any other assignment, the goals of the course, the tastes of the individual instructor, and the proclivities of the particular student body. What I provide here is my perspective on teaching nonargumentative writing to students at The University of Arizona in the Spring 2004, Fall 2004, and Spring 2005 semesters. I explain the context surrounding the courses in which I taught this assignment, describe the assignment and the rationale behind its construction, and share student reactions to the assignment from feedback on anonymous teacher evaluation forms. What I show is that through such an assignment, students learn how to explore complex issues without closing the opportunity for dialogue across difference. As such, I suggest that teaching students to write nonargumentatively can help achieve the goal of reaching empathic understanding across cultures.

Contextualizing the Particularities

My teaching of nonargumentative writing took place at The University of Arizona, a public land-grant university with a student body in fall 2004 of 36,932 students (*UA Factbook 2004-05*). Of these close to 37,000 students, 28,368 were undergraduates, 8,564 were graduate or medical students, 26,520 came from Arizona, 7,819 came from other US states, and 2,593 came from other nations (*UA Factbook 2004-05*). The ethnic makeup of these

students was as follows: 63.9% were identified as White Non-Hispanic, 13.6% Hispanic, 7% Nonresident Alien, 5.4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 2.7% Black Non-Hispanic, 2.1% American Indian or Native Alaskan, and the remaining 5.4% were of unknown ethnicity (*UA Factbook 2004-05*). The mean SAT score of the 2004 incoming freshman class was 1118 (*UA Factbook 2004-05*), and the average GPA of all undergraduate students on campus in Spring 2005 was 3.013 (*Greek Life*). For the incoming class of 2005, students graduating in the top 25% of their high school classes were guaranteed admission to the University (*Entrance Requirements*), and of the incoming class of 1998, 57% had graduated by 2004, or within six years (*Frequently Asked Questions*).

As a graduate instructor in the English Department, my teaching took place in the University's writing program, which focuses heavily on first-year composition but also offers several upper-division writing courses (see Appendix A for descriptions of the Writing Program's course offerings for the 2005-2006 school year). The curricula of many of these courses was highly prescribed by the writing program administration with somewhat more flexibility allowed of instructors in a few of the courses offered. Course goals were clearly stated in all the course descriptions, and in those courses in which more flexibility was allowed, as long as instructors were aiming to meet these goals, the shape of individual writing assignments could be customized according to each instructor's tastes. It was in two of these more flexible courses, English 306 and English 109H, that I introduced my alternative to argumentative writing assignment.

At the time I was teaching it, English 306 was open to any student who had completed first-year composition and was designed to introduce students to "[. . .] classical rhetoric and contemporary research on composition in order to further develop [their] ability to write and communicate" (*Composition Courses*). The course was required of all English Education majors, and English majors following the rhetoric and writing emphasis were strongly encouraged to take it. Others took the course to satisfy upper-division writing requirements in their majors that did not specify which course must be taken, while some took the course as an elective. As this description suggests, students taking this course often had rather varied goals for their writing. In the two sections of English 306 that I taught, the students taking the course were majoring in Journalism, Psychology, Media Arts, English Education, Political Science, Accounting, Computer Engineering, Classics, English, History, and Finance.

English 109H was a first-year course designed for students who received a score of 4 or 5 on the English Literature Advanced Placement Exam or a 5, 6, or 7 on the English portion of the International Baccalaureate Exam. This one-semester honors course aimed to achieve the combined goals reached in English 101 and 102 for mainstream students. Like all other first-year composition courses at the University of Arizona, English 109H was a required course, considered part of the University's general education requirements. As can be imagined, the diversity of student interests in a course such as this can be phenomenal. In the two sections of this course I taught, students indicated they were majoring in Engineering, Optical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Aerospace Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Material Science and Engineering, Engineering Physics, English, Psychology, Molecular and Cellular Biology, Art History, Nutritional Sciences, History, Pre-Business, Political Science, Communications, Journalism, Religious Studies, Veterinary Science, German Studies, Spanish, Creative Writing, Elementary Education, and Chemistry. Of course, since these students were early in their college careers, their majors may have changed between the start of the courses, when I was provided the list of majors, and the end of the courses. Nonetheless, it seems safe to conclude that the students in these sections represent a wide range of interests.

The Assignment

Given the relatively broad course goals and the wide range of interests of the students taking these two courses, I felt justified in creating a writing assignment designed to foster intellectual inquiry in general. In both courses, I required two major papers. In the first-year course, I felt obligated to ensure that students would be able to competently meet the writing requirements of courses across the curriculum, so their first paper was a traditional, thesis-driven, academic argument. Students were introduced to various types of analysis, such as

literary analysis, visual analysis, and rhetorical analysis, and they then chose an artifact or text to analyze using one of these forms of analysis. Their work with this assignment culminated in a thesis-driven paper that argued for their interpretation of the text or artifact they had chosen.

In the upper-division course, I felt that by making it to their junior or senior years of their college careers, students had most likely already mastered the traditional academic argument, so the first paper for this course was a personal reflection that integrated several course readings. Students first read excerpts from Plato's *Gorgias*, Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, and Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric*. They then analyzed the approaches to rhetoric and composition in each of these texts and reflected on ways these approaches could be found in their own writing experiences. For example, students noted Aristotle's emphasis on persuasion and Blair's emphasis on clarity, then thought about ways they had been taught to write persuasively and with clarity throughout their schooling. Such reflection in the upper-division course and practice with analytical argument in the first-year course created a springboard for the second half of the semester focusing on alternatives to argument.

