ABSTRACT

TEACHING FOR TRANSFER: REFLECTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

by Caitlin A. Martin

This thesis uses qualitative and quantitative research strategies to understand the effectiveness of two classroom activities designed to teach for transfer in first-year composition (FYC). Drawing on students’ completed Reflect, Project, Imagine heuristics and their comments on rubrics used to assess their own writing, this project explores students’ perceptions of potential transfer between FYC and other writing contexts and the ways writing-related language can be cultivated in the FYC classroom through critical self-reflection and metacognition. Students participating in this study came to the FYC classroom with pre-existing writing vocabularies that both helped and hindered meaning-making, but through collaborative work and reflective activities, students began to adapt their vocabularies to the FYC environment. Implications for classroom instructors, composition programs, university-wide writing initiatives, and further research are also discussed, including ways to adopt reflective self-assessment strategies for the benefit of both students and instructors.
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Dedication

To my parents, Tom and Diana Martin, who instilled in me a love of learning and a desire to do well in all that I attempt. It is through their love, support, and encouragement that I have become the learner, instructor, and scholar that I am today. And to Tyler Groff, who has listened patiently throughout this project and helped me through the often difficult task of being a reflective instructor.
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Chapter 1
Studying Transfer and Student Self-Assessment in the FYC Classroom

The research project that follows is the result of two years of theoretical reflection and research on how students transfer writing related knowledge from the first-year composition (FYC) classroom. In my first year of teaching FYC at Miami University, I encountered what I saw as numerous challenges in teaching for transfer. I based many of my pedagogical decisions in those first two semesters on what I knew about my own writing experiences and what was prescribed in the program’s curriculum. For example, I used rubrics to grade student writing because I had valued them as a learning tool as a student. I also assigned reflective writing as required in the curriculum for ENG 111 and ENG 112. But, as we all know, the first year of teaching can be a daunting one, and I was often unsatisfied with the results I saw.

One aspect of my teaching where I knew that I really struggled was adequately and appropriately incorporating reflection into the class. In my first semester, I assigned a daily “writer’s blog” that my students and I eventually forgot about. I had intended it to be a place for students to reflect on class activities and to think about different choices they made in their writing process, but the writer’s blog barely reached the point of actively engaging students in reflection.\(^1\) As the Miami curriculum also required it, I had students complete writer’s letters with each final draft. In this assignment, they explained their audience and purpose and shared details of the writing process with me. As the final assignment for the course, I had students complete a final portfolio with a reflection that asked them to think about what they learned in ENG 111 or ENG 112, and why that learning mattered to them. While these activities required students to do some reflection, the writing was often shallow and lacked any real engagement.

As I read more into the literature on transfer, though, I saw just how important reflection was to student learning, and I realized that I needed to make some changes to the way I incorporated reflective activities. Reflection needed to be more than something students complete the night before a final assignment is due or in a final project. While a semester-long blog might be a good way to incorporate ongoing reflection, it doesn’t help much if you fail to remind your students to do it or don’t give them appropriate prompts on which to reflect. But the

\(^1\) In my second semester teaching ENG 112, we successfully completed the writer’s blogs, but students did not seem to refer back to them after posting at all—even when I specifically asked students to look at their past reflections.
hustle-and-bustle of teaching for the first time and acclimating to a new learning environment myself were only two obstacles to my encouraging reflection in a meaningful way and aiding students’ understanding of the course and their writing.

More troubling than simply being dissatisfied with student reflections, however, was when a student reported in a course evaluation that the second inquiry of the class had been pointless because it was redundant. In my first semester of teaching, I had tried very hard to scaffold the five major inquiries of the course so that they connected or overlapped in some way. In Inquiry 1, students wrote about a time they had tried to persuade someone and why that persuasion was or wasn’t successful. In Inquiry 2, they completed a rhetorical analysis of a website for an organization. In Inquiry 3, they researched public issues and wrote persuasive texts to audiences of their choosing. Students began this research with issues or concerns associated with the organizations they analyzed in Inquiry 2. For Inquiry 4, students were able to work with a partner to remediate one of their previous inquiries into an audiotext (with many students choosing PSA genres). But this particular student—a strong student—had not seen Inquiries 1 and 2 as connected or related. Because they both dealt with rhetoric, Inquiry 2, for this student, had not introduced anything new. As an instructor, I wanted to keep those connections between assignments to emphasize that learning is not something that occurs in a discrete moment and then is done and over with. Instead, I wanted to show that the outcomes students were expected to “achieve” by the end of the course were developmental: they would build on each other and grow over the semester, and students would continue to develop these writing strategies and skills once they left the English 111 classroom.

This student comment helped to reinforce my budding scholarly interest in transfer and Writing-Across-the-Curriculum scholarship. I was optimistic about the question of transfer because I felt that I had somehow learned to write and could identify points in my own academic career where “transfer” had occurred. But empirical research on transfer is not nearly as optimistic as I had hoped, and many of the researchers conclude that transfer is possible, but extremely difficult to see or teach for (Beaufort, 2007; Nowacek, 2011; Smit, 2004; Wardle, 2007). Many of these scholars suggested reflection and metacognition as ways to facilitate transfer. These two concepts were what I saw at the weakest aspects of my own teaching, perhaps because in the few instances I was asked as a student to complete reflections on my writing, I did not take the activities seriously, and I had always maintained that someone could
be a “good writer” without knowing any writing vocabulary. I discovered, though, that I had always been informally reflecting on my work as I began to think about how to better incorporate these two concepts into my classes. I realized that I needed to formalize reflective activities in ways that students would value.

After completing a preliminary study on student perceptions of transferability from Miami’s FYC courses, I saw a foundation for thinking about teaching for transfer in my own courses. In the spring 2012 semester, I conducted a survey of sophomores, juniors, and seniors who had taken either ENG 111 or ENG 112 at Miami. I asked students to explain the ways that they use what they had previously learned in FYC when writing for other courses, as well as when writing in personal and/or work and extra-curricular contexts. This survey indicated that there are many connections between the outcomes of Miami’s FYC sequence and students’ writing in other contexts (especially academic ones). However, their responses also showed that many students either did not see those connections or did not recall learning writing strategies in an FYC course when they used them in current writing settings. Further, my study also indicated that students who had more recently taken the FYC course were more likely to see instances of transfer. These preliminary findings left me wondering what I, as an instructor of first-year writing courses, could do to help students identify and understand opportunities for transfer.

The present study reports on two activities I now use to foster metacognition and attempt to teach for transfer: Reflect/Project/Imagine and rubric-based student self-assessment. These two activities stem from the initial findings of my study of upper-level students, my own experiences attempting to teach for transfer, and my research into the literature on transfer. My main goal with these activities is to better incorporate reflection into the composition classroom in ways that are grounded in theories of transfer.

I developed the Reflect/Project/Imagine (RPI) heuristic to help illustrate points of connection between students’ past, current, and future writing assignments. Using David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon’s (1988) ideas of forward- and backward-reaching transfer and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s (1998) ideas of reflection, I asked students to use the RPI heuristic to think through what an assignment was asking them to do, what writing tools or strategies they already had for this assignment, what struggles or challenges they thought they might encounter, and what future writing contexts exist in which they might need these strategies or tools again. Students completed this heuristic at the beginning of every major project, and I hoped it would
help students to make connections between ENG 111 and their high school writing, as well as between the various inquiries in the course.

With the RPI activity, I paired rubric-based student self-assessment of all major projects. In my own experiences, I had used rubrics as a tool for thinking about and drafting assignments, but as a teacher I had not seen my students taking the same steps. Often, they looked at the rubric when we discussed it in class, then didn’t seem to refer back to it until they received their grades on the inquiries. To mitigate this problem and help students see how rubrics could aid their writing, I asked students to assess their own projects on the rubric and revise accordingly. They then turned in the completed rubric, and I rated and commented on the same rubric, thus creating a space for dialogue with the students about the criteria and how well they had met expectations.

As a reflective teacher, I felt that these activities had been beneficial to students’ learning at the end of the semester. But to truly understand how these activities might help students learn to write and see opportunities for transfer, I also used this opportunity to conduct a study about students’ perceptions of the activities and transferability of writing-related knowledge. During the semester, I asked students to complete two anonymous surveys about their experiences in the class, once at the midterm and once at the end of the semester. I also solicited consent from students to analyze their writing from the semester and to contact them for an interview in the spring semester. Forty-one of my 46 students consented to participate in the study to some extent.

