Learning How to Ask Writing Questions with Rhetorical Reflections

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Abstract: Positioned within our field's work on supporting transfer of writing-related knowledge through careful course design, this article describes the development of a pedagogical intervention designed to help students identify knowledge gaps and pose questions about rhetoric and genre. Below, I tell the story of a 2012 teacher research study that helped me identify a key problem in my inquiry-based first-year composition classroom: while students were comfortable asking questions, they were not asking the kinds of questions that would help them move across assigned genres most successfully. I explain how this finding led me to develop a rhetorical reflection assignment and explore the rhetorical reflections of two students in my fall 2016 FYC course to identify and describe what happens when these knowledge domains are explicitly emphasized in reflective tasks and to consider questions for future study of this kind of reflective writing.

"The more questions I asked myself about the topics I wrote about, the clearer the answers were to me." (Melissa, reflective argument essay)

Why Does Asking Questions Matter?

As teachers, we know that asking questions can lead students to develop authority about their writing processes and rhetorical decisions. As a part of the social construction of knowledge-making, asking questions empowers the student-rhetor by helping them gather information about the thought processes, ideals, and beliefs of their audiences and other aspects of the rhetorical situation. For our work as teacher-researchers, we find question-asking a recursive and generative part of developing our pedagogical practice and scholarship.

Examining how question-asking plays out in a composition classroom can give us insight into how to develop learning conditions that support students in developing a *habit* of asking the right kinds of questions as they compose. Specifically, the study and follow-up analysis I describe below show how providing students with specific occasions to identify knowledge gaps about the rhetorical situation may help them better attend to aspects of rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and writing process knowledge as they consider *what questions* they need to ask instructors or peers (and themselves) as they compose. These kinds of questions can focus student attention on aspects of writing that transcend what must be done to complete an assignment for a class, instead emphasizing concepts that are integral to responsible, effective communication in writing across contexts: why am I writing this, who am I writing for, in what format can I best communicate these ideas, what effects might my rhetorical choices have, and what do I hope we will learn together through this communication?

But creating opportunities to ask questions will not do enough work to help students know how to ask the "right" questions about writing. Invoking Beaufort's knowledge domains, which she used in her 2007 study to examine a student's transfer of writing-related knowledge from FYC, through other general education courses, and into the workplace, may help us think about the kinds of questions students need to be asking in our writing classes. Beaufort's five knowledge domains ("discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge" (Beaufort 18)), which I apply and extend in my analysis below, provide us with a vocabulary for categorizing question types that may be applicable across the many ways that FYC manifests curricularly in our institutions. Composition and literacy learning scholars (e.g. Ogle, Ciardiello, and Olivas, described below) have developed instructional strategies for teaching question asking that emphasize the development of curiosity about content knowledge. Earlier Composition scholarship on knowledge transfer addresses

prior knowledge and knowledge gaps by offering us instructional suggestions that emphasize one integral part of supporting knowledge transfer—explicit prompting—in supporting students' work on developing writing process knowledge and genre knowledge (see, for example, Nowacek's description of a series of reflective activities designed to help students articulate genre knowledge (133-135)). This prompted reflection makes possible students' identification of knowledge and knowledge gaps about genre, rhetoric, and writing process; however, we can think more about how students might follow up on that assessment with specific questions to help them develop that knowledge—that is, we can consider what demonstration is needed for learners to know *what* or *how* to ask questions about these knowledge domains{1}. As Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak point out, instructors may "ask students about their absent prior knowledge and invite them to create a knowledge filling that absence" (126). This "filling" can, I suggest, happen through asking questions that specifically help them get at these knowledge domains. To use Yancey, Robertson and Taczak's term, demonstration of these questions is an "expert practice" that is effective for supporting transfer especially because, beyond showing expectations, "it illustrates how what is expected can be accomplished" (138). While question-asking might seem a simple follow up to a student's identified knowledge gap about the rhetorical situation of a writing project, it does not always prove to be as effective and productive as it might be without explicit modeling.

Below, I outline scholarship in composition and literacy learning that places question-asking in the larger discussion of knowledge transfer and strategies for teaching students to ask and write down research questions and other questions about their writing. Then, I explain a Fall 2012 teacher research study I conducted of students' question-asking in an inquiry-based composition course, and provide an analysis of students' questions framed in Beaufort's knowledge domains. Next, I describe a pedagogical intervention I developed from that research that I call "rhetorical reflections," designed to prompt students' assessment of prior knowledge and knowledge gaps at the onset of a writing project, and look at what happens in two students' reflections across the semester in my Fall 2016 FYC class where these reflections were implemented. I use this description, then, to pose questions and possibilities for future study. The essential thread of this article is this: as teachers interested in supporting students' transfer of writing-related knowledge, we must do more than create space for the possibility of questions about rhetorical, genre, and writing process knowledge to emerge in our classrooms; we must develop, test, and demonstrate strategies for helping students assess knowledge gaps and ask effective questions about these knowledge domains that can help them navigate new writing tasks.

How does Question-Asking Fit into the Transfer Discussion?

Thinking through the value of question-asking for students' development of writing-related knowledge, I tread the challenging ground of considering question-asking as both a habit and a skill. Ciardiello writes about "question-finding" as "both a disposition and a skill", as a propensity toward investigation as well as the ability to strategize action. Looking at the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, we might find the act of question-asking rolled into the habit of mind "curiosity," though the document describes curiosity as centered on the development of research questions of interest to particular communities. "Flexibility," however, which is supported when students "reflect on the choices they make in light of context, purpose, and audience" (*Framework* 5), also seems to require a kind of introspection and questioning (the former a habit, the latter a skill, perhaps). As Driscoll et al clarify, students must be disposed to particular learning behaviors for these behaviors to manifest in the classroom; a disposition like a willingness to engage in play, or to explore curiosity or flexible rhetorical decision-making through asking questions, is, thus, something a student brings with them into the classroom. As studies of knowledge transfer in composition move toward discussions of the multiple factors influencing students' transfer of writing knowledge across contexts, scholars have begun looking at which dispositions particularly foster transfer (e.g. Wardle; Driscoll and Wells; Driscoll et al). Wardle describes "problem-solving" dispositions as those that foster or value "creative repurposing," an openness to rhetorical possibility or flexibility—a readiness for transfer—and "answer-getting" dispositions, which seek more final, simple, or limited rhetorical solutions.