The second assignment for both courses focused on inquiry. I have included the most recent version of my argumentative inquiry assignment in Appendix B, and this assignment includes the following description:

As the syllabus states, this paper "will be written in a collaborative, hybrid, inquiring manner about any issue of concern."

Collaboration: For this paper, you will need to listen to and use the words of others in your writing. You are required to cite from the writing prompts of at least one of your classmates and a passage from at least one author you've read for class since the mid-term paper. Your quotations should be used to show an appreciation of the people who wrote them, an appreciation of the meaning behind the words.

Hybrid: Hybridity means not necessarily conforming to the standards of Academic English. It might mean using various font types within one text. It might mean incorporating visual rhetoric into an otherwise linguistic text. It might mean using more than one genre (poetry, narrative, business memo) within your text to convey your meaning. Your options here are almost limitless.

Inquiring: Inquiring means to write without arguing. It means to investigate rather than to assert. Writing in an inquiring manner means, as Young explains, writing from a state of mind without answers. It means, as Gage suggests, using writing as a means for creating new knowledge in both the writer and reader. To write this paper you should find an issue about which you feel a "felt difficulty" and create an inquiry into that issue. To provide context for the issue you choose, you should refer to at least one source from outside the class readings.

I used basically the same assignment in both the upper-division and the first-year courses, illustrating its flexibility and broad applicability to students at varied levels of education. In leading up to this assignment, students read works by contemporary rhetoric and composition theorists who emphasize alternatives to argumentation. These readings included Richard E. Young's "Toward an Adequate Pedagogy for Rhetorical Argumentation: A Case Study in Invention," Carl Rogers' "A Counselor's Approach," John Gage's "An Adequate Epistemology for Composition: Classical and Modern Perspectives," Jim Corder's "Varieties of Ethical Argument, With Some Account of the Significance of Ethos in the Teaching of Composition," a chapter from Deborah Tannen's *The Argument Culture*, and Linda Flower's "Talking across Difference: Intercultural Rhetoric and the Search for Situated Knowledge." In fact, the roots of this assignment can be traced to one Linda Flower describes in *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing in College and Community* (418-28). I completed this assignment when I took her course, "Rhetoric and the Writing Process: Community Literacy and Intercultural Interpretation" at Carnegie Mellon University as part of my Master's degree. In fact, Flower cites my work as an

example of an effective approach to writing an inquiry (421-23), and I drew on my work with this assignment as I designed my own inquiry assignment. Our assignments, although they are not identical, have in common the focus on inquiry as well as the latitude for textual hybridity.

Perhaps a note here on what textual hybridity means would be helpful. A succinct definition is provided by Kris Gutiérrez, Patricia Baquedano-López, and Carlos Tejeda in their article "Rethinking Diversity: Hybridity and Hybrid Language Practices in the Third Space." They explain that "[. . .] hybridity [. . .] is manifest in the coexistence, commingling of, and contradictions among different linguistic codes and registers [. . .]" (289). In other words, hybridity occurs when various language forms come together and interact to make meaning. For example, hybridity occurs when an American learning the Korean language utters the sentence, " *nomu* hot *imnida*," a sentence that uses a mingling of Korean and English to state, "I am too hot." While hybrid discourse sometimes involves this type of bilingual usage, Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda claim "[. . .] such language practices are always present, though not always legitimized and utilized, in formal learning contexts" (289). Even when bilingualism is not at issue, then, hybrid language use takes place. This is true because even though all speakers in a given conversation may use standard American English, they do not share identical contexts. Hybrid meanings are created whenever people gather and make use of language, for different connotations, different ideologies, and different perspectives are given voice and intermingle.

Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda cite such authors as Anzaldúa, Arteaga, Becquer and Gatti, Bhabha, Gómez-Peña, Lipsitz, Shohat and Stam, and Valle and Torres as providing the theoretical basis of hybridity theory, and they summarize this sizeable body of work as follows:

> In particular, this body of work captures the struggle of translation and difference in contexts where cultural and linguistic practices, histories, and epistemologies collide. Such translation, in which people negotiate what is known, for example, local cultural knowledge and linguistic registers, occurs when people attempt to make sense of one's identity in relation to prevailing notions of self and cultural practices. (288)

The authors cited focus their work primarily on the hybridity that occurs when people of dominant and nondominant cultural groups interact. The members of the nondominant group strive to make sense of life in the dominant culture by drawing on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds in comparison to the new reality they face. What results is a hybrid creation, a creation that mixes dominant and nondominant languages, cultural practices, and ideologies.

Yet Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda carry the analysis further, extending the notion of hybridity to classroom situations: "This same complexity and struggle, [. . .] we have argued, is found in other contexts of cultural contact, particularly urban classroom settings" (288). In such settings, hybridity may involve bilingualism, dominant and nondominant cultural groups, and competing epistemologies, but it may not. Hybridity in classroom settings may revolve more around socioeconomic differences between classmates, different levels of technological expertise between students and teacher, or different tastes and interests between classmates and between students and teacher. In such circumstances, the creation of hybridity may involve students who are well-versed in video game culture, or adept at sports, or skilled in painting importing such knowledge into standard academic subjects. In cases such as this, "[. . .] the teacher and the student are in a new hybrid space [. . .] where student knowledge, including use of alternative representations of meaning, become new tools for learning" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 295). These "alternative representations of meaning" are what come to define hybrid texts, for often these representations do not fit the mold of standard academic discourse. Instead, these representations of meaning go beyond ink on paper texts to involve a "[. . .] broader range of linguistic and sociocultural resources and experiences [. . .]" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 301). They could involve the integration of drawings into a standard academic paper, or they could be more all-encompassing, such as the creation of a multimedia website instead of a standard academic paper. The

possibilities of what could constitute a hybrid text are nearly limitless, shaped in each circumstance by the experiences and knowledge of the particular students involved.