I have focused my research on students’ completed RPI heuristics and rubrics from their final inquiries to engage five key research questions:

- How did students talk about their own writing in these two reflective genres?
- What are some of the benefits and challenges of employing the RPI heuristic?
- What are some of the benefits and challenges of asking students to self-assess their work using rubrics?
- How did these assignments affect my teaching, both as the class progressed and for future classes?
- How can these activities be further developed to make them more meaningful or helpful to students?

In order to answer these questions, I will first review theoretical and empirical studies of transfer of learning, reflection and self-assessment, and rubric-based self-assessment. In Chapter
2, I discuss students’ comments on rubrics, explaining how this genre became both a space for student reflection and student-teacher dialogue. In Chapter 3, I look closely at one set of student RPIs to understand how this genre functioned as a tool for both students and myself, as well as to understand how this genre could be improved for better student engagement. In the final chapter, I explain how this research can help improve writing curricula and programs.

**Transfer of Writing Related Knowledge: Key Terms**

Two useful understandings of transfer are provided by educational psychologists Perkins and Salomon (1988): low/high road transfer\(^2\) and forward- and backward-reaching transfer. The differences between high and low road transfer focus on the levels of similarity between contexts. Low-road transfer, Perkins and Salomon (1988) say, occurs when two contexts are similar. They use the example of a person who learned how to drive in a car being able to drive a truck—little reflection or explicit connection between the two experiences is necessary for the person to be successful driving the truck (p. 25). High-road transfer, on the other hand, occurs when two contexts are dissimilar. Individuals need to be able to abstract from prior knowledge in order to see how what they have already learned is applicable to the new, different situation. They use the Shakespearean metaphor “Summer’s lease hath all too short a date” in Sonnet 18 as an example, saying that the Bard came to this “remarkable” metaphor “not by tripping over it, but by deliberate authorial effort, reaching mentally for some kind of abstract metaphorical match with the decline of summer” (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p. 25). As this example illustrates, high-road connections require reflection that allows us to see how information from one situation is able to be recontextualized to another.

Perkins and Salomon (1988) also break high-road transfer into two distinct forms, forward-reaching and backward-reaching. Forward-reaching transfer occurs when “one learns something and abstracts it in preparation for applications elsewhere” (p. 26). This type of transfer requires students to theorize about their learning and how it might apply to other aspects of their lives. Individuals learn a skill or strategy, and then imagine how it might be used in the future to complete another task. This form of transfer occurs in a reciprocal relationship with backward-reaching transfer, in which “one finds oneself in a problem situation, abstracts key characteristics from the situation, and reaches backward into one’s experiences for matches” (Perkins and

\(^2\) These forms of transfer are also sometimes theorized as near and far transfer (Royer, Mestre, & Dufresne, 2005).
Salomon, 1988, p. 26). These two forms of transfer might occur independently, but to be truly helpful they need to be developed in tandem, with individuals learning to look backward and abstract from past experiences a strategy or skill that can aid the current situation, and then looking into the future to contexts where similar skills might be useful or necessary.

Another useful distinction is between direct transfer and recontextualization. Direct transfer occurs between low-road instances in contexts that look extremely similar or when mindfulness is not a requisite. This idea of transfer draws on early research conducted by psychologists like E. L. Thorndike and R. S. Woodworth (1901), who were concerned with understanding how practicing one task could improve participants’ abilities to complete a second, similar task. When it comes to writing, however, we are often unsuccessful at looking for such direct transfer because skills and concepts do not always correlate directly in different settings. Elizabeth Wardle (2007) summarizes the problems with the direct view of transfer in a simple baking analogy: “we are looking for apples when those apples are now part of an apple pie” (p. 69). Instead, we should be looking for evidence that learning has been recontextualized. This view of transfer relies on Perkins and Salomon’s (1988) idea of high-road transfer. By considering transfer as recontextualization, we begin to look for the similar-but-different iterations of concepts used in different contexts, especially ones that seem more different than similar. A writer, for example, may have learned a great deal about integrating quotes in a research project in an FYC course, but it might be difficult to see evidence of direct transfer when looking at a digital project or a speech, in which quote integration and use may look very different. Looking for direct transfer could lead us to problematically focus on surface-level issues. Understanding transfer as recontextualization is important for understanding how students transfer writing-related knowledge between settings.

Similar to the idea of recontextualization is the idea of integration (Nowacek, 2011), in which we seek to understand how knowledge changes and evolves in different contexts. Integration implies more than simply employing a skill learned in a writing course in subsequent writing contexts (which aligns more with low-road transfer). Instead, different contexts change a person’s understanding of the knowledge, allowing the individual to learn something new about the knowledge, rather than simply use it. Integration could be seen as another facet of high-road transfer.
Empirical Studies of Transfer and FYC

A number of studies of transfer have been conducted in composition and rhetoric, from which many of the above definitions are drawn. Early empirical studies of transfer looked at writing in various contexts, laying the foundation for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) programs.

In “Writing in Academic Settings: A Study of Contexts for Writing in Two College Chemical Engineering Courses,” Anne Herrington (1985) studied students enrolled in two courses, a laboratory course where students worked in groups to conduct experiments and write reports for six different professors and a chemical process design course that tasked a group of students with solving design problems. Through classroom observation, analysis of student writing, interviews with student participants, and surveys of students, Herrington (1985) found that the two chemical engineering courses served as distinct communities for reading and writing, that students and instructors in the courses often perceived the appropriateness of conventions differently, especially because of “conflicting signals faculty gave to students of the issue, audience, and writer roles, and the social purposes for writing” (p. 342), and that “lines of reasoning” in both the chemical engineering lab course and design course were also different (p. 342). Herrington’s findings make it clear that even within a single discipline, the expectations and uses for writing may vary—calling into question what she calls the “monolithic nature of writing in academic settings” (p. 354). This study on students writing in two contexts illustrates some of the difficulties of transferability of writing-related knowledge—even in a situation that we might expect to call for low-road transfer in near, rather than far, locations.

In a similar vein, Lucille McCarthy (1987) tells the story of one student’s writing experiences in “A Stranger in Strange Lands: One Student Writing Across the Curriculum.” Drawing on sociolinguists and ethnographers of communication, McCarthy explains that language takes place in a social context and “that writing, like speaking, is a social activity” in which one “must use the communication means considered appropriate by members of particular speech or discourse communities” (pp. 234-235). Over 21 months, McCarthy followed a student through three different contexts for writing (freshman composition, introduction to poetry, and cell biology courses), finding that he approached each context as distinctly different from any of the others. McCarthy used classroom observations, interviews with students, compose-aloud protocols paired with retrospective interviews, and textual analysis of writing to understand how
the participant learned. Importantly, McCarthy found that although there were many similarities in the writing Dave conducted in each of these contexts, his “attention was occupied by the new conventions of interpretation and language use in each community” (p. 246). In fact, when Dave discussed “trying to get [a biology] article into his own words,” McCarthy states that it took “prodding” by both herself and another participant “to make Dave see that he had indeed written summaries before. Lots of them” (p. 249). Because Dave was a newcomer to the different discourse communities in which he was being asked to write, issues of expectation—especially the expectations of the teacher as the examiner—masked similarities between the writing tasks that might have aided Dave as he navigated the assignments in his freshman composition, introduction to poetry, and cell biology courses.

Herrington and Marcia Curtis conducted another longitudinal study of college writers. In *Persons in Process: Four Stories of Writing and Personal Development in College* (2000), they follow three students from Curtis’s Basic Writing course—and a student enrolled in a College Writing course with one of those students—as they navigate the writing requirements of courses across the curriculum. The study initially began with 18 participants from Curtis’s course, but these four students’ experiences provided interesting overlaps and divergences, such as the vastly different experiences two students had in a single class because of their willingness to assimilate to psychology’s ways of knowing based on their personal values. Herrington and Curtis (2000) used interviews that occurred over five years to understand how students composed themselves through writing at the university. The results of their longitudinal study lay the foundation for much of the transfer scholarship conducted in composition and rhetoric. While they are not looking explicitly at transfer themselves, Herrington and Curtis (2000) illustrate how students interact with the conventions and expectations of their new discourse communities in the classes in which they enroll at the university.