The composition courses at my university (and at those I have read about at other institutions) are working to create spaces where students practice rhetorical problem-solving—where, despite their inevitable participation in some other less rhetorically flexible systems, we encourage students' development of a rhetorical flexibility through strategies like asking questions, writing reflections, and playing in various genres. I argue that students' practice with asking questions about genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge is an integral part of our FYC courses; this practice is especially important when these courses exist in institutional contexts wherein students must learn to navigate across disciplinary boundaries (Nowacek 136). Through the work of practicing rhetorical decision-making through the above strategies, including question-asking, students can develop, as Nowacek puts it, "rich vocabularies for talking about their own experiences of writing and interpreting the descriptions and expectations of others" (136).

As we work with students closely in our writing courses, we may begin to understand their dispositions toward writing

and all of its processes, like asking questions about required knowledge of the rhetorical situation, and we may be especially attuned to the ways that smaller moments in the writing class (students' work on specific assignments, dialogue over draft feedback, class discussions, etc.) support or disrupt students' dispositions or help them practice particular skills. For understanding transfer of writing-related knowledge, Bransford and Schwarz's concept "preparation for future learning" (PFL) makes space for thinking not just about the broader reaches of students' knowledge transfer (e.g. into future courses, into the workplace) but also about how students use knowledge developed in one learning experience for the next writing task. That is, thinking about transfer as PFL can allow us to look in more closely, to look at near transfer (Salomon and Perkins) and what is happening during the short term of our writing courses. Engaging students' prior knowledge (writing knowledge developed prior to the course as well as from past writing experiences within the course) can support their work on future tasks. As discussed by Salomon and Perkins, explicit prompting of prior knowledge is integral for students' forward-reaching transfer (136). That is, students are more likely to consider prior knowledge in relationship to a new learning task when teachers explicitly prompt that knowledge in dialogue or written tasks. Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi suggest that such prompted reflection helps students work through negotiation of prior knowledge in new contexts (98). Nowacek describes this as recontextualization. As I noted above, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak list building in expert practices (under which umbrella I include the practice of asking questions related to genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge) and prompting articulation of prior knowledge as two key strategies for teaching for transfer (138). In light of these approaches, I argue through the discussion below that question-asking, as a skill that may support recontextualization of prior knowledge and preparation for future learning, requires the instructor's explicit attention in course design.

As a means of connecting students' prior knowledge and experiences with the present writing context, and then for preparation for future learning, the pedagogical practice of asking questions has been addressed, at least minimally, in composition and literacy learning scholarship. Often, this topic is pursued via examination of the Socratic method, wherein teacher (or writing tutor) is posed as question asker (see, for example, Whipple 1997, Hanson 1999, and Smith 2005, though examination of the Socratic method in writing instruction goes back to a 1967 *English Journal* article by Herbert). Scholarship on literacy learning offers avenues for developing practice that supports development of question-asking skills. Here, I consider work that addresses three key instructional moves—question-finding, K-W-Ls (what I *know*, what I *want to know*, and what I have *learned*), and a heuristic for composing research questions—designed to elicit students' questions and support the development of question-asking as a skill or habit. In an inquiry-based composition course, using these activities to engage students in asking personally relevant questions about their research topics is in line with the pedagogical perspectives that inspired the 2012 course design (i.e. Postman and Weingartner, Macrorie). However, while each of these approaches supports the kind of curiosity described in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*—engaging students in asking questions about their topics—the activities do not necessarily point students toward thinking about the rhetorical elements of specific texts they will be asked to *write*, a reflection that is integral to their ability to address these topics in appropriate ways for the rhetorical context—a prompted metacognitive task that can support knowledge transfer. Thus, as I will describe below, learning environments and tasks must do more than potentially foster dispositions toward curiosity; they must also attend to the practice of the specific skills students with these dispositions might use effectively in the writing class.

Exploring one such skill, Ciardiello proposes "question-finding" as an integral part of literacy learning classrooms. Describing Berlyne's 1960s work on "epistemic curiosity," Ciardiello writes, "The goal of epistemic curiosity behavior is to acquire new knowledge that will satisfy the seeker's inquisitiveness about a topic or issue" (230). This habit of mind of "epistemic curiosity" (Ciardiello 230) then develops into a "disposition" of question-finding:

> [Question-finding] is an intellectual process of inquiry, containing metacognitive and cognitive skills. The inquirer has the ability to monitor his or her knowledge deficits related to understanding discrepant sources of information and knows how to take corrective action. It involves the metacognitive skill of being able to sense gaps in one's knowledge base. The inquirer also possesses the cognitive skills to uncover and frame the hidden questions embedded in the perplexing source material. Question-finding views the role of the student as that of an investigator, one who seeks to dig deeper into the material to find the hidden productive questions embedded within (Wertheimer, 1959). In sum, question-finding is both a disposition and a skill. (Ciardiello 233-234)

To help students ask questions, Ciardiello writes, the teacher provides a discrepant event, a source that includes "generally familiar information" as well as some new information that poses discrepancies with prior knowledge (231). From the presentation of the discrepant event, the teacher assesses students' awareness of what seems out of place with their prior knowledge, and students pose questions as they seek understanding. Through the use of the discrepant event, the teacher aims to foster the development of question-asking as a habit (231).

Ogle's K-W-L model follows a similar approach toward prompting students' questions about reading a text. In the K-W-L model, the teacher provides a specific stimulus and engages with students in discussions about prior knowledge, offering extended questioning when needed. Together, they categorize the kinds of information they *know* (K) and are looking to confirm as they read. Students then articulate in writing the questions they *want to know* (W) the answers to, so as to read purposefully and personally. Finally, they discuss and record what they have *learned* (L) from the reading (Ogle). The K-W-L activity foregrounds the knowledge students bring to the classroom and fosters opportunities for discussion and supporting students' recontextualization of prior knowledge (Nowacek). Further, the prompting of questions in the K-W-L may promote the novice disposition needed for "boundary crossing" (Reiff and Bawarshi). In addition to recognizing the wealth of prior knowledge they bring to a learning moment, students are also ready to identify knowledge gaps.

In composition courses, students' questions drive class discussion, but are also integral for driving written work. The initial development of research questions is a key space for teacher intervention. Olivas describes her work helping students understand the composition of research questions through considering purpose and personal interest. She writes, "By taking the time to teach students to form a good question through a process, giving them the chance to understand the purposes a good question serves, and letting them experiment and explore their own beliefs, ideas, and curiosities, we can offer them a chance to take risks, be imaginative, and develop a better understanding of the inquiry-based research process" (67). Olivas uses the following heuristic to ask students to reflect on and rewrite their research questions:

- Who is the question about?

- What relationship, phenomenon, situation, or aspect of the "who" is the question about?

- What kinds of information might you need to explore this question?

- Where might you find this information?

- How can this question help you organize your paper? (70)

In this heuristic, Olivas specifically prompts students to reflect on their research questions in a way that makes them consider multiple aspects of the rhetorical situation of initiating research on a new topic and beginning to write about that topic. The work students do from this point—whether it be revising the research question or moving forward to begin reading into their topics—is shaped by this particular intervention.