As the assignment sheet I gave my students illustrates, students in my classes enjoyed broad flexibility in designing hybrid texts. Students exercised their options in terms of hybridity to varying degrees. Some used the flexibility to write a paper on an academic subject in a creative genre, such as a play or extended dialogue. For example, one student explored the question of self-identity through an extended dialogue of his imagined alter egos. He gave these identities names, imbued each identity with characteristics of his personality, and recorded an imagined dialogue between them. The imagined characters then puzzled through such issues as the contribution of ethnicity to personality. Since this student was of mixed ethnicity, he wanted to know if certain parts of his personality could be attributed to certain sides of his ethnic heritage, and the creative genre of the imagined dialogue gave him a unique way to approach the topic. This sort of text represents hybridity in that it uses a mode of discourse that goes beyond the bounds of what is normally accepted as academic, yet it stays within the traditionally accepted ink on paper format.

Another student created a hybrid text that stayed within the bounds of an ink on paper text in quite another way. This student explored questions surrounding public schooling and theories of education, integrating ponderings about her decision to be an education major along the way. To explore this topic, she chose to use the traditional ink on paper format with significant alteration. She used legal-sized paper turned to a landscape orientation, saving the left three-quarters of each page to record a narrative exploration of her topic. To the right, on the remaining one-quarter of each page and separated by a vertical line, she inserted commentary of assorted kinds, using a variety of clip art to indicate the differing rhetorical purposes of the commentary. For example, to indicate a source of information, she inserted an image of a stack of books followed by a citation. To indicate a new insight, she used an image of a light bulb followed by a connection she had made between different perspectives or ideas. This sort of hybridity mixes narrative structure with tangential asides and visual images to create a journey through the topic at hand. To convey her meaning, this student drew on a wider range of tools than are ordinarily accepted in standard academic discourse, creating a hybrid text as a result.

Other students strayed even farther from traditional text formats. In addition to the female student above who explored questions of public education and theories of schooling through a hybrid ink on paper format, another student wanted to explore questions surrounding public schooling and theories of education while integrating ponderings about his experience as a home-schooled student. This student enjoyed playing video games, and he had expertise in computer programming as well, so he decided to create a video game to serve as the textual representation of his inquiry. As users entered the game, they were confronted with a floorplan meant to represent a public high school. As the player moved around the floorplan, various encounters occurred. For example, upon entering room "A," the player might encounter a disgruntled teacher ridiculing students for answering questions incorrectly. Upon entering room "B," however, the player might encounter an inspirational teacher encouraging students to find their interests and follow them. In the hallway between classrooms, the player might run into bullies or might run into a group of friends making plans for the weekend. By creating this game, the student was able to explore his attitudes toward home-schooling and call into question some of his preconceived notions about public schools. The game represents a hybrid text because it drew on this student's existing interests and expertise with video games while also satisfying some of the requirements of traditional academic discourse, such as conducting and documenting research. Other students painted artworks of various sorts in response to the permission to create a hybrid text, while some integrated audio into their final inquiry projects. The range of texts created was wide and serves to illustrate that "[. . .] learning contexts are imminently hybrid, that is, polycontextual, multivoiced, and multiscripted" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 287). Affording students the opportunity to create hybrid texts allows the hybridity that is latent in any situation to become visible.

The idea behind textual hybridity in assignments is to allow a break from the linearity of traditional academic argument. Students are aware that thoughts do not always arrive arranged with their thesis statements first followed by evidence and then analysis. Textual hybridity allows students to follow their trains of thought in a more organic manner and in whatever genre they are most comfortable working. Howard Gardner's notion of

multiple intelligences provides a strong theoretical basis for promoting and using such hybidity in educational settings. Gardner explains the methodology used to establish his theory, stating:

> In formulating my brief on behalf of multiple intelligences, I have reviewed evidence from a large and hitherto unrelated group of sources: studies of prodigies, gifted individuals, brain-damaged patients, *idiots savants* , normal children, normal adults, experts in different lines of work, and individuals from diverse cultures. A preliminary list of candidate intelligences has been bolstered (and, to my mind, partially validated) by converging evidence from these diverse sources. I have become convinced of the existence of an intelligence to the extent that it can be found in relative isolation in special populations (or absent in isolation in otherwise normal populations); to the extent that it may become highly developed in specific individuals or in specific cultures; and to the extent that psychometricians, experimental researchers, and/or experts in particular disciplines can posit core abilities that, in effect, define the intelligence. (9)

By observing such a broad population sample and finding patterns of abilities, Gardner is able to delineate several types of intelligence. These intelligences include "[. . .] the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences that are at such a premium in schools today; musical intelligence; spatial intelligence; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; and two forms of personal intelligence, one directed toward other persons, one directed toward oneself" (Gardner xi). As Gardner notes, "In ordinary life [. . .] these intelligences typically work in harmony, and so their autonomy may be invisible. But when the appropriate observational lenses are donned, the peculiar nature of each intelligence emerges with sufficient (and often surprising) clarity" (9). By isolating each intelligence, we can see that different people are stronger in certain areas than in others. For example, not all people are strong linguistically. Allowing for textual hybridity gives students who are stronger in other intelligences, such as spatial or musical intelligences, a credible way to explore their ideas. Of course, in adopting this assignment and adapting it to various contexts, instructors will have to assess how much hybridity they feel comfortable accepting.