In a similar but substantially larger study, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz (2004) report on an extensive longitudinal study of Harvard students. Using mixed methodologies, the researchers surveyed 400 students over four years to see how their perceptions of writing changed and how writing had aided their academic development. In addition to this survey group, a subgroup of 65 students was randomly selected to participate in discourse-based interviews at the end of each semester (Sommers & Saltz, 2004, p. 126). Sommers and Saltz investigate how first-year students who are “novices” to academic writing are expected to be
experts and must find ways to give themselves that authority. They found that students who accepted this role, rather than “clinging to their old habits and formulas and resent[ing] uncertainty” (p. 134), succeeded in finding that authority. Additionally, they found that students who used writing to gain expertise, as opposed to attempting to write from a position of expertise, learned more from these writing experiences. They show that “Students who refuse to be novices, who continue to rely on their high school methods and see writing as a mere assignment, often end up writing the same paper again and again, no matter how different their assignments” (p. 140)—a finding with important implications for transfer. “Struggle” seems to be an important facet of learning—and without learning, transfer cannot occur. Finally, Sommers and Saltz (2004) conclude that, much like other studies have concluded, “learning to write has been a slow process, infinitely varied, with movements backward and forward, starts and stops, with losses each time a new method or disciplined is attempted” (p. 145), but students who accept their roles as novices “make the greatest gains in writing development” (p. 145). Sommers and Saltz (2004) begin defining habits, approaches, and dispositions to writing that can help people effectively learn to write in various contexts. The students that succeeded are those that took on the “novice” identity, but the students who clung to very rigid rules did not. By encouraging students to take risks, “to be changed by what they learn” (p. 134), we can help students learn to write and write-to-learn.

In 2007, a plethora of studies specifically framed around questions of transfer—rather than simply longitudinal studies about what students are learning—were published. In College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction, Anne Beaufort (2007) reports on the experiences of a single student, whom she calls Tim, writing in freshman composition, courses in a history major, courses in an engineering major, and in his profession at a small engineering firm after graduation. Beaufort (2007) uses a number of learning theories and writing scholarship to create a conceptual frame for understanding how individuals learn to write, which she applies to the various writing tasks her participant encountered to understand how Tim began to develop writing skills in history and engineering. This frame considers the goal of discourse community knowledge as including the overlap of writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge. This framework illustrates how this concept of discourse communities can enable people to develop writing expertise. As she explains,
What writing expertise is ultimately concerned with is becoming engaged in a particular community of writers who dialogue across texts, argue, and build on each other’s work. Discourse communities exhibit a particular network of communicative channels, oral and written, whose interplay affects the purposes and meanings of the written texts produced within the community. Based on a set of shared goals and values and certain material/physical conditions, discourse communities establish norms for genres that may be unique to the community or shared with overlapping communities and roles and tasks for writers are appropriated within this activity system. (Beaufort, 2007, pp. 18-19)

Through Beaufort’s use of discourse community theory to analyze Tim’s writing and writing development, she finds that, while the discourse community played an important role in writing and the evaluation of writing, there was little explicit discussion of it in any of Tim’s courses. While Tim’s freshman composition courses focused on audience and purpose—two writing values that Tim carried with him as he encountered new writing experiences—the lack of discussion of discourse communities led to a limited application in which Tim inappropriately applied knowledge of his audience—i.e., his teacher—that conflicted with the norms and values of the discourse community in which the writing was situated. For example, Beaufort (2007) discusses a history paper Tim wrote for an instructor whom he knew had children. Tim began the paper with an analogy to childrearing because he thought the analogy would appeal to his instructor, whom he saw as the audience (p. 96). This example of what many call “negative transfer” shows that simply learning a skill or strategy may not lead to appropriate application. In fact, theories of discourse communities can account for many of the challenges that Tim faced, especially in cases where he misread or misinterpreted the expectations of the discourse community with the need to “regurgitate” learning, as he often did in his early history courses.

As Sommers and Saltz (2004) found of some students, one of the largest barriers to Tim’s success in his disciplinary writing was his clinging to values about writing that were inappropriate to the new contexts of history or engineering. After Tim accepted his novice position in the engineering discourse community, he was able to develop as a student and as a writer. While Tim does exhibit some evidence of transfer, especially in that he internalized ideas about audience while not always using them appropriately, is promising. Although I am hesitant to argue that we need more in-depth studies of individual writers, the field of composition does need to understand how students develop in other disciplines, what strategies, skills, or concepts
they actually carry with them from the FYC classroom, and how those strategies, skills, or concepts are valued in new contexts. While many researchers have begun to look at what strategies students take with them after FYC, more research that considers students’ disciplinary writing at a complex level, like Beaufort has done, needs to be conducted in order to truly understand transfer and its effects on student writing development.

After the first two years of a longitudinal study, Wardle (2007) reported on how students enrolled in an honors first-year composition course that used a Writing-about-Writing (WaW) approach to composition instruction showed evidence of transfer in their first and second years of college. Wardle drew two major conclusions from interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis of student work in all classes. Wardle (2007) found, first, that students “rarely generalize from FYC,” and, second, that “context-specific supports were necessary for engagement and success” in disciplinary writing assignments (p. 73). Her findings are particularly interesting in light of the participant sample: they were all self-selected students in honors courses based on their ACT scores, and all were white and middle- or upper-middle class. As Wardle (2007) asserted, these are “students one would expect to be savvy, educationally successful, and able to ‘transfer’ knowledge and abilities more easily and often than less well prepared students” (p. 72). But even with these high-achieving students, Wardle found that students did not often demonstrate transfer of writing related knowledge. While she concluded that students were able to transfer some skills—especially ones about the writing process, the students ultimately chose not to when these skills were not necessitated by non-English writing assignments (Wardle, 2007, p. 73). When students did achieve generalization from FYC to other writing assignments, the process was unconscious (Wardle, 2007, p. 79). These conclusions indicate that while transfer from FYC courses is possible, more research needs to be conducted in order to understand how such transfer occurs and what institutional structures might be inhibiting it.

Gerald R. Nelms and Ronda Leathers Dively (2007) begin to explore some of those inhibiting structures in their research of curriculum. In “Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition Courses to Writing-Intensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study,” Nelms and Dively (2007) seek to illuminate factors that may potentially influence how students transfer composition knowledge. They conducted a survey of teaching assistants at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale to find out what concepts GTAs emphasized in their
courses, the types of formal and informal writing assignments GTAs assigned, and the GTAs’ perceptions of their students’ strengths and weaknesses, finding that there was great diversity in the types of assignments required. Because of this diversity (which Nelms and Dively attribute to “a writing program philosophy that advocated a good amount of GTA autonomy,” p. 221), “students were likely to encounter disparate experiences across the many sections of these courses, and, therefore, writing-intensive instructors in other departments could not rest assured that students entering their courses had engaged in similar composing scenarios or had achieved competency with regard to a standardized base of composing knowledge” (Nelms & Dively, 2007, p. 221). While instructor autonomy is certainly important to many programs, the lack of standardization among writing courses could lead to vastly different experiences in a single course depending on the instructor. While I do think it’s important to allow for instructor innovation, especially so instructors can develop new strategies to contribute to composition research and theory, there should be an expectation for at least some common curriculum within like courses because a standardized curriculum can enhance student development.

Nelms and Dively (2007) also included the perspectives of instructors outside of the English department through a focus group interview. Important to the discussion of transfer are two of their findings: first, that the instructors that participated were “genuinely concerned about knowledge transfer” (Nelms & Dively, 2007, p. 223) but that these participants “repeatedly noted the perceived inability of their students to make even the most superficial connections between what they were learning in one course and what they had learned in another,” which Nelms and Dively (2007) called a “tremendous source of frustration” for participants (p. 223). Although instructors in non-composition courses did not feel students were able to make connections between courses, the researchers did find that some of the concepts “most commonly addressed” in the composition courses were applicable to other writing, but that “several items on that list [of commonly taught strategies] did not manifest themselves in their students’ writing” (Nelms & Dively, 2007, p. 224). This inclusion of the perspectives of non-composition instructors illuminates an important fact about transfer scholarship: that it is a concern not only of composition instructors, but of instructors across the university. Their research indicates a starting point for scholarship on the potentials for transfer between FYC and non-FYC writing contexts.
Another issue that can inhibit transferability is discussed in Linda S. Bergmann and Janet Zepernick’s (2007) “Disciplinarity and Tranferences: Students’ Perceptions of Learning to Write.” After “repeatedly” hearing that students in FYC “actively rejected the idea that what they learned about writing in high school or in first year composition (FYC) courses could be applied to the writing they were asked to do in courses in other disciplines” (p. 124), Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) sought to research student perceptions’ of writing in FYC and in other disciplines at their small, Midwestern technological university where writing-across-the-curriculum was strongly emphasized. Ultimately, they found that students characterized writing in FYC—which aimed to teach “academic argument” and “expository prose” (p. 124)—as “fluff,” and, thus, “failed to perceive the transferability of most of what these courses purported to teach them about writing” (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007, p. 125). In fact, they say that “the primary obstacle to such transfer is not that students are unable to recognize situations outside FYC in which those skills can be used, but that students do not look for such situations because they believe that skills learned in FYC have no value in any other setting” (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007, p. 139). Students in this study did not see the writing that they completed in a required composition course as legitimate, which is a major problem not only for transfer but for composition instruction in general. Indeed, students will need to be coached to see the connections between writing in FYC and writing in other courses, which can legitimize the FYC course and model for students ways to connect learning between seemingly disparate contexts.