Each of these three approaches to helping students ask questions supports the work of the inquiry-based writing course by providing specific occasions for particular kinds of question-asking (i.e. questions about reading new texts, questions for future research). And in each case, the teacher scholars who have created these learning activities tie them to specific learning tasks within their classrooms (e.g. understanding a new topic through reading, starting a research project). As Dewey says, "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (20). Similarly, Cambourne, whose framework I address below, explains that the learning environment and the strategies for learning employed in a classroom are inextricable; they "are particular states of being (doing, behaving, creating) as well as [a] set of indispensible circumstances that co-occur and are synergistic in the sense that they both affect and are affected by each other" (184). Essentially, the scholarship on transfer and question-asking and the analysis I present below point to this major pedagogical conclusion: We must do more than identify question-asking as a possible and valued practice in our classrooms; if we want students to ask certain kinds of questions, particularly questions about genre and rhetorical knowledge—the kinds of knowledge we want them to transfer between writing tasks—then we need to prompt them to ask these questions and show them the kinds of questions to ask.

How Did I Study Question-Asking?

In what follows, I describe data and analysis from an initial 2012 teacher research study of inquiry-based and reflective learning as well as a description and discussion of a pedagogical intervention I developed as a result of that study and integrated into my 2016 FYC class{2}. It is a story that shows the present results of an ongoing exchange between my research and teaching practice, rather than a quantifiable solution to the problem of helping students ask better questions. This article is an example of how teacher research inquiries stretch across time, not finitely captured in the space of any one semester. Thus, it may speak especially to teachers who are most interested in studying what happens in the context of their own classroom ecologies when they introduce research-based

interventions, so that they might better serve their own students. In other words, the teacher-researcher's reflection on their work in the classroom and on students' learning can reflexively shape future teaching and learning. This article represents that reflexive work in the context of conversations in Composition about supporting transfer and, more narrowly, interest in how inquiry-based teaching and learning strategies might support transfer of writing-related knowledge.

In Fall 2012, my first-year composition course was designed to explicitly center on students' questions driving their research and writing projects. My use of a pedagogical framework centered on Cambourne's conditions of learning was intended to create an inquiry environment that would foster students' question-asking. My attention to these conditions of learning in the course was in part deliberate and in part tacit, as I had learned to attend to them in my teaching early in my career. In Table 1, I include definitions of these conditions of learning as well as examples of how I attended to each of these conditions to support students' development of question-asking as a skill and habit of mind.

Table 1. Attention to Cambourne's Conditions of Learning to Support Question-Asking

Condition	Definition	Integration in Class
Immersion	Being "steeped in" print, surrounded by text (Cambourne 185)	Integration of explicit questions into assignments, class plans, discussions, etc., including printed or digital course materials
Demonstration	Implicit or explicit modeling of literacy practices and skills	Teacher posing possible research questions or reframing students' statements as questions
Approximation	Safe practice of new skills or safe exploration of new concepts	Making space for students to make safe attempts at new genres, supported by reflection and feedback mechanisms
Responsibility	Learner making decisions "about when, how, and what 'bits' to learn in any learning task" (Cambourne 187)	Students writing monitoring reflections on drafting and revision process; student agency in development of project topics
Response	Direct, explicit feedback on practice	Conferences and teacher feedback on drafts and research process
Employment	Learner's practice with and use of a skill	Drafting projects; posing questions in class discussion
Engagement	Learner's investment in a task (dependent on the presence of the other conditions) (187)	Development of personally relevant questions in the K-W-L, reflections, and I-Search project
Expectations	Standards of learning held by those with whom learner has trusting relationships	Development of student/teacher relationship through dialogue and conferencing

When I designed the course, I understood the importance of demonstrating a disposition of curiosity to my students; I knew I had to model the practice of asking questions and pursuing relevant inquiries that arose during our time together. I also knew I had to design assignments that would allow students to develop meaningful inquiries and work through the process of testing sources, drafting tentative conclusions, and continuing to push and revise these inquiries throughout the semester. Essentially, I knew I had to make question-asking a regular part of classroom activity.

Writing assignments were centered on students' questions about aspects of familiar discourse communities—for example, their workplaces, churches, and student organizations—a key concept in our program's composition

sequence. Formal and informal writing tasks in our course were sequenced and scaffolded to lead to two major projects: a proposal argument in a new genre and the reflective argument essay. To prepare students for these major projects, I integrated a number of reflective assignments and the opportunity for safe approximation of new genres to help build their content and genre knowledge over time and to prepare them to successfully transfer this knowledge into the creation of the two final projects. Initial writing projects in the class, like the I-Search paper, were explicitly designed to focus students on practicing asking questions. I also asked them to read and write responses to texts like Postman and Weingartner's "What's Worth Knowing" and Macrorie's "I-Search," among others, that would serve as discrepant events, in which students might "detect a discrepancy between a known fact and new information" (Ciardiello 231) about college writing. These texts and responses, as discrepant events, required students to recontextualize their prior knowledge about topics like academic genres, classroom discourse, and research writing. While students received feedback on tasks and assignments leading up to the two final projects, question-asking practice throughout the semester (as a key component of PFL in the class) was intended to help them navigate these two final writing experiences on their own.

The class was one of several sections taught by full-time lecturers in composition at our urban research university. Other lecturers took approaches that focused more heavily on genre analysis, discourse communities, or rhetorical theory. All sections included projects that emphasized analysis, research, argument, or combinations of these tasks. Our cohort of instructors worked to formally and informally study and assess the effectiveness of our curriculum on students' transfer of writing-related knowledge within courses and across the composition sequence{3}. To contribute to this work, one of my aims in designing the explicitly inquiry-based course was to understand how an inquiry-based approach could support students' rhetorical flexibility and writing practice across genres as they moved from one project to the next.

A teacher research study was important for this investigation because it would allow me to closely examine the experiences of students and myself as we worked through the assignment sequence and would prepare me to fine tune instruction for future semesters. The curriculum itself was not experimental—I integrated assignments and strategies I had used before, but with minor differences in framing and scaffolding, and each task aligned with the program's course learning outcomes. Essentially, by looking closely at their writing and the questions they were asking, I hoped to better understand how each student in the class used learning tasks in the class to prepare for future learning.

The group of students who participated in the study included ten females and five males. Of these students, twelve were traditional first-semester freshmen, one a junior, one a senior and veteran, and one a continuing student retired from an automotive company. The group included four African-American students, one Asian-American student, and ten Caucasian students. Several of these students appear briefly in the discussion or tables below.