With minor revisions, I used the same assignment in all four English 306 and 109H courses I taught. The biggest change I made to the assignment over time involved the number of sources students were required to cite. Through informal feedback, students had indicated that requiring a set number of sources of various types seemed arbitrary, and upon reflection I realized they were probably correct. My goal in requiring students to make use of sources was to ensure that they were considering viewpoints other than their own as part of their inquiry into their "felt difficulty" or issue of concern. I realized that simply by indicating students needed to consult at least one fellow students' perspective, at least one author read as assigned reading during the course, and at least one additional source with a perspective on the issue in question, I could ensure that students considered multiple perspectives without needing to impose seemingly arbitrary quotas of sources. I also altered my requirements for documentation once I realized how many students took advantage of the chance to construct hybrid texts. Originally I had required MLA format for documentation, and I had indicated verbally that if anyone wanted to stray beyond traditional text, I would adjust that requirement accordingly. However, over time I decided to formalize my flexibility with MLA documentation, indicating that although students were required to document sources, they could do so in any format they chose or constructed themselves. I made similar alterations to the requirements for mechanics as indicated in the grading guide. Again, because many students chose to construct hybrid texts, it simply did not make sense to require standard academic English in all cases. For example, the student who wrote the imagined dialogue between his alter egos created dialects appropriate to each persona. Although the created dialects did not follow standard academic English, they did serve a carefully constructed rhetorical purpose. I felt it would be inappropriate to penalize such creative uses of language, so I simply removed the requirement for following standard rules of mechanics and grammar from my grading considerations. Because I was teaching honors and advanced students, and because the first paper in the semester had required proficiency in standard academic English, I felt confident in dropping this requirement. However, anyone wanting to adopt such an assignment would need to evaluate his/her own

comfort with this flexibility and adjust the requirements accordingly.

Student Reactions

Overall, students seemed pleased with the chance to try a new mode of writing. Each semester, students filled out Teacher Course Evaluations (TCEs), to which instructors had access after grades were submitted. Students evaluated both their instructor's teaching effectiveness and the course content using a 5-point scale over a range of questions, and they also wrote narrative responses that allowed the chance to explain their feedback. In the tables below, I have compiled comments relevant to the course content and the inquiry assignment in particular. I have included both positive and negative feedback in separate tables, and I have divided the evaluations based on course level, so there are two tables for evaluations of English 306, the upper-division course, and another two tables for evaluations of English 109H, the first-year course. I have tried to limit comments to those that seem particularly pertinent to the inquiry assignment.

Table 1

English 306 Positive Evaluations

TCE Question	Student Responses
What is your overall rating of this course?	• I liked the freedom to try new things and be more expressive. • Very interesting course that leaves me with a lot to think about. • The assignments were refreshing, approachable, and presented a new and (preferable) way to view writing. • I will use the inquiry-based writing in my own teaching and future writing. • Learning about diverse writing styles and being able to write in creative contexts was great. • This course centered around alternate writing techniques—moving away from traditional argumentative styles—this focus allowed for more creativity, involvement, and enjoyment in the writing assignments. • This course was helpful in allowing me to explore writing boundaries. • I really like the exploratory nature of the class.

TCE Question	Student Responses
What was your overall experience in this course?	• I felt free and encouraged to try or at least be open to all forms of composition.
	• The inquiry assignment/hybrid text exploration was among the most valuable, enjoyable, and practical assignments I've completed in college.
	• This experience opened my eyes to the different writing styles that exist. It was the first English class I have taken that did not follow the five paragraph essay format. It allowed me the freedom to be creative.
	• Thanks for letting us write creatively!
	• I loved the way it challenged me.

Freedom, openness, and exploration are recurring themes in these comments. Students seem to have been both challenged and invigorated by the inquiry assignment.

Table 2

English 306 Negative Evaluations

TCE Question	Student Responses
What is your overall rating of this course?	• The writings didn't help me for my future writing tasks.
	• I expected a course that would help me to explore argumentation, etc.
What was your overall experience in this course?	• The course was listed as "Basic Argumentation" but the instructor changed it to study "Alternatives to Argumentation." We never wrote anything argumentative.

These few negative comments focus on unmet expectations for the course content and a perceived lack of relevance to future studies or work.