Although much less discussed, also important to understanding transfer from FYC is understanding transfer into FYC. Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi (2008) attempt to understand the “incomes” students bring with them, especially seeking to understand how FYC students use prior genre knowledge to navigate new contexts. Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi (2008) surveyed students in 33 sections of FYC at the University of Washington and completed discourse-based interviews with 18 students on a preliminary essay and the first major essay for FYC. Their research confirms that students bring with them a variety of genres, including those both academic and non-academic. Perhaps not surprisingly, 95% of survey respondents said they had written a five-paragraph essay before (Rounsaville, Golberg, & Bawarshi, 2008, p. 102). In interviews that asked about drawing on prior genre knowledge to write new genres, however, students did not recall using prior genre knowledge in new settings. Further, a few instances of high-road transfer that the researchers saw “were not
self-initiated” (Rounsaville, Goldberg, & Bawarshi, 2008, p. 107), and students had to be prompted to understand how they had, in fact, drawn on prior genre knowledge to complete a new assignment.

In “Pedagogical Memory: Writing, Mapping, Translating,” Susan C. Jarratt, Katherine Mack, Alexandra Sartor, and Shevaun Watson (2009) found that “many students across the disciplines had internalized the idea of writing as a process and a mode of learning” but that “even the most successful...lacked fluency in basic writing terminology, failing to identify genres beyond the most basic (“research paper”) or to distinguish modes of development, such as summary and analysis” (p. 48). These two findings lead to great conclusions about the potential for transfer. In trying to get students to remember how they had learned to write, Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) found that “the interview generates as much as retrieves knowledge,” coining the term to “pedagogical memory” to discuss how students’ writing memories are based in both lived experiences and the “broadly-shared, collective experiences” of a given context. According to the researchers, pedagogical memories are created “in the presence of an addressee” because such memories are not engaged elsewhere (Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, & Watson, 2009, pp. 49-50). The idea of pedagogical memories needing to be created with an addressee underscores comments by Rounsaville, Golberg, and Bawarshi (2008) and Nelms and Dively (2007), mainly that the act of participating in a study of transfer may do more to engage students’ prior knowledge than the students actively do on their own. In fact, a few students in Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson’s (2009) study actually linked “disparate college writing experiences” through their attempt to “create pedagogical memories” during the study (p. 62). Such memory-making can illustrate connections between contexts in ways that students would not otherwise seek out. By participating in the interviews, students may gain additional metacognitive awareness. We cannot, however, depend on research participation as a way to facilitate transfer.

Dan Fraizer (2010) researches a General Writing Skills Instruction (GWSI) model of First-Year Composition by surveying 112 students and six full-time, faculty instructors in a second semester FYC course. Fraizer (2010) uses student perceptions of writing in FYC and other courses to posit that “reflection and other transfer activities” may be more valuable in helping students develop as writers if they occur in non-FYC settings (p. 35). As of yet, there has been little discussion of transfer-focused activities in non-FYC settings. Fraizer (2010), however, finds an interesting thread about student perceptions that speaks back to experiences documented
by Bergmann and Zepernic (2007). After surveying FYC students to understand how they saw themselves as writers and how that changed during their FYC courses, he found that students “saw FYC as a course sequence that helped them to develop as college writers, but in a general way that was sometimes hard for them to explain” (Fraizer, 2010, p. 45). Even though some scholars of transfer are skeptical about the applicability of GWSI models to students’ other writing in the university (Wardle, 2007; Smit, 2004), the students in Fraizer’s (2010) study did perceive the class as helpful. However, integrating additional transfer theories to a GWSI course could actually help students see the value of the class. This is important to note because Fraizer (201) also surveyed instructors (adapting the process used by Nelms and Dively, 2007) and found that instructors emphasized process pedagogy and close reading, but only one of the genres assigned (the “research paper”) was “directly linked” to writing students would do in other courses. Increased connections between the writing done in FYC and the writing completed in other settings should increase the perceived value of FYC, especially for students.

In her recent study of transfer, Rebecca Nowacek (2011) looked at transfer in a complex manner by following 18 students and three professors involved with an interdisciplinary learning community in which three individual courses (literature, history, and religious studies) were combined in a single honors seminar. Although each professor was “in charge” of a specific discipline of the course, Nowacek (2011) says that “sessions with only one professor present were the exception” and that class discussions often merged together without distinction. The students, however, tended to see the three courses as distinct classes, as demonstrated through their uses of separate notebooks for each course and speaking “of a given class period as belonging to a professor” (p. 4). With an exception of an oral final, no projects in the courses required students to use material from all three courses, but, as Nowacek shows, students did perform such acts of transfer between these three subjects and class discussions. Nowacek (2011) used classroom observation as a key component of her study. Without it, she would not have understood how students were integrating knowledge from one disciplinary course to another. In a chapter specifically on students’ transfer of writing-related knowledge, she explicates multiple classroom discussions of the use of questions in a paper, including one in which two different professors shared two opposite viewpoints on whether students should include questions within a writing assignment. A month later, Nowacek (2011) observed a student ask the third professor how he felt about having questions in a paper (p. 113). Nowacek (2011) is able to see this student
using prior writing knowledge in a new setting, but says that the instructor, who was not present during the previous discussion, “is like [. . .] most instructors most of the time: he has no idea connections motivate [that student’s] question” (p. 114). Nowacek’s (2011) ability to use classroom observation and, thus, see the connection the student made illustrates the contextual nature of writing and the way we research it. As numerous scholars have addressed, transfer is not often present in written documents. Like Nelms and Dively’s (2007) discussion with non-composition scholars, Nowacek’s (2011) experiences show the need to include more than the student in discussions of transfer—doing so, however, is not often an easy process (as Beaufort notes in *College Writing and Beyond*).

**Reflection and Metacognition as a Strategy for Transfer**

The value of reflection and metacognition to the ability to transfer writing-related knowledge is a common assumption of transfer scholarship. Beaufort is among the first to theorize the connections between reflection and metacognition and transfer explicitly, at least in the field of composition and rhetoric. In her appendix on teaching for transfer, Beaufort (2007) names “teach[ing] the practice of mindfulness, or meta-cognition” as one of the key principles for “facilitate[ing] positive transfer” (p. 182). She calls this an “extension of the familiar step in the writing process of reflection after the project is complete” (Beaufort, 2007, p. 182). Similarly, Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi (2008) state that early research on transfer in education and psychology “identify meta-cognition as crucial to knowledge transfer, especially across dissimilar contexts of the sort students will encounter between [FYC] courses, courses in different academic disciplines, and workplace settings” (pp. 97-98). Wardle (2007) also notes that “transfer research from other fields, and as well as the findings of this study, suggest that *meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies* in FYC may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate” (p. 82, emphasis original). Because of this need for metacognition, much transfer research points to ways to improve students’ metacognitive abilities. As Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi (2008) point out, it is challenging to study transfer because “students are not often conscious of how they use prior resources, except when explicitly prompted” (p. 98). The act of participating in a study of transfer may be providing that prompting students need in order to see connections between contexts. Nelms and Dively (2007) advance this point, explaining that:
reflection represents an important mechanism for achieving metacognitive awareness of the potential for transferring learning across contexts. Much of the data generated for each study comes from just such reflection, a reflexivity that the students might not have developed had they not participated in these longitudinal studies. (p. 216) Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) underscore this idea, as well, in their framework for pedagogical memory because “the interview generates as much as retrieves knowledge” for the students in their study (p. 49). The resulting problem is that, first, students may not be “prompted” to tap into their metacognitive skills in later writing settings, and, second, that the kinds of reflections students practice in writing classes may not be the same kinds of reflection that can facilitate transfer.