In the tradition of teacher research, I collected data from the course that allowed me to consider students' learning from several perspectives. In addition to collecting all blog posts, reflections, drafts, and revised projects, I audiotaped several discussion-centered class sessions. I also took field notes on these class sessions, jotting down key events in my notebook during the class to sustain my memory, and then typing up full notes in my office immediately after the class session.

Because they provided a vocabulary readily comprehended by readers of transfer scholarship, Beaufort's knowledge domains—"five overlapping yet distinct domains of situated knowledge entailed in acts of writing" (18)—served as a useful analytical framework for my examination of the kinds of questions students were asking in the class. Beaufort's distinctions between different aspects of writing-related knowledge—like the difference between genre knowledge, which refers to the ways specific genres are used or manipulated by particular discourse communities, and rhetorical knowledge, which refers to the writer's understanding of the rhetorical situation (Beaufort 20-21)—allow us to look more closely at which knowledge domains are supported through particular instructional activities, in this case, through inquiry-based teaching strategies. Below, I describe how, as part of the 2012 study, I extended Beaufort's knowledge domains to categorize students' unprompted questions, or the questions students asked on their own volition throughout the term. I chose to look at unprompted questions, rather than at moments when I asked students to state or write questions, to understand the degree to which my employment of the conditions of learning described above supported students' development of question-asking as a skill or habit.

My coding process was developed inductively via several passes through assigned blog posts, field notes, and emails. For example, in Project 1, students were assigned to create an About Me page on their individual class Wordpress blogs, in which they would introduce themselves to their classmates (in part through description of primary and secondary Discourses), explore their motivations for working through the course, and describe their prior knowledge of academic writing. Students were also expected to think about how the design of their About Me page contributed to the meaning of their message to readers. While we worked through discussion of the assignment prompt, Melissa raised her hand shortly after I began reading through the assignment sheet with the class. "We don't

have to write this as a poem, do we?" she asked, in response to the reference to Langston Hughes's "Theme for English B" in the prompt. I told her no, unless she was inspired to. I continued reading through the handout with the class, and, when we were finished, I asked them to do five minutes of brainstorming ideas for the About Me page. After five minutes passed, I asked students for questions about the assignment, and a student asked me how to add a new page to her home page on the Wordpress blog. While Melissa's question was *unprompted*—she asked the question seemingly when she needed clarification on the assignment expectations—the other student's question was *prompted*, because it emerged when I specifically asked students to pose questions about the assignment.

To identify these unprompted questions, I hand-coded texts and began by first underlining questions where they appeared and then categorizing them. Initially, as I examined my field notes, I looked specifically at explicit questions (inquiries that were stated as interrogatives and not buried or implicit in declaratives) to identify the topics of questions students were asking, the frequency of these questions, and *when* students were asking these questions (i.e. in whole-class discussion, in one-on-one conversations, in small group conferences). Then, I organized these topics into several broad categories, identifying the function of students' questions (what information they were trying to attain through asking the question): course logistics, rhetorical situation of assignments, developing assignments or ideas, clarification of comments or tasks, social purposes, citation/formatting, key course concepts, critical analysis, reading strategies, and other academic purposes.

However, when I moved from generating categories of questions to applying these categories to one student's (Melissa's) questions, I found I needed to identify her questions with more specific functions that better accounted for the nuances of what she was asking. For example, there was a clear distinction between when Melissa asked a question about a text that we were reading to practice analysis and when she asked a question about a text she was *writing.* Essentially, I needed to identify *why* Melissa was asking a particular kind of question rather than *what* she was asking a question about. Because I found Beaufort's knowledge domains intuitively applicable in this initial coding of Melissa's questions, I used them to develop a set of codes for the function of students' questions, adding categories where I needed additional, applicable descriptors to identify the knowledge goals of students' questions (see Interpersonal Knowledge, Administrative Knowledge, Gauging Authority/Personal Agency, Text Knowledge, and Task Knowledge, below) (Table 2). Using Beaufort's knowledge domains allowed me to use terminology already understood in the field of Composition, and by adding my own categories to Beaufort's, I could explore shades of these knowledge domains not explicitly accounted for in her taxonomy. I developed these codes as mutually exclusive categories, rather than as overlapping, to better attend to how the conditions of learning prompted students to ask questions about certain topics or with certain functions and to reflect on how future course design could better prepare students for productive question-asking.

Table 2. Knowledge Domains and Question-Asking

Beaufort's Knowledge Domains	My Additional Domains	Definition	Example Question (with student and question location)
Rhetorical Knowledge		Understanding whether a particular move is fulfilling the needs of the rhetorical situation; clarifying understanding of a speaker/writer's meaning	Asks whether the administration is the audience (Luke, to group)
Discourse Community Knowledge[4]		Understanding what issues are relevant or important to a discourse community; understanding how to navigate a discourse community	"[W]hat do students find most challenging about this class?" (Arun, one-on-one)
	Interpersonal Knowledge	Building relationships with others in a discourse community	Did I know of anything, any professors or groups working on human trafficking? (Melissa, one-on-one)
	Administrative Knowledge	Understanding due dates, technology issues, timing	Asks about due dates for rough draft (Shawn, one-on-one)

	Gauging Agency/Personal Authority	Understanding authority to make decisions about tasks or writing projects	Asks about changing her topic from what she wrote about in her reading response (Michelle, one-on-one)
Genre Knowledge		Understanding genre conventions and how genre conventions are employed by specific discourse communities (especially, in this course, citation practices)	Asks how to cite a primary source if someone he interviews doesn't want their name to be used in his paper (David, class discussion)
	Text Knowledge	Understanding a specific text in analysis	Re: student sample draft, "Does he even have a third source?" (Melissa, class discussion)
Subject Matter Knowledge		Understanding key disciplinary concepts being studied	"Doesn't every discourse community have genre sets then?" (Felicity, class discussion)
Writing Process Knowledge		Understanding how to engage in composition process	Asks what she should do now that she realizes her research questions were bad (Melissa, class discussion)
	Task Knowledge	Understanding a teacher-directed task (how to approach the task, clarifying directions, etc.)	Re: my requests for personal examples, asks if it has to be an example of something in their writing [process] (Shawn, class discussion)

After defining these codes, I returned to my initial accounting of students' questions to apply the codes and work through analysis. I noted the date the question was asked, who asked the question, the location of the question in classroom discourse (in one-on-one conversation, in an email to me, in class discussion, or to another student), the question itself (either directly or indirectly quoted, as written in field notes), and the function of the question. From this chart, I developed an accounting of question functions and placement in class discourse in order to identify whether and when/where students were asking particular kinds of questions (Table 3).