Table 3

English 109H Positive Evaluations

TCE Question	Student Responses
What is your overall rating of this course?	• It was refreshing to get to try new styles of writing after years of the same expository writing assignments. • I really enjoyed this course because it challenged me to think in ways not shown to me before. • The course goes clearly beyond the normal monotonous writing of other classes and instead pushes the students to reach their peak capacity. • This course made me think in a new way and opened my eyes to a new perspective of learning. • It challenged me to think and learn in new ways. • This course was very helpful in helping me to get past arguing in essays. I learned how to rhetorically analyze and to write an inquiry without always asserting. • I loved doing non-conventional writing. It really helped me become more inquisitive. • We were allowed a lot of freedom so we were able to write about what interested us and express it in a way that is unique and not dry.
What was your overall experience in this course?	• I think the greatest aspect of this course is that it opens up one's mind to new ideas and perspectives. • I like the nature of the course—it's focused on developing our writing and breaking from the mainstream. • I enjoyed the personal and academic freedom this course allowed. It made me think more than focus on the right or wrong answers. • I liked the essays. This was the first English class that allowed me to be creative—and learn about methods of inquiry as well.

Recurring themes in these positive comments include experiencing new ways of thinking and learning, feeling free, and being challenged.

Table 4

English 109H Negative Evaluations

TCE Question	Student Responses
What is your overall rating of this course?	• I didn't really feel that I learned anything new. • I didn't take all that much away from it. I've learned more about writing in history classes than this one.
What was your overall experience in this course?	• I wish we wrote more papers and developed more writing techniques. • It was good—I just don't know how it will help me in the future.

These few negative comments focus on feeling unchallenged and feeling the writing will not be useful in future courses or work.

Reflections on Feedback

In thinking about the negative feedback, I am troubled by the idea that some students did not seem to understand the relevance of nonargumentative writing to their future lives. I included in my syllabi for both of these courses readings that explore the importance of developing new ways of communicating about complex problems. These readings included works by Carl Rogers, Richard E. Young, Deborah Tannen, and Jim Corder, among others. It could be that these readings have been too difficult for some students to fully understand, but I would have hoped that class discussions might have helped elucidate the main points. However, I might have helped further clarify the usefulness of learning to communicate nonargumentatively by asking students to reflect on arguments or misunderstandings they have experienced in their own lives. Perhaps even a role-playing activity in which two or more students take on the role of people engaged in a disagreement could better highlight why learning to communicate in ways aimed at fostering mutual understanding has importance.

That some students may be unable to see the relevance of this type of assignment to typical school activities could also be indicative of the indoctrination model of schooling. Whereas the inquiry assignment I have created allows for free thinking and creative problem solving, these types of activities may not fit students' expectations of what is normally expected of them in educational settings. Furthermore, composition classrooms typically focus on linear, thesis-driven writing, and the inquiry assignment I have created could seem ill suited for preparing students to do well in future composition classrooms that follow the more typical model. While these observations may be accurate, to me they point more to the shortcomings of current educational practices than to the shortcomings of this assignment.

As for the comment that the course did not meet stated course goals, this seems less well founded. As the description of English 306, Advanced Composition, in [Appendix A](#) states:

In this course you will study classical rhetoric and contemporary research on composition in order to further develop your ability to write and communicate. You will research rhetorical situations, write essays, and critique fellow students' work both formally and informally. The course explores how to write persuasively in different rhetorical situations.

Nowhere is the course titled "Basic Argumentation," and while students did not write argumentatively, they did study classical rhetoric, contemporary research on composition, and develop their abilities to write and communicate. Perhaps the statement regarding writing persuasively is one that could seem at odds with nonargumentative writing, although class time was devoted to exploring and comparing the purposes and aims of argumentative writing, persuasive writing, and inquiry. I had hoped my course design would lead students to a more sophisticated understanding of how to assess rhetorical situations to determine the best form of writing to use in each, but perhaps more explicit instruction in the differences and similarities between persuasion, argumentation, and inquiry could have been helpful.

Similarly, the English 109H student who wrote that s/he learned more about writing from history classes than this one is perhaps also finding it difficult to overcome preconceived notions. It is possible that to this student the inquiry assignment, with its exploratory intent and its hybrid shape, did not fit a preconceived notion of what writing is. I feel regret that this student remained so closed to the new way of writing that I tried to introduce that s/he feels nothing new was learned about writing at the end of the semester, but sometimes students are not ready to accept new concepts at particular points in their lives, and without a willingness to learn, there is not much an instructor can do. Similarly, the comment from the English 109H student who felt s/he did not learn anything new at all simply confounds me. The vast majority of the comments from these sections indicate the complete opposite, although it is possible that perhaps a few students had learned to write inquiringly in high school. I honestly cannot think of a way to proactively respond to the possibility of these isolated incidents, other than to focus on the majority of students who made more positive comments and take comfort in the notion that this assignment has made an impact in their writing and thinking lives.

Much of the positive feedback centers around the affective domain. Students comment on feeling free, open, and refreshed. They speak about enjoying the assignment, feeling creative, and being involved. These comments may not denote much quantifiable learning going on, but they speak powerfully to me. To have created an assignment that fosters feelings of excitement and happiness is gratifying to me as an educator. Too often students feel disengaged from learning, finding it to be more drudgery than enjoyment, or they associate learning with feelings of dread as they think more in terms of requirements to be met than in terms of invigorating discoveries to be made. Mike Rose speaks movingly of such challenges to educators in *Lives on the Boundary*, and from the time I first read this book, I wanted to find ways to help students feel positively about learning and education. Students with optimistic outlooks seem more likely to be open to active engagement with ideas, unlocking their potential to engage with the world in fruitful ways. That the inquiry assignment I designed has had this effect on many of the students who have worked with it is moving to me.