Reflective Writing in the Composition Classroom

In Reflection and the Writing Classroom, Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) theorizes and describes three types of reflection that are important for student development: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation. These three ideas illustrate just how multi-faceted “reflection” is and why it may be so difficult to teach and incorporate into the classroom. In Yancey’s taxonomy, she defines each of these terms based on when the reflection occurs and on what the student is reflecting. Reflection-in-action is “the process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event, and the associated texts” (Yancey, 1998, p. 13). Constructive reflection is “the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events, and the associated texts” (Yancey, 1998, p. 14). Reflection-in-presentation is “the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variable of writing and the writing in a specific context for a specific audience, and the associated texts” (Yancey, 1998, p. 14). These three different forms of reflection, however, should not be used in isolation—together, they create a fuller picture of the student-writer and by engaging in multiple forms of reflection, students should better develop their reflective skills. However, it can be difficult to distinguish between these various forms of reflection because of the overlap between process and product that can exist.

Because of such overlap, students may wonder what we mean when we say reflection. And, as I see when I attempt to define these terms for myself, not all scholars will agree or use
the term *reflection* in the same way. These differences in terminology may not matter much for students—I don’t, for example, ask them to write a “reflection-in-presentation” with their final drafts or to think about their “constructive reflection” throughout the semester. Rather, I use *reflection* to mean the processes by which students reflect. This meaning leads to “short” activities—like forum or blog posts—that are intended to be generative for the student. For Yancey, this is more like *reflection-in-action*: students are doing the reflection on a specific text during a specific context, whether the resulting text is a list of activities that the student completed during class and a comment about what helped the most or a paragraph-based reflection in which students explain how they have gone about accomplishing a specific task. For me, *reflection* is an act: it occurs in defined moments that build up over time. Students practice reflecting throughout a given project so that a final reflective assignment—the writer’s letter—is not the sole location of reflection in the course. While even longer, more formalized genres of reflection might be realized as isolated acts of reflection, I’ve found it easier to provide specific genre terms to better convey the purposes of the reflection I want students to do. For example, students turn in reflective writers’ letters with both their peer feedback and final drafts. By delineating between *reflection* as an act that is done at multiple points and the *reflective writers’ letters* as a genre that explains the various acts of *reflection* students have done throughout the process, I hope that students write more meaningful writers’ letters that actually allow them to learn from the acts of reflection they have already done.

**Reflective Writing as Self-Assessment**

There is a long tradition of using reflective writing—specifically as student self-assessment—to inform instructors’ responses to student writing and to help students take ownership over their work. In the Editor’s Note to *Student Self-Evaluation: Fostering Reflective Learning*, Jean MacGregor (1993) explains, “The term *student self-assessment* [. . .] connotes processes that stand alongside traditional evaluative systems and provide informal or formal information about student learning to students, faculty members, or others involved in either classroom-based or campuswide assessment work” (p. 2). Although MacGregor favors “self-evaluation” over “self-assessment,” the latter term more often arises in composition theory and research, specifically when discussing students’ reflections on their own writing.
One of the earliest illustrations of the value of self-assessment in the writing process occurred when Nancy Sommers (1980) sought to explicate the differences in revision strategies of student and “experienced” writers—those who worked as “journalists, editors, and academics” (p. 380). Her main finding is that students tend to focus on revision as word changing, as underscored by the language they use to discuss revision. Instead of revision, which these students saw as the vocabulary of the teacher, students referred to the process as “Scratch Out and Do Over Again,” “Reviewing,” “Redoing,” “Marking Out,” or “Slashing and Throwing Out” (Sommers, 1980, pp. 380-381). These students saw revising mainly in terms of changing words and repetition, which is in contrast to the views of “experienced writers.” These experienced writers used revision at many points in the writing process—not as “a separate stage at the end of the process” (Sommers, 1980, p. 378). In this study, the experienced writers discussed ideas like their imagined audience and used metaphors to help explain how they use revision. For Sommers (1980), the vocabulary that these two sets of writers use to talk about their writing is indicative of the broader strategies that these groups of writers actually use when they revise. Student writers seemed to focus their self-assessments on their word choice, whereas experienced writers focused on more global concerns in revising their writing. Sommers (1980) focused on “revision,” and the ability to self-assess their own work is a key component of being able to revise.

Jeff Sommers (1985) advocates for the writer’s memo used alongside a portfolio grading method, which “reinforces the value of revision . . . because submitted work is treated as drafts in progress rather than as finished essays” (p. 95). In this method, Sommers (1985) explains, the writer is the one to decide a certain draft is “finished,” rather than the instructor, and “a more productive relationship is established between student and teacher, who are no longer defendant and judge but instead writer and editor” (p. 95). In order to help create this relationship, Sommers (1985) proposes the “student-teacher memo,” which he describes as a “brief, informal not-to-be-graded communication written to the instructor by the student who comments on the draft in question” (p. 96). In his model, the instructor proposes a series of open-ended questions (such as “Who is your audience in this pieces of writing?” or “How did that audience affect what you have written?”), and students “have the option to write these memos in any form they choose” (Sommers, 1985, p. 96). Sommers (1985) ultimately argues that these student-teacher memos have a strong impact on his responses to their writing. “By looking first at students’
intentions,” Sommers (1985) explains, “instructors also demonstrate that they are responsible evaluators, that they plan to judge the student’s ability to write rather than her ability to please” (Sommers, 1985, p. 102). Further, he says, “For equitable and meaningful evaluation of student writing, this mutual guesswork [between student and teacher] must be replaced with genuine communication about that writing,” and that such communication’s ideal form is the student-teacher memo (Sommers, 1985, p. 102). I question, however, whether the student-teacher memo is the ideal place Sommers explains it as. If students do not engage with the act of writing the memo, is it still as helpful for the instructor? Sommers’s example in the article shows a strong response, one that may be the “ideal” but not the “norm,” and Sommers does not go into much detail about student attitudes toward the activity. Finally, how can we be certain that students are not simply attempting to please us, the instructor and ultimate reader, in their memo?

In 1989, Richard Beach elaborated on strategies for self-assessment when he asserted that “evaluation alone may not achieve this long-range goal of helping students learn to critically assess their own writing” (p. 127). Beach (1989) argues for using writing conferences to model assessment strategies, claiming that “In responding to student writing [. . .] we must find ways for students to recognize, on their own, the sort of problems that we experience as readers of their texts” (p. 127). In his discussion, he outlines several strategies that writers use when assessing their own work, including “describing, judging, and selecting and testing revisions” (Beach, 1989, p. 131). According to Beach (1989), many students struggle to use such assessing techniques, which is why modeling is important. These strategies help students to name, describe, and understand the problems they encounter in a specific texts and cultivate students’ reflective abilities and metacognitive understandings of their writing and writing abilities.

Just over ten years after Jeff Sommers called for the use of student self-assessments to aid teacher evaluation, Peggy O’Neill (1998) again argued that student self-assessment can be incorporated into the “response sequence between teacher and student writer” (p. 61). She explains that much of the foundational scholarship on teachers’ responses to student writing—such as Nancy Sommers’s “Responding to Student Writing” and Richard Straub and Ronald Lunsford’s Twelve Readers Reading: Responding to College Student Writing—problematically omits students’ self-evaluations and reflective writing. But this omission in the response literature creates a circular concern, and “teacher training” and “professional development” materials remain entrenched in traditional methods for teacher response that prevent composition
instructors—and any instructor that grades writing in general—from truly engaging in a
conversation with students about their writing. O’Neill (1998) suggests “[c]hanging how we
conceptualize the response pattern” in order to “lead the way in transforming response practices”
(p. 62). By reading and responding to both the student writing and the student self-assessment,
we can “foster more real conversation” with student writers “because it allows them to negotiate,
discuss, and reconsider during the conversational turn-taking” (O’Neill, 1998, p. 62). Such
conversation between teachers and students is imperative in order to foster student writing
abilities and their evaluative abilities.