Table 3. Unprompted Question Types/Functions and Locations in Classroom Discourse

Unprompted Question Type/Function	One-on-one	E-mail	Class Discussion	To Group	Total to Me	Total to Others in Class	Total
Rhetorical Knowledge	5	12	7	2	24	2	26
Discourse Community Knowledge	3	0	0	0	3	0	3 (40)
-Interpersonal Knowledge	4	0	0	4	4	4	8
-Administrative Knowledge	10	9	5	2	24	2	26
-Gauging Personal Authority/Agency	3	0	0	0	4	0	3
Genre Knowledge	16	5	7	0	28	0	28 (31)

-Text Knowledge	1	0	2	0	3	0	3
Subject Matter Knowledge	0	0	2	1	2	1	3
Writing Process Knowledge	5	0	1	0	6	0	6 (32)
-Task Knowledge	12	2	7	5	20	5	26
							132 questions total

What Kinds of Questions Were Students Asking?

The larger study from which I take the data for this present article investigates in depth my employment of Cambourne's conditions for learning in the inquiry-based composition course, using field notes and student texts (formal projects, reflections, and blog posts) to illustrate our collective explicit attention to developing inquiries and asking questions about writing. It concludes, in part, with attention to the need to explicitly direct students in inquiry-based writing (rather than only setting up conditions for inquiry-based writing opportunities) and in framing reflective questions that demonstrate an emphasis on genre and rhetorical knowledge. Here I wish to look at what I hoped would be the payoff of that pedagogical investment: students' *unprompted* use of question-asking as a skill. That is, I hoped to see, especially by the end of the course, that students would ask more questions on their own about writing as a result of my (implicit) demonstrations, their practice, my feedback, and attention to the other conditions of learning. In this way, I narrow my attention to an admittedly small aspect of the phenomenon of question-asking, which, like other strategies for learning, is dependent on the work of the entire classroom ecology (Postman and Weingartner; Jankens); however, for understanding the need to better emphasize question-asking about specific knowledge domains, this narrower scope will suffice. My goals in looking at whether and when students asked questions and what kinds of questions they asked were two-fold: 1) to understand whether and how students were using question-asking to prepare for future learning (in this case, immediately future writing tasks) and 2) to understand how the classroom ecology was functioning by examining to whom students were directing questions and when they were taking up question-asking opportunities. Presently, I'll direct the larger share of my attention to this first goal, though in my conclusion I include questions for further study of the second.

Looking at the entire catalogue of students' unprompted questions, which is too large for me to reproduce here, reveals patterns in particular students' use of unprompted questions, patterns that help me see whether and how individual students were disposed to ask questions in the class. Felicity, for example, often asked her writing group for clarification on tasks. Arun, a frequent contributor to class discussions, asked several questions to help him gather discourse community knowledge. At the end of the semester, Shawn, who worked quietly through the course, suddenly emailed me several questions about genre and rhetorical knowledge as he prepared his final project. In reviewing the data, I found myself especially drawn to Melissa, the one student who explicitly wrote about asking questions in her final reflective argument essay. While Melissa asked questions that fall in every major category, most of these unprompted questions (5) were about administrative knowledge. Like other students, she often posed unprompted questions to attain task knowledge (4), and she was the only student to pose unprompted questions about texts we examined (3). However, Melissa also only posed one question related to genre knowledge at large, when she asked how to do citations for her Peace Corps sources for the I-Search because she was using several texts authored by the same group.

While Melissa's presence and participation in the course was noteworthy, and while she demonstrated engagement in her projects, her questions were largely task-oriented or detail-oriented. In an assigned reflective activity positioned after the genre analysis and before the collaborative argument project, I asked students to consider, in part, these questions: How would you represent your role in the class as you and your classmates worked through writing your genre analyses? That is, how would you describe your role in this classroom learning and writing process, and how would you convey that role to an audience? Melissa wrote about her question-asking,

> I would explain my learning process in this class to be observant. I ask questions typically concerning small details in my own papers, but the majority of learning I do in the class, I do by listening to what others have to say. In class today, the analogy of a tree was used. I would be a bird in that tree, watching all that happens below. I watch it all happen and observe and sit in my nest to gain the
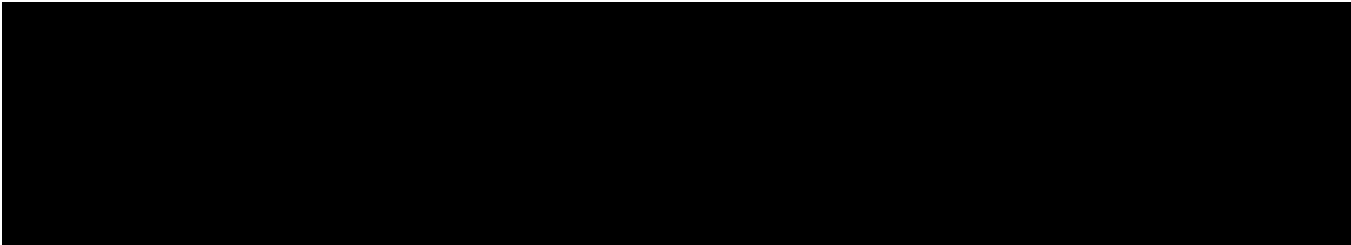
knowledge I take in. I would convey this to an audience by my attention to small details in my writing style.

Reading this now, several years after having Melissa in my class, I am struck by how much this reflection highlights her strengths and challenges as a learner. Melissa is open to learning from others; she believes that she can attain the knowledge she needs by being a good listener in the class. She also asks questions, but her questions are more about "small details," she notes. This pattern of questioning (an emphasis on "small details" and a lack of emphasis on rhetorical knowledge) can be seen throughout the catalogue of questions: questions about discourse community knowledge (30.3% of all questions) were particularly weighted in administrative knowledge, and were often about due dates and technology use; writing process knowledge questions (24.24% of all unprompted questions) were often about understanding teacher expectations for a specific task (task knowledge); unprompted genre knowledge questions (23.48% of the total) were often about citation; and questions about rhetorical knowledge (19.69% of all unprompted questions) were more often about topic (7 questions) and the development of a specific idea or assignment (32 questions) than about any other components of the rhetorical situation (8 questions), particularly those which might have helped students more successfully navigate transitions into new genres. These findings prompted me to rethink the way I cultivate question-asking. Below, I describe a pedagogical intervention that might better support composition students like Melissa—students who understand the value of asking questions, but need to develop a sense of how to ask the questions that will best serve their learning about writing.

What Happens When Students Use Rhetorical Reflections at the Beginning of Projects?