Other student comments focus more directly on the content of their learning. Several mention being challenged to think in new ways about writing. In other words, students stretched the boundaries of what they thought it meant to write before taking the course. Many students are familiar with the traditional five-paragraph essay, and by commenting directly on the notion of moving beyond this structure, students imply they have learned new methods of organization and development than are allowed by the traditional format. One student mentions becoming more aware of rhetorical options by learning how to rhetorically analyze situations to best determine when it is appropriate to argue and when a different approach might be more helpful. These comments reveal

that not only does this inquiry assignment have a positive impact on students' affective domains, it also is effective at teaching the content of composition and rhetoric.

Implications for Composition and Rhetoric Instruction

I feel confident in suggesting that the inquiry assignment I have created carries with it great potential for positively shaping the way students think and feel about writing. As the student feedback I have received reveals, most students come away from working with the assignment with positive results. They have come away with an optimism about writing and learning, and they have also learned new composition and rhetoric skills. Rather than feeling limited by the persistent five-paragraph essay format, students have felt freed to explore new ideas in ways that may not have fit the constrictions inherent in such formulaic writing. The inquiry assignment I have described in this chapter provides students a means through which to investigate complex topics in depth. It gives them the space and flexibility to pursue possibly contradictory evidence or lines of reasoning, exploring how such contradictions and complications coexist in the world and shape their own way of thinking. By not requiring students to develop clear-cut lines of argument in straightforward, thesis-driven writing, this assignment helps avoid the oversimplification of complex issues. Students are free to include all information they find, contradictory or not, confusing and unclear or not, and have the space to begin to puzzle it out through writing. Rather than being required to provide answers and assertions, students working with this assignment are encouraged to take on challenging problems and figure out where they are in their thinking about them for the time being.

How can such writing help achieve the goal of reaching empathic understanding across cultures? By teaching students through assignments such as this that it is at times appropriate to be provisional in their thinking, to be exploratory, to be curious, to be unsure, rather than only teaching them to be absolute, confident, certain, and assertive, we can begin to open the lines of dialogue across cultures. Assignments such as this teach students the skills necessary for engaging in inquiry by encouraging them to be always open to unexpected possibilities as they arise, encouraging them to be respectful of the diversity of opinions that exist on any given topic, encouraging them to ask questions, withhold hasty judgment, and truly listen to and understand others' viewpoints. These skills are not only valuable in academic settings, but they are also valuable in real-world intercultural communication. By enacting these skills, our students have the potential to engage those from different cultural backgrounds in meaningful dialogue, dialogue that hopefully will result in increased mutual understanding.

APPENDIX A

From: *Composition Courses* . The University of Arizona Department of English Writing

Program 7 Sept. 2005. <http://english.arizona.edu/index_site.php?id=83&preview=1>,

Composition Courses

English 100

English 100 is designed to introduce students to college-level reading and writing expectations. Through the emphasis on analysis, inferential thinking, and careful consideration of evidence, the course seeks to strengthen students' critical thinking while asking them to apply that thinking to a variety of texts-visual texts such as advertisements and photographs, academic and popular printed texts from journals and magazines, and living texts such as personal experience, communities, and society.

English 101

This course will focus on close reading and written analysis of a wide range of texts, which can include nonfiction prose, historical documents, creative texts, film, visual images, speeches, and so on, offering a soft bridge from high school to an entry level college writing course. Students will learn how to select and use research correctly and effectively. You will also study and practice a variety of methods for reading and analyzing texts both in in-class and out-of-class writing. Each essay will involve multiple drafts essays and writing workshops. In essay one, you will learn analytical methods for reading closely. In essay two, you will consider how a text gains meaning from its contexts: other texts, issues, cultures, eras, and so on. In essay three, you will consider how your own culture influences how you read and write about texts.

In sum, students will learn a repertoire of strategies for close reading, critical thinking, focused research, and analytical writing as well as understand how their own lives influence what and how they read and write. Students will learn to write sustained, critical analyses and arguments that incorporate evidence from a variety of sources including their own experiences.

English 102

This course builds on the close-reading and research strategies introduced in English 101, but focuses more on the craft of writing and the students' own fields of interest. The key concepts and skills taught in 102 are rhetorical analysis, research, reflection, and revision. In the first unit, students will explore texts for their rhetorical situations and the strategies used to meet those situations. In the second unit, they will apply what they have learned in the first unit to their own writing as they design an inquiry into an issue in their field of interest. They will learn effective research strategies and analyze they sources they discover as well as learn ways to integrate sources into their texts to give substance and credibility to their arguments. They will also learn to read their own rhetorical situations so that their essays appeal to their target audience, accommodate their and their audience's context, and fulfill their purpose. In the third unit, they will choose two essays to rewrite and revise as well as reflect upon themselves as writers and look closely at their writing practices and habits. In a series of workshops, they will learn to revise more effectively as well as describe what and how they have revised.

One of the goals of 102 is help students understand that texts are effective and successful not by accident but by purposefully designing them to meet their rhetorical situation. Because 102 may be the last writing class that many students take, it is structured so as to help them become more independent writers—more conscious of how they write and what their strengths and weaknesses are, as well as more aware of what steps to take to improve their writing.

ESL Composition Courses

English 106

This course is designed for international students and other non-native speakers of English who will benefit from extra practice at college-level writing in English. The course is taught by teachers with special training in the field of ESL (English as a Second Language.) This classroom setting is diverse and dynamic with students from all over the world. Reading material, writing assignments, and discussions on language use issues are relevant and specific to multi-lingual students. English 106 is comparable to the English 100 course for native speakers of English.