Drawing on research by N. Sommers (1980), J. Sommers (1985), Beach (1989), and
others interested in self-assessment and reflection, O’Neill (1998) also explains that
“composition practitioners have been advocating [self-assessment] through the seventies,
eighties, and nineties, especially as portfolios have become more popular” (p. 61). As a
discipline, compositionists in the 21st century still focus on reflective discussion and writing as
ways to help students “become their own evaluators” (O’Neill, 1998, p. 61). There are good
reasons for our continued focus on reflective discussion and writing. While there are many
reasons to integrate self-assessment into the writing classroom, including to help students gain
the evaluative skills necessary to assess their own writing, regardless of the rhetorical situation,
another important reason seems to be the way that reflective self-assessment can aid instructor’s
response practices. Self-assessments can be “recognized as a means for teachers to learn more
about the contexts informing student work” (Evans, 2001, pp. 293-294) and, as Kathryn Evans
(2001) argues, self-assessments should “reshape what teachers do” (p. 294, emphasis original).
Evans (2001) illustrates how student self-assessments can help guide teachers’ responses to
student writing by arguing that:

Instead of formulating context-free responses and using contextual information when we
happen to find out about it, such information should be actively solicited from students.
Greater knowledge of context can be key because the “problems” apparent in a student’s
text are often symptoms of deeper, underlying problems that are not apparent in the text.
(p. 293)

Although she acknowledges that “teachers cannot hope to anticipate and address every layer of
context that shapes each students’ work” (p. 296), Evans (2001) believes that “we should
deliberately and regularly employ context-gathering tools in the classroom” (p. 296). This
suggestion, of course, assumes that students will be both willing and able to provide the contextual details an instructor needs to most effectively help them with their writing. Our attempts to reshape our responses to student writing and our goals to “foster more real conversation” with students about their writing may be better served by moving the conversation away from the student-teacher memo and into other genres not traditionally viewed as a place for dialogue between student and instructor, such as the evaluative rubric.

**Rubrics as a Tool for Reflective Learning**

Bob Broad (2003) details the rise of rubrics as a tool for evaluating writing in his critique of them in *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. Broad explains that rubrics were initially intended to solve “the problem of disagreement” between raters during assessments by “rebuild[ing] readers’ evaluative frameworks so they can agree more consistently and more quickly” (p. 7), thus allowing us to “reach impressively high correlations among scorers” and “judge students’ writing with remarkable speed and relative ease” (p. 7). Additionally, he notes that rubrics “may have done more good for writing assessment and the teaching of writing than any other concept or technology” because they “legitimized direct assessment of writing” (Broad, 2003, p. 8). Because of these positive points, rubrics have become a staple of writing assessment, both in large-scale, programmatic assessments as Broad discusses and in classroom evaluation of writing. Although Broad critiques traditional rubric development, he asserts that using a collaborative development method called Dynamic Criteria Mapping can help to mitigate some of the reductive aspects of rubrics, an idea I discuss more fully in Chapter 2.

There are a variety of types of rubrics commonly used when teaching writing. Heidi Goodrich Andrade (2005) summarizes some of the uses and advantages of these different kinds of rubrics. First, she differentiates between a scoring rubric and an instructional rubric, explaining that “At the most basic level, then, a rubric lists criteria and levels of quality” (Andrade, 2005, p. 27). The main difference between instructional and scoring rubrics, however, is simply the way each is used: a scoring rubric is used “exclusively by the teacher” while an instructional rubric is “co-created with students; handed out; used to facilitate peer assessment, self-assessment, and teacher feedback; and only then used to assign grades” (Andrade, 2005, p. 27). Although this is an important distinction, the same rubrics—without any changes to the
document itself—can function in both capacities. As we might infer from Broad (2003) and other scholarship on writing assessment—such as Brian Huot’s (2002) *Rearticulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning* and Linda Adler-Kassner and Peggy O’Neill’s (2010) *Reframing Writing Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning*—bringing more voices into our assessment can improve the way assessment of student writing occurs, as well as how students actually learn to write.

**Collaboratively generating rubrics.** One way to bring multiple voices into classroom assessment is to collaboratively generate evaluative rubrics with students. Asao Inoue (2005) proposes “community-based assessment pedagogy” in which “students take control of all the writing and assessment practices of the class, including . . .the creation of assessment criteria, rubrics, and writing assignments” (p. 210), claiming that “Rubrics and their assessment practices should . . .be sites for reflection as well, so that the rubrics can spur richer ways to evolve as writers, assessors, and theorizers of language” (p. 210). In other words, students should be included in the entirety of the learning and evaluating process. Inoue (2005) details the process of collaboratively generating rubrics with students and how he uses these rubrics to have students assess (rather than respond to) each other’s work. Through these processes of creating the assessment criteria and using it in the classroom, students became more active learners and became more “accountable” in their reading of each other’s work.

Chanon Adsanatham (2012) draws on Inoue’s work in his study of collaboratively creating rubrics in the ENG 111 curriculum at Miami University. According to Adsanatham (2012), “exchanging, debating, and negotiating criteria, and revising them accordingly can strengthen our learning and growth as writers and assessors. Teachers and students can grow from meaningful dialogues with one another through the process of co-constructing grading standards” (p. 156). Adsanatham (2012) also interviewed several students in the class about the experiences, finding that “Collaborating on the expectations and clarifying them up front could help students understand the objectives of the project and feel more confident about how to proceed” (p. 160). Additionally, he asserts that “inviting students to create the grading criteria may be a way to increase engagement and reduce potential apathy to an assignment” (Adsanatham, 2012, p. 160)—two issues that are of concern in the FYC classroom, especially given research conducted by Bergmann and Zepernick (2007), who found that students treated the FYC curriculum as “fluff” and illegitimate.
Rubric-Based Student Self-Assessment

Along with using student reflective writing as self-assessment, such as Sommers (1989) and O’Neill (1998) have discussed, there is a growing body of scholarship on how effectively students assess themselves using rubrics and how that process improves their overall writing abilities. Much of this discussion of rubric-based self-assessment has occurred outside of the FYC classroom—for example, in middle school language arts classes or in undergraduate law and psychology courses. This scholarship, however, provides a foundation for thinking about the benefits of incorporating rubric-based self-assessment into the FYC classroom.

Andrade and Beth A. Boulay (2003) investigated how middle school students benefited from using rubrics as part of their writing process. In this study, Andrade and Boulay (2003) provided a grading rubric to seventh- and eighth-grade students whose classes had been assigned either to the control group or experimental (self-assessment) condition. While they ultimately found that “the self-assessment intervention was insufficient to obtain a consistent, measurable effect,” Andrade and Boulay (2003) outline a number of recommendations that have created a theoretical grounding for the way self-assessment is used in this project (p. 28). In their study, students who were asked to self-assess using the rubric participated in two “self-assessment sessions” in which they learned about the rubric and how to use it, but the researchers say that “Teachers may have to do more than” that “to determine meaningful improvements in students’ essays” (Andrade & Boulay, 2003, p. 28). Students need to be able to work with the rubric over a longer span of time if it is to provide real benefits to their writing and writing process. Second, Andrade and Boulay (2003) recommend “clarifying students’ understanding of the rubric, perhaps by co-creating it with them and by making it more central to each writing assignment” (p. 28). As Inoue (2005) and Adsanatham (2012) illustrated in their own scholarship on rubric creation, inviting more student input into the grading criteria would likely have led to a stronger engagement with and ownership over the project, even for middle school students.

Finnish scholars Sari Lindblom-Ylanne, Heikki Pihlajamaki, and Toomas Kotkas (2006) also studied the ways students self-assess using rubrics by researching 15 students in a History of Law course. These students used a grading rubric to assess their own texts, to complete peer assessment with their classmates, and for the instructor to assess the students’ writing. The researchers found that the scores of all three of these assessments were similar to each other,
with only a few differences depending on the type of criteria being evaluated. For example, Lindblom-Yllane, Pihlajamaki, and Kotkas (2006) found that “The biggest differences were among scores for independent and critical thinking. On these two criteria, the peer gave the highest and the teacher the lowest scores” (p. 57). Although their research focuses on “accuracy” and uses the teacher’s score as the checkpoint for comparison, their study also considered student perspectives on the assessment process. In general, “the teachers and the students had mostly positive experiences”—although some students found it more difficult to assess their peers, and others found it more difficult to assess themselves (Lindblom-Yllane, Pihlajamaki, & Kotkas, 2006, p. 59). Understanding how students react to the self- and peer-evaluation process can help us to better facilitate such processes in our courses.