Teachers may help students "find" questions through the integration of discrepant events like responding to unfamiliar course texts and activities that prompt assessment of knowledge gaps like the K-W-L. But to teach students how to ask the kinds of questions that will help them develop the genre and rhetorical knowledge we want them to learn in the composition course, we need to demonstrate these questions and deliver an expectation for the employment of question-asking in these domains. In my FYC class in Fall 2012, I employed Cambourne's conditions of learning to help me model and set expectations for an inquiry-based learning environment, but found through my analysis of students' unprompted questions that I needed to shift more attention to questions about genre and rhetorical knowledge to strengthen students' use of question-asking as a tool for near transfer in the course. Like Olivas, I thought that supporting the task of question-asking with a heuristic would be a useful approach—one that I could use to help students prepare for any project in the class, and one that might stick with them in their writing work after our class. Drawing from my learning experience in teaching and studying my Fall 2012 course, and using the K-W-L framework, I developed a set of reflective questions to help students move beyond administrative knowledge to identify genre and rhetorical knowledge gaps as they approach a writing assignment (Figure 1). Below, I trace the reflective work of two students in my Fall 2016 class—Brendan, a finance major in an online section of my course, and Natalie, a dance major in a face-to-face section of the course—to examine their identification of knowledge gaps and question-asking in specific reflective texts: the rhetorical reflections and the reflective argument essay. In doing this work, I hope to understand whether and how the rhetorical reflections manifested as useful for students' preparation for [near] future learning in the class, particularly through focusing students' attention on identifying prior knowledge and knowledge gaps about rhetorical, genre, and writing process knowledge.
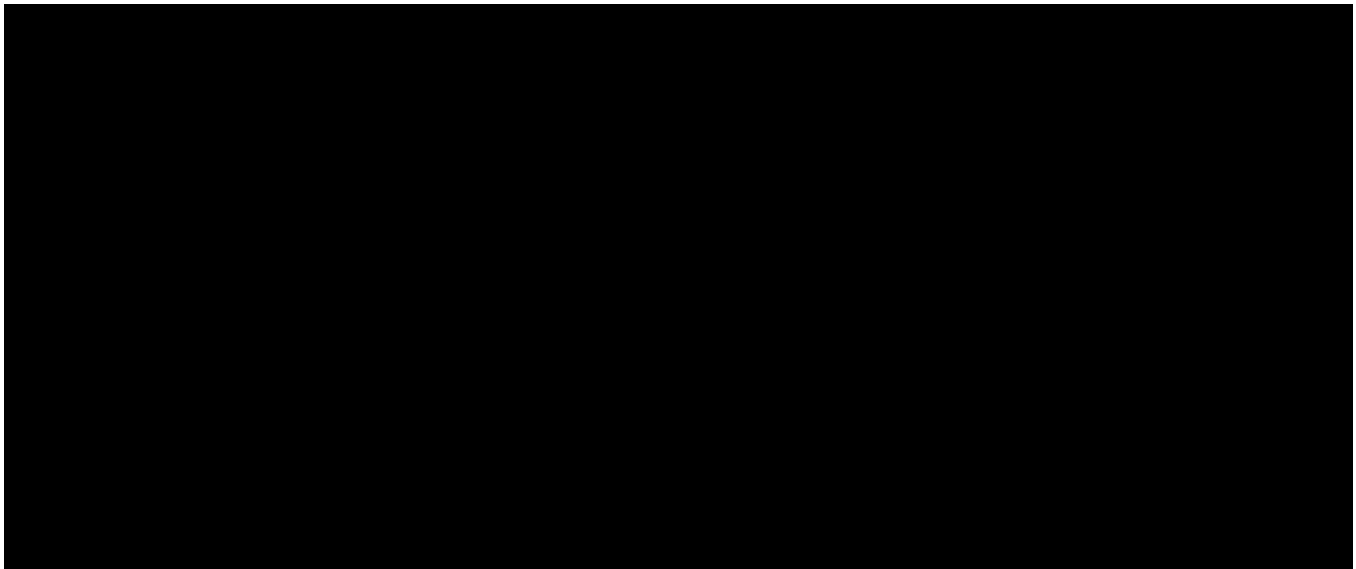
The questions in the rhetorical reflection prompt address both the kinds of questions students asked privately or the issues I addressed in my comments on student drafts. I designed this prompt to begin class discussions about new writing tasks with the goal of helping students develop a stronger sense of what knowledge they need to work through the writing process and supporting students' uptake of the skill of question-asking about genre and rhetorical knowledge, even when unprompted. In this way, the prompt works to do what Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi suggest: that teachers should ask students to reflect on their perceptions of assigned tasks, possible connections, and potential resources. The prompt also requires students to engage with key vocabulary of the writing class. While I draw differently from Beaufort's model than do Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak to create this prompt, this rhetorical reflection strategy reflects their statement that, "[W]e see the role of language in conceptualizing transfer, and especially transfer in support of students *writing* their way into college and across the college years, as fundamental" (35). The concepts and vocabulary presented in this prompt are fundamental to our program's writing projects.

In the Fall 2016 semester, I asked students in both online and face-to-face sections of my FYC course to compose rhetorical reflections (RRs), using the prompt above, as we began working on new projects. Following our program's new assignment sequence (in place in Fall 2015), students composed a rhetorical analysis essay (Project 1), an I-Search (Project 2), a researched argument essay on the topic they began investigating in their I-Search (Project 3), an infographic on that same topic (Project 4){5}, and a reflective argument essay evaluating their achievement of course learning outcomes (Project 5). In my classes, students wrote three rhetorical reflections, which were placed before the major projects. Placing these reflections at the onset of a writing project shifted the work of question-asking from an unprompted possibility to a prompted, reflective practice, with direction to attend to aspects of genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge. This placement before projects also allowed both students and me to assess knowledge in these domains and thus to shape further question-asking, instruction, and feedback. Students in all sections of my course submitted these blogs on Blackboard, our course management system, during the first week we discussed the project, after reviewing the project descriptions and either watching an instructor video or participating in a short class discussion of the assignment. In my face-to-face section of the class, as an in-class exercise, I asked students to write an addendum to RR3, further explaining their motivation and reasoning for writing their arguments.

After the semester was completed, I asked Brendan and Natalie if I could use their work specifically because of their interactions with me throughout the semester. Brendan, although he was in an online section of the course, visited me early in the semester and conferenced with me in my office almost bi-weekly about his writing. He writes about our first meeting in his reflective argument: "I went into the first office hours to talk to [the instructor] and immediately felt the difference between high school and college. It felt like I was conversing with a mentor, not a "boss", and was excited for that aspect of the course." Natalie, while she participated in discussions with classmates and spoke with me briefly one-on-one in class, often emailed me questions about assignments. In short, both Brendan and Natalie elected to begin conversations about their writing with me throughout the semester. Their dispositions toward question-asking reminded me of Melissa—from the beginning of the semester, they sought feedback and were willing to ask questions that sought possibilities and alternatives instead of simple solutions—and at the end of the semester, as I read their reflective argument essays, I noted their references to reflection and these conversations. Returning to examine how they each engaged with the reflections throughout the semester could, I thought, tell me something about whether and how rhetorical reflections were helping them ask questions about knowledge that would support the writing process. It is my hope that this initial reading can suggest questions for a larger study of the ways that particular reflective assignments, scaffolded throughout a semester, support students' preparation for future learning in a writing class and facilitate students' abilities to pose rhetorically aware questions, particularly in composition courses centered on developing rhetorical flexibility and responsibility.