English 107

This course, which corresponds to English 101, is designed to introduce ESL speakers to the strategies and conventions of American academic discourse, both formal and informal. A personal narrative, a textual analysis, and a documented argument constitute the major writing assignments. Topics for essays evolve from your

personal knowledge and interests in certain issues. Because the course emphasizes writing as a process of discovery, you will take your essays through several revisions based on responses from your instructor and your classmates. You will use journal writing to invent ideas and to record your responses to assigned readings. Stylistic, syntactic, and grammatical problems will be part of class discussion.

English 108

English 108 corresponds to English 102 and is the second-semester First-Year Composition course for ESL speakers. In this course, you will continue to strengthen your awareness of American academic writing and research strategies and applications of those strategies. Through journal writing and other pre-writing activities, you will reflect upon the texts and synthesize your ideas and experiences with those presented in the texts. You will begin by writing a personal response to a story, poem, or other text. You will also write an analysis of a text by studying its rhetorical and cultural contexts. Your next essay will consist of a detailed analysis of a novel or other long text in which you incorporate research into your writing. In the final (in-class) essay, you will synthesize and expand on the writing strategies you have developed over the semester.

Honors Composition Courses

English 103H

This course is the honors equivalent of English 101. Because placement in the honors sequence usually indicates advanced competence in writing and a varied background in reading, the course aims to refine your critical thinking and writing skills. Works may include major literary texts, significant scientific and historical writings, outstanding dramas, and other art forms. Class discussions, informal writings, documented papers, and essays written in class provide a forum for assessing ideas and writing in ways you will be expected to perform throughout your college experience.

English 104H

This course provides students who have completed English 103H with further opportunities to expand their understanding and application of rhetoric and to expose you to various challenging ideas in contemporary culture, the academic community, the world at large. You will critically assess strategies employed by other writers and compose essays of your own. Other activities include informal writings, active discussions, in-class essays, and a formal, documented presentation of research.

English 109H

This course is designed to prepare you to integrate critical reading, thinking, and writing tasks in one semester. You will engage in a wide range of intellectual, aesthetic, and rhetorical inquiries. Readings include a series of interdisciplinary texts that are thematically relevant, culturally diverse, and representative of a wide variety of voices speaking for different purposes to different audiences. Art forms other than literature are incorporated into the course in which principles of rhetoric (the study and practice of how texts produce their effects) and poetics (theories of reading, criticizing, and interpreting texts) merge. You will work independently and collaboratively to prepare written and oral texts that are shared with your class. A research component is also required.

Only available for students through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or portfolio placement.

Advanced Composition Courses

English 207: Sophomore Composition

English 207 is open to all students who have completed English 101 and 102. Certain departments and colleges require majors to take this course. 207 offers you further opportunities to study and practice forms of expository and argumentative writing. The syllabus varies according to the individual instructor, but all instructors

emphasize understanding of the rhetorical situation in both student and professional writing. You will write four to six essays, taking them through a process of invention, drafting, and revision, read and discuss examples of professional nonfiction prose, and participate in large- and small-group workshops of class members' writing. In most classes, students may choose their own topics in order to develop writing related to their own individual disciplines, though these are written to a general rather than to a specialized audience. Over the course of the semester, you will create a portfolio of their writing. Prerequisite: completion of Freshman Composition is required.

English 306: Advanced Composition

In this course you will study classical rhetoric and contemporary research on composition in order to further develop your ability to write and communicate. You will research rhetorical situations, write essays, and critique fellow students' work both formally and informally. The course explores how to write persuasively in different rhetorical situations. Prerequisite: students should be juniors or seniors who have completed the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Requirements.

English 307: Business Writing

This course introduces the theory and practice of communicating within organizations, with emphasis on written communication. You will learn how to determine the needs of a reader and select the most appropriate organization and language for each letter or report. You will progress from routine correspondence to cases requiring more persuasion or tact. You will prepare a resume and cover letter as well as a formal report based on original research. Instruction includes class discussion, group exercises, individual conferences, and one or two library tours. Assignments and texts vary from section to section, but all sections have regular writing assignments. Prerequisites: Freshman Composition and successful completion of Upper Division Writing Proficiency Examination. Junior or senior standing is recommended.

English 308: Technical Writing

This course is for juniors and seniors majoring in scientific or related disciplines. Through regular exploratory writing, you will produce a final project that represents significant work in your field and is presented in written form appropriate to a particular, real audience and situation. You will learn how to find and use library resources and field methods in their areas of specialization. Writing assignments include a formal research report and five to six short papers, such as a letter of application, trip report, proposal, progress report, or assignments derived from rhetorical principles and strategies. All students select subjects for their writing assignments from within their major study areas. Prerequisites: Freshman Composition and successful completion of Upper Division Writing Proficiency Examination.

English 414: Advanced Professional Writing

This course is only offered on an occasional basis.
It is designed to help you write typical technical documents and to give you experience creating web pages using hypertext mark-up language--tasks technical writers in most fields must do. You will employ advanced editing skills, practice writing on-line documentation, and develop hypertext links. Instruction throughout the course stresses the rhetorical skills needed to create effective texts that meet the constraints of particular writing contexts. You will write detailed rhetorical analyses for each of their writing assignments and produce effective letters, memos, technical descriptions, proposals, resumes, progress reports, and other appropriate documents for their course projects. Prerequisite: English 306, 307, or 308.