In a study similar to Andrade and Boulay’s (2003), Amy Covill (2012) researched how students enrolled in two sections of a psychology course used three different types of assessments on their writing. Students were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: the “long” or “comprehensive” rubric that included 11 grading criteria, the “short” rubric that included five criteria, and an open-ended assessment tool (n.p.). Covill (2012) found that, regardless of which assessment tool students were using, the majority of students in the course thought “having to assess their own writing made them work harder” and “believed that self-assessment made them more aware of revisions they needed to make” and “believed that having to assess their rough draft help[ed] them write a better final draft” (n.p.). Despite these findings, Covill (2012) asserts that “Students who were given an instructional rubric . . . did not write better papers than students who were required to simply identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own paper.” She also states that there was no difference in the final quality of writing by students who used long and short rubrics. While she theorizes that the lack of impact of the rubric on writing quality may be because “by the time students are in college, many have reasonably good knowledge of criteria and goals relevant to academic writing in general, and they can surmise assignment-specific criteria from a well-written assignment sheet” (n.p.), this assumption would fundamentally contradict much research of students writing across the curriculum, such as the kind conducted by McCarthy (1987), Herrington and Curtis (2000), and Beaufort (2007). Because Covill (2012) states that “The writing quality of students, regardless of condition, was in the C+/B- range,” her findings might also hint that having students assess one paper on a rubric multiple times is not enough time or practice for students to internalize the
value of using a rubric to guide their writing. That being said, it is promising that many of the students responded positively to the self-assessment practices in her study.

Methodology and Methods

Background

The present study seeks to understand how two sections of ENG 111 I taught used and understood the acts of reflection and self-evaluation, particularly through the use of the Reflect/Project/Imagine activity and rubric-based self-evaluation. I sought to document student perceptions of class activities and transferability of the strategies we discussed. In this study, I draw on data from two in-class surveys, in-class activities, five final writing projects, rubrics from four of the five final projects, and interviews with four students conducted after the semester was complete.

Methodology

This study is primarily teacher-research from a pragmatic epistemological viewpoint. Many of the values of teacher-research are also values that undergird my teaching philosophy in general: that the classroom is a community of learners, and that I learn as much from my students as they learn from me and each other; that theory and practice should be mutually guiding factors, rather than seen as a binary; and that the classroom context is important to the success of a class or activity (Ray, 1992). Ruth Ray (1992) notes that teacher-research seeks “to redress. . .the imbalances between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms” (p. 174). Although I rely more heavily on qualitative research methods—specifically using qualitative methods for reading and analyzing student work and interviews—I attempt to balance this with more quantitative data in the form of student surveys and the use quantitative discourse analysis to code student comments. In my view, both quantitative and qualitative data are imperative to the two discourse communities most likely to benefit from my research: composition instructors and educational researchers.

Methods
Data collection. In the Fall 2012 semester, students enrolled in these two courses, called Class 1 and Class 2 in this project, were invited to participate in the study. All students enrolled in the classes completed the same coursework. At the end of the semester, students were given the option to provide consent to allow me to analyze their work from the semester, including in-class writing and final projects. Following the approved Internal Review Board protocol, a colleague collected the consent forms and held them until final grades had been completed. Of the 46 students in the sample frame, 41 consented to let me analyze their work. Twenty-six of those students also consented to let me contact them to request an interview during the spring semester.

At the middle and end of the semester, students completed online surveys about their experiences in the ENG 111 course. These surveys were anonymous, and students provided consent at the time they completed them (see Appendix A for survey tools). In addition to their use for research, I used the results of the midterm survey to gauge student understanding of the course content and to receive some early feedback on student opinions on pedagogy and instruction. I commonly employ these surveys in all classes at the midterm in order to adjust the remainder of the course to student needs.

Forty-two\(^3\) students completed the midterm survey; 48.8% of these students were enrolled in Class 1 and 51.2% were enrolled in Class 2 (n=41, as one student declined to answer). Fifty percent were male, and 90.5% reported that English was their first language. Of these students, 97.6% were first-year students and 2.4% were sophomores. Fifteen students completed the end of the semester survey.\(^4\) Of these students, 64.3% were enrolled in Class 1 and 35.7% in Class 2 (n=14, as one student declined to answer). As is common in survey research, 73.3% were female. The majority of respondents (93.3%) said English was their first language. As expected in a first-year course, 86.7% were first-year students and 13.3% were sophomores.

In February of 2013, I contacted 13 students to schedule an interview about their experiences in the class. Of those 13 students, four participated in an interview. Because these four students discussed their experiences with me in more detail, I often report more fully on the

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\(^3\) This high response rate (91.3%) is likely because students were given time to complete the survey during class. I did, however, step out of the room (much like during course evaluations) so students would not feel as though I was watching them.

\(^4\) This is a much lower response rate (32.6%) than the midterm survey. Although students were also given the opportunity to complete this survey in class, on the day it was conducted there were major connectivity issues with our learning management system, through which students connected to the survey. While I contacted students with the survey link via email to try to bolster responses, few students completed the survey outside of class.
views of Adam and Colleen (from Class 2) and Maddox and Marisol (from Class 1). I met with students either in my office or in a private study room in Miami’s library depending on their preference. Following the approved IRB protocol, the interviews were audiorecorded using both a voice recorder and the microphone on my computer. I used a semi-structured interview format for multiple reasons. First, I am most comfortable with this format of interviewing because of my background in journalism—there is a necessity to have determined questions, but I realize that much of the “most interesting” information often comes from questions that arise from how the interviewee responds. Although I followed a script much like a structured interview (Fontana & Frey, 1993), I often added questions based on the particular students’ responses or the work that they had turned in. In this vein, I also used techniques from discourse-based interviews (O'dell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983). See Appendix B for notional interview questions.

Because I had previously been the students’ instructor, there was some concern that interview participants might be hesitant to answer some questions or to provide potentially “critical” responses about the course. To help receive the most helpful feedback from students, I tried to create a more relaxed atmosphere: I often chatted with students before discussing the consent form and procedure to help them feel comfortable; I often sat next to them rather than across from them during the interview, and we often laughed or joked throughout the interview. However, I was very aware that students still saw me as an instructor—in fact, one student ended the interview with a question soliciting advice about research he was currently working on, and the two male students continued to refer to me as “Ms. Martin” even though I had signed all current correspondence with “Caitlin.” Students, however, still seemed very comfortable while talking with me about their work and the class, even when providing answers they thought might upset or bother me (such as saying that a particular class activity was not helpful). It is worth noting that such honesty and comfort may stem from our interactions during the course. All of the students who completed an interview had met with me at multiple times throughout the semester to discuss their work. Because they were already comfortable talking to me about issues and concerns, this may have led to their comfort during the interview, which might have felt more like a “conference” they had already had with me.

After the interview, I transcribed the audio recordings, replaced the participant’s name with his or her pseudonym, and e-mailed the transcript to the participant for feedback or

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5 All student names are pseudonyms.
clarification. Only one student responded with clarifications. Following the Internal Review Board protocol, I deleted the audio files after transcription.

**Data analysis.** I began analyzing my data using a grounded-theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Because I am most interested in students’ abilities to reflect on and evaluate their work, I began with the three genres that explicitly required this of them: writer’s letters, Reflect/Project/Imagine activities, and rubrics for each of the major assignments, looking for emerging themes and salient quotes. I was particularly aware of times when students talked or wrote about the RPI and rubric activities. One prominent theme that stood out regardless of the genre was the language students used to discuss their own writing, a theme closely connected to transfer scholarship. I completed the same process with the four interview transcripts. After completing this initial reading, I began to re-read student work looking for the salient themes. Because of the amount of data generated for each student, I narrowed the data I would actually analyze down by focusing on specific texts that held interesting themes. Specifically, I chose to focus on the Inquiry 1 and Inquiry 2 rubrics, and the Inquiry 3 Reflect/Project/Imagine activity. In doing so, I was able to look at a greater number of students on each type of text.

To help me read the data more as a “researcher” and less as a “teacher,” I developed several coding schemes for analysis. Using themes that arose out of the students’ work allowed me to understand how the students were responding to particular activities, which, in turn, can help to make the activities more helpful for students in the future. These coding schemes are discussed more fully in Chapters 2 and 3.

**Limitations of the Research**

There are a few limitations that can affect the generalizability of the results of this study, including the small sample size and my position as both teacher and researcher. Additionally, because of the time constraints of the study, it is difficult to document any evidence of student transfer beyond their perceptions.