In Natalie's reflective argument, written at the end of the semester, she notes that she was ambivalent about reflection during the first part of the class. She writes, however, that through her practice writing reflections in our class and in her dance classes she has developed "a new perspective on reflection." Natalie explains her reflective process during RR3, the precursor to writing the researched argument project:

My in-class reflection prior to starting project 3 is a strong example of how important reflection can be.

This reflection was done before I was completely set on my argument for the project, but the prompt was demanding answers pertaining to who the audience was, what I was planning on arguing, and why I was writing on this subject. I remember this day, and before starting this reflection I had no idea what my answer was to any of these questions. It took me awhile to get the ball rolling and begin writing, but once I entered the right mind-set the rest came easily to me. As I was writing I was developing the answers to these questions, and it helped me make logical sense of it all. In this reflection, I decided what direction my project 3 was going to go in, who my target audience was, and my purpose for writing it. I also added a few questions for you at the bottom on this day after writing this reflection, and when you came by you told me I was starting on a good path to proceed with the rest of my project. I did not feel comfortable moving on with project 3 until I had all of these answers. Now that I had both that and your approval, I could comfortably move on.

In this reflection, Natalie explores how the rhetorical reflection prompt required her to work through important questions about rhetorical knowledge (who is her audience? what is her purpose?) and writing process knowledge (how will she organize her argument?). She describes this reflective moment as an especially important part of continuing her research and writing process with confidence. Because I provided her with specific questions to ask about her writing, she was able to identify what she did not know about her rhetorical situation, and what she needed to figure out. Reading Natalie's comments in the final reflection of the class, I was eager to return to her earlier reflections, to see whether and how this sense of purpose for writing the rhetorical reflection was present in these earlier texts.

Natalie begins RR1 by citing her feelings about starting to work on a formal paper and why she selected the text she did for her rhetorical analysis essay. Her RR1 questions, listed at the end of her reflection, are pulled from the prompt: "A lot of the questions I have pertain to the genre aspect of it....What are the moves that are valuable in this genre and will help me to reach my purpose? What writing style is expected? How will my audience use, read, or navigate this text?" Even though in this moment she is repeating genre knowledge questions from the prompt itself, Natalie is potentially posing questions that are just as much about engaging in college writing generally as they are about the specific assignment. That is, she might be asking questions like what does a rhetorical analysis essay *look* like, how formal do I need to be, and what does my *teacher* expect—all in the camp of questions I receive early in an FYC class before students develop a sense of their other purposes for writing. Prompting these questions via reflections before writing, helps extend and support the framing of questions related to Beaufort's domains. Thinking and writing through the questions in the rhetorical reflection prompt about concepts like audience, style, and purpose, Natalie considers what she knows about genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge and focuses her attention on inquiry into these aspects of her writing experience.

In RR2, Natalie uses the questions in the prompt to format the reflection, writing her responses to each set of questions below each section of the prompt. In writing about audience, Natalie describes a general reader:

> Anyone who has weird dreams, is interested in dreaming like me, or even someone who does not recall their dreams (people who claim they don't dream) would find an interest in my Isearch paper because it will relate to them in one way or another. This audience has personal experiences of their own, as do I, and it would be helpful to keep coming back to commonalities in the topic that can be related universally to reach the widest possible audience.

This sense of audience changes to individuals "affected by sleeping disorders" and physicians, however, as Natalie shifts her examination of sleep-related phenomena and focuses her argument in Project 3, writing that "doctors do not place enough emphasis on the side effects that prescribed medication will cause in patients with sleeping disorders."

While in RR1 Natalie uses the questions provided to her in the prompt to identify what she needs to know to keep moving forward in the project, and in RR2 she lists no specific questions, in RR3 the questions she lists at the end of the reflection are, as she describes in her reflective argument essay (quoted above), written specifically to me: "Is my argument okay? Should I revise my annotated bibliographies that I did before my argument changed? Going into the body paragraphs, look at rough outline?" These questions emphasize needed rhetorical and writing process knowledge, and, as Natalie noted in her reflective argument, are where she feels she needs "approval" to be able to move on successfully, though the phrasing of her questions suggests this approval is not so much about discovering whether or not this is what the teacher wants but what moves will best support her developing argument.

The questions Brendan raises in his reflections also demonstrate this emphasis on rhetorical knowledge, writing process knowledge, and genre knowledge. In RR1, Brendan lists two questions at the end of his blog post: "[W]hat are the different angles I can look at this text from to help my reader understand it better?" and "How can I annotate

in the most effective manner possible?" Preparing for the researched argument project, Brendan's question in RR3 is about a concept presented in the textbook (a concept we did not specifically address in the online class, but which was presented as a strategy students might use if they thought it would be helpful): "My biggest question would be how the tree mapping technique can fit into this paper in the most beneficial way possible. I understand how the technique works but I don't have a firm grasp as to how it can be applied specifically to this essay." Identifying a knowledge gap in preparation for the infographic project, Brendan notes, "I see that I still need to know more about how to tie the image and essay together, and also just some general construct about the image itself."

The emphasis on rhetorical decision-making is evident in Brendan's reflective argument essay, where he describes thinking about his purpose and audience. For example, Brendan explains how he explored the differences between value investing and day trading in the I-Search, and how he had to think about constructing an argument for Project 3:

> By the end of [the I-Search] I believed that value investing was a better approach to reach that level of wealth. When it came to the argumentative essay, I knew what I thought was better, but I had to figure out how to convince my audience that my opinion was correct. My audience for that essay was rather small, and in the financial world it is very important to have good resources. I found 4 new sources that backed up my thesis. One was written by a day trader who admitted that value investing was the better approach if you had to choose one, giving my argument very strong ethos and persuasion power.

Here, Brendan describes how he shifted his focus from finding sources that supported his viewpoint to developing a rhetorical sensibility about how to convey his argument to his specific audience.

What Do I Know Now (and What Do I Still Want to Know)?