APPENDIX B

Final Paper

Assignment:

As the syllabus states, this paper "will be written in a collaborative, hybrid, inquiring manner about any issue of concern."

Collaboration: For this paper, you will need to listen to and use the words of others in your writing. You are required to cite from the writing prompts of at least one of your classmates and a passage from at least one author you've read for class since the mid-term paper. Your quotations should be used to show an appreciation of the people who wrote them, an appreciation of the meaning behind the words.

Hybrid: Hybridity means not necessarily conforming to the standards of Academic English. It might mean using various font types within one text. It might mean incorporating visual rhetoric into an otherwise linguistic text. It might mean using more than one genre (poetry, narrative, business memo) within your text to convey your meaning. Your options here are almost limitless.

Inquiring: Inquiring means to write without arguing. It means to investigate rather than to assert. Writing in an inquiring manner means, as Young explains, writing from a state of mind without answers. It means, as Gage suggests, using writing as a means for creating new knowledge in both the writer and reader. To write this paper you should find an issue about which you feel a "felt difficulty" and create an inquiry into that issue. To provide context for the issue you choose, you should refer to at least one source from outside the class readings.

Format:

Your paper should be at least 8 pages long. You must document your sources, although you are not required to do so in MLA format. You also do not need to follow MLA guidelines for format, since this will be a hybrid text. Paper drafts should be brought to class on the dates listed below. Hard copies of your final papers, along with hard copies of the drafts, should be handed in by the due date listed below. All final drafts should include highlighting with a marker or, if using a color printer, with the highlight function of your word processor to indicate revisions made. You should also hand in this assignment sheet with your final paper. See the diagram below. **Any late papers will result in a 10-point per day reduction of the paper's final grade.**
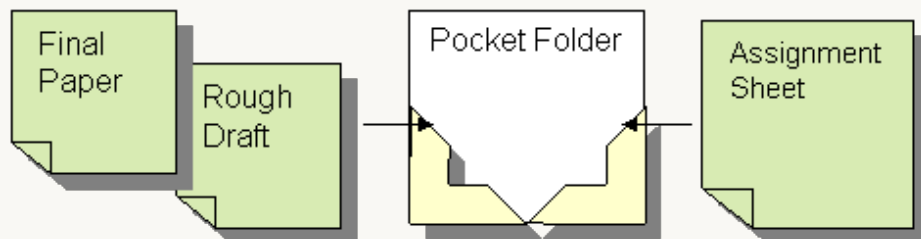
Conferences:

Given the unique formats and topics of each of your papers, I will be holding individual conferences on the dates listed below. You should come to your conference with two copies of your draft. During your conference, you will read your draft aloud, then receive feedback from me. Comments will focus mainly on global-level revisions (i.e., is the content appropriate, is the organization effective, are main points well developed). Local-level revisions (i.e., style and mechanics) most likely will not be addressed during conferences, although students are responsible for revising their papers for these matters before the final due date.

Due Dates: Draft 1 : **Group 1 ( ) T 4/19 Office Hours**

Group 2 ( ) T 4/19

Group 3 ( ) R 4/21 Office Hours

Group 4 ( ) R 4/21

Group 5 ( ) T 4/26 Office Hours

Group 6 ( ) T 4/26

Final Draft : **R 4/28**

Grading Policy:

Your final grade will be determined not only by your level of mastery of several skills, but also by your ability to respond to feedback between drafts. All assignments are expected in class on the due date. Any late assignments should be turned in to the English Department (ML 445) at any time other than our scheduled class meeting, or to me during our next class.

Final Paper Grading Guide

	A	B	C	D	E
Content (30 pts)	The final paper content is completely appropriate to the audience and purpose. (27-30 pts)	The final paper content is mostly appropriate to the audience and purpose. (24-26 pts)	The final paper content is somewhat appropriate to the audience and purpose. (21-23 pts)	The final paper content is barely appropriate to the audience and purpose. (18-20 pts)	The final paper content is not at all appropriate to the audience and purpose. (0-17 pts)
Development (30 pts)	The main points are superbly developed, showing excellent depth of thought. (27-30 pts)	The main points are well developed, showing good depth of thought. (24-26 pts)	The main points are adequately developed, showing average depth of thought. (21-23 pts)	The main points are barely developed, showing weak depth of thought. (18-20 pts)	The main points are not at all developed, showing no depth of thought. (0-17 pts)

Mechanics (10 pts)	The writer uses an extremely clear means of documenting sources. (9-10 pts)	The writer uses a mostly clear means of documenting sources. (8 pts)	The writer uses a somewhat clear means of documenting sources. (7 pts)	The writer uses a barely clear means of documenting sources. (6 pts)	The writer does not clearly document sources. (0-5 pts)
Revision (30 pts)	The final paper went through all required drafts, and revisions were exceptional. (27-30 pts)	The final paper went through all required drafts, and revisions were significant. (24-26 pts)	The final paper went through all required drafts, and revisions were adequate. (21-23 pts)	The final paper went through all required drafts, and revisions were barely significant. (18-20 pts)	The final paper went through all required drafts, and revisions were insignificant. (0-17 pts)

Total points and final grade:

[return to text]

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