First, the sample size in this study is relatively small. With 42 total participants, it is difficult to generalize beyond those students. However, teacher-research focuses on “change from the inside out—from the classroom to the administration, rather than the other way around” (Ray, 1992, p. 173). Additionally, teacher-research resists the idea that results can simply be taken from one research project and applied elsewhere. Ray (1992) notes that the question of
generalizability is a critique of nearly all teacher-research, including among her list of four limitations of teacher research that “teachers do not always frame their findings in terms of theory, and thus their research has little relevance beyond their own classrooms” (pp. 183-184). I would note, however, that these limitations do not devalue the project: the goal here is not to make sweeping claims about student abilities or writing growth in the class. Instead, I hope that the activities I report on might inspire other teachers to integrate similar activities, adapting them to the theoretical values of their own classrooms and institutions rather than simply “porting” them into the curriculum.

Second, because I researched students in my own classes about their work in the class, this might have led some students to feel the need to simply tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. Some scholars do question the validity of student self-reports, and this is a common limitation of many studies that rely mainly on student self-reported data. However, the field of composition in general sees students as authorities on their writing and learning. As Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) explain, as a field we tend to take “the students at their words” (p. 50). Beyond the field of composition, however, many individuals question students’ subjective assessments. Nicholas A. Bowman (2010) explains many of these concerns in the field of educational research. One key finding that is important to this study is that “Regardless of their actual beliefs, students may report sizable gains on a number of attributes, such as academic skills [. . .] even if they do not think they have gained very much” (Bowman, 2010, p. 469). Bowman offers reasons for students to respond in ways that may be deemed “desirable” by others: mainly, that “students do not want to admit their own (perceived) lack of learning” (Bowman, 2010, p. 470). Additionally, Bowman (2010) notes that students may “think they know what the researchers want to find” and this can affect their responses (p. 470). In order to balance this concern, I have triangulated student self-reported data with my own analyses of their work. Just as it would be unethical for me to only look at students’ writing without considering their subjective ideas about the class, it would also be unethical for me to solely rely on their subjective ideas and understandings of the class as reported in surveys and interviews.

Finally, the inability to conduct a longitudinal project is both a strength and limitation of this study. The majority of transfer studies follow qualitative, longitudinal designs and employ case studies as the main method of sharing results (Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2007). The findings of this study would be greatly influenced by the opportunity for a
longitudinal design, which allows researchers to “estimate how much an individual changed between time points” and “to better understand participants’ characteristics from the outside” (Seifert, Pascarella, Erkel, & Goodman, 2010, p. 2). However, many of the longitudinal projects miss opportunities for seeing immediate signs of transfer or for considering student perceptions of transfer. Recently, Nowacek (2011) and Dana Driscoll (2012) both conducted studies limited to a semester that yield important results for understanding transferability. Because a longitudinal perspective was not possible for this study, I emulate Nowacek’s (2011) attempt to analyze “a thick synchronous slice of student life” to see how students “become ‘agents of integration’,” her terminology for active learners and integrators of knowledge (p. 3). This “slice” is taken from students’ participation in one of two sections of ENG 111 in the Fall 2012 semester at Miami University—a significantly “thinner” slice than Nowacek’s (2011) interdisciplinary learning community with three linked courses and three instructors. In addition to students’ experiences in my composition courses, I also try to document, through student interviews, some of the ways students are already seeing connections (or not seeing connections) between the ENG 111 course and the courses they enrolled in during the Fall 2011 and/or Spring 2012 semester.
Chapter 2

Rubric-Based Self-Assessment: Strategies for Incorporating Reflection and Creating Classroom Dialogue

As an instructor and student, I understand the mutual value of using rubrics to both write and evaluate writing assignments. But because I had seen students ignore rubrics in the past, I knew I needed to do more than simply give my students a rubric. In this chapter, I explore how I tried to teach students to evaluate their own writing using rubrics. I begin by discussing students’ responses to an open criterion on a rubric I created and provided to them. Then, I explore the process of collaboratively creating a rubric with two different classes. I also analyze the ways students engaged with the rubrics when making comments. Drawing on student writing, in-class surveys and post-semester interviews, I reflect on the success of having students self-evaluate their assignments with rubrics. I then provide suggestions for teaching with rubrics based on these experiences.

In an effort to teach for transfer, I turned to collaboratively generated rubrics and self-assessment for two key reasons. First, I anticipated that many students would encounter rubrics in other writing assignments at the university. Because rubrics are a key tool for understanding a writing assignment, I hoped to help students understand the different ways a rubric could aid their writing. Second, I wanted to incorporate additional strategies for developing writing metacognition, which is a key component of teaching for transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2007; Rounsaville, Golberg, & Bawarshi, 2008; Nelms & Dively, 2007; Jarratt, Mack, Sartor & Watson, 2009); I wanted to use these two processes of dialoguing about writing to improve students’ abilities to discuss their own writing.

Over the course of a semester, I asked students to rate their composition projects on the same rubric that I would use to grade their assignments. These rubrics either had an opportunity for student input or were created collaboratively with my classes. In assessment and evaluation practices, students are not often able to voice their concerns or needs. However, as an instructor, I believe that students and their concerns should be included in the evaluation process. Although this might not be standard procedure in all of the writing contexts that they encounter, I hoped this collaborative nature would help students to see the complexities of grading and the unique contextual aspects that grading—and grading with rubrics especially—often ignores. Bob Broad
(2003), for example, points out that rubrics “rarely. . .venture into the realm of evaluative context when investigating or reporting on how rhetorical judgments are made” (p. 73). In his study of City University, he argued that we should illuminate how contextual criteria affect assessment, rather than viewing context as “illegitimate, inappropriate, or contraband” (Broad, 2003, p. 73). It is difficult, however, to account for all potential contextual concerns when developing a streamlined evaluative tool.

Although I embrace the term rubric, the ones I will discuss look less like a grid that defines “levels of quality” as Heidi Goodrich Andrade (2005, p. 29) explains them. Like Broad (2003), I, too resist the “traditional” rubric. Instead, I drew on Broad’s (2003) theories of Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM) by “enter[ing] into discussion and debate” (Broad, 2003, p. 135) with students about the expectations of the assignment. While the work I conducted is not full DCM, negotiating the dynamics of assessment between my own beliefs and values, students’ beliefs and values, and the beliefs and values as documented in official Miami composition documents is a cornerstone of the rubrics used in the course. Many scholars advocate, as well, for developing rubrics with students in the context of the course. Andrade and Beth A. Boulay (2003) also suggest co-creating rubrics with students, as this can “clarify. . .students’ understandings of” them (p. 28). Similarly, Chanon Adsanatham (2012) reported on the ways that collaboratively developing a rubric for a multimodal remediation project helped students take ownership over their work and their writing processes, including the evaluative process.

As a teacher-researcher, I ultimately discovered that asking students to help develop—and then use—the rubric might be a more difficult task than I had anticipated. Because of the fast-paced nature of our English 111 composition courses, I had to create a rubric that I could provide my students in the first week of classes so that students would have ample time to work on their beginning-of-the-term projects, especially because I wanted students to see it as a guide or planning tool in addition to a list of criteria for evaluation (Adsanatham, 2012). I used a department-provided rubric to create the rubric for our first inquiry project. When creating this rubric, I decided to include an “open criterion” where students could define something they felt was important to the grading process that didn’t seem to be included in the rubric criteria already. I wanted to value students’ prior learning, and this seemed like a good way to do so. After introducing the rubric to the class, we talked through what the categories on this rubric
were meant to assess, and we used the rubric to evaluate a sample student essay found in our College Composition at Miami textbook.

Before discussing the rubric, it’s important to first understand the Inquiry 1 Project. Programmatically, Inquiry 1 is called both the “initial reflection” and the “reflective narrative.” Its main goal is “to ask students to think deeply and reflectively about their communication and writing practices . . . to think about themselves as rhetors and to think about their own rhetoric(s)” (Teacher’s Guide, p. 65). This assignment is often envisioned in different ways by different instructors. I chose to use a prompt similar to one available in our Teacher’s Guide, a resource for instructors in the composition program, and ask students to reflect on and analyze an experience or related experiences in which they encountered “different Englishes.” My purpose was for students to begin thinking about times when conventions or standards they were used to—or even took for granted—did not match the conventions or standards required of a given rhetorical situation. Being able to navigate such moments is a key goal in teaching for transfer, and I hoped that jump-starting these thought processes would help students in thinking about how writing-related knowledge can transfer between disparate situations.

This particular inquiry 1 assignment tasked students with identifying different Englishes