The analysis of students' unprompted questions in my Fall 2012 FYC course indicates that students most often asked questions that helped them understand administrative or task-oriented aspects of the class, rather than questions centered on the genre or rhetorical knowledge that might prepare them to approach subsequent writing tasks in the course. When students did ask questions about genre or rhetorical knowledge, these questions were centered on issues like citation or confirming assignment expectations, rather than on understanding other aspects of the rhetorical situation. Pedagogically, I understood that students would have benefitted from more demonstration of how to ask questions that would benefit their preparation for future learning, and I developed the rhetorical reflection prompt to engage students in class discussions or reflective writing moments to help them practice identifying knowledge gaps in these areas and formulating questions that would help them develop their writing projects. A look at the rhetorical reflections of two students in my Fall 2016 class shows that indeed this reflective assignment *can* help students identify gaps in rhetorical and genre knowledge and raises questions about the connection between these reflective assignments and students' ability to write about rhetorical decision making at a metacognitive level; larger studies might, then, help us understand the ways that different genres of reflective assignments help students articulate in writing their knowledge and decision-making across domains, and may help us see how a skill like question-asking is taken up by students in their writing work *outside* of reflective genres, as well as how students use question-asking to develop a sense of responsible rhetorical decision-making.

Though I have focused on rhetorical reflections and the reflective argument essay here, I cannot make an argument yet that there is a direct tie between the rhetorical reflection assignment and the ways that students write about developing genre and rhetorical knowledge in the culminating assignment of the semester. What I can show is that in their rhetorical reflections, Natalie and Brendan are able to identify what they need to understand to continue working on their projects, that often they cite needed genre, rhetorical, or writing process knowledge, and that in their reflective arguments, unprompted, they discuss, to some degree, this rhetorical decision-making. Developed as a response to identification in my 2012 study for the need to better help students ask questions that would help them develop rhetorical, genre, and writing process knowledge, the rhetorical reflection assignment, then, seems to be a useful writing task for students' preparation for future learning (writing) in that it both prompts and demonstrates question-asking in these domains, instead of *either* prompting *or* demonstrating. Further, for reflection to support knowledge transfer, students must have repeated practice in writing reflection which "centers on writers' ability to theorize and question areas such as their processes, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and understandings about writing, along with the ability to consider why they made the rhetorical choices they did" (Taczak 78). The rhetorical reflection prompt, placed at the onset of new writing projects in the FYC class, supports this repeated practice. This question-promoted rhetorical decision-making through written reflection, then, may potentially lead to knowledge transfer as students practice metacognitive behaviors through reflective writing and thus may help them build toward constructive metacognition (Gorzelsky et al). As we continue to study students' writing in these constructive

moments, and work to understand how such reflection supports writing knowledge transfer, we can, like VanKooten suggests, learn from the "specific metacognitive moves" described by Schraw, by considering the ways that students' questions manifest, at the sentence-level, in these rhetorical reflections. And the work I examine here may echo Fiscus' "hope" that we "strategically design a variety of genres for reflective practice, encouraging different types of metacognitive work suited to our pedagogical goals." For the purposes of my own teaching, this continued teacher research helps me understand that these rhetorical reflections are useful at the onset of a writing project for helping students see what they understand and what they need to find out to develop a rhetorically effective text.

In discussing the rhetorical reflection assignment with me soon after I developed it, one member of my dissertation committee encouraged me to think more about audience. I find, as I reflect on the prompt as I employed it in Fall 2016, that further questions on audience may help students develop a stronger rhetorical sensibility and responsible approaches to their writing. They might consider, for example, questions like "What other perspectives on the topic could my audience help me consider as I write?" and "How is my audience likely to read or use my text and why?" Such questions may engage students in thinking about how their writing can work responsively in relationship to an audience. Possible responses to these questions offer valuable rhetorical knowledge that support "problem-solving" (Wardle) and may help writers work through needed recontextualization (Nowacek) as they prepare for upcoming writing tasks in the composition course and in other contexts. As a bridge between writing assignments in a composition course, the rhetorical reflection prompt can help students actively work through this assessment and adaptation for a new rhetorical situation.

Working through analysis of these rhetorical reflections has helped me see that looking at a larger *n* of rhetorical reflections might better help me understand to what degree students pose questions related to genre or rhetorical knowledge versus the other knowledge categories I describe. A larger study might also help me better conceive of the rhetorical reflection as a reflective genre that helps students do work differently than, say, a reflective argument essay, or a post-project memo, or a talk-back, or some other kind of reflection-in-action or constructive reflection (Yancey). Finally, I might also understand whether and how classmates use each other's rhetorical reflections to identify and work through writing problems and rhetorical decision-making socially or collaboratively.

Ultimately, I am encouraged to continue using rhetorical reflections in my classes as a means of helping students practice the skills (i.e. question-asking, monitoring, etc.) that are in tandem with the habits of mind that support their successful college writing. My 2012 study and my follow-up work with the rhetorical reflections showed me that merely making time for question-asking is not enough; we can develop reflection tasks that explicitly prompt and demonstrate particular learning skills that support students' preparation for future learning and specific rhetorical decision-making. The construction of reflective assignments that target these specific knowledge domains can help students comprehend and employ the conceptual vocabulary that they will use across writing assignments in the class; conducting an assessment of knowledge and learning to ask questions about the rhetorical situation of a writing assignment—beyond seeking approval of their topic or understanding formatting requirements—can help students think differently about the decisions they must make in their writing. These rhetorical reflections, and the questions they demonstrate and prompt, through shifting attention from limited task knowledge to rhetorical, genre, and writing process knowledge, may do important work toward the metacognitive abstraction required for transfer.

Notes

1. Taking another approach toward development of meta-awareness of writing knowledge, Ryan P. Shepherd (2018), drawing from Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak's 2014 concept of theories of writing, argues for the need for teachers to provide "sound reasoning and clear examples" to help students build multimodality into their definitions of writing. This need for examples gets close to the argument I am making here about demonstration of specific questions about rhetorical, genre, and writing process knowledge. (Return to text.)

2. In the semesters since Fall 2016, I have continued to integrate rhetorical reflections before projects in both my first-year and intermediate writing courses, as a strategy for supporting students' assessment of needed knowledge across domains. (Return to text.)

3. See, for example, Nicole Guinot Varty's "Ecological Awareness: Enacting an Ecological Composition Curriculum to Encourage Student Knowledge Transfer" (2016). (Return to text.)

4. Discourse community knowledge may operate at several levels; it may relate to the immediate workplace, as it does (mostly) here, as students sought knowledge about how to navigate our class socially and administratively, and it can reference a larger sphere (i.e. the field of Composition). (Return to text.)

5. In the present version of this common syllabus (in place AY 2017-2018), students work through the

researched argument and infographic projects concurrently (Project 3a/b), to better help them consider how to work through rhetorical decision-making as they craft the same argument in different genres and for different audiences. ([Return to text.](#))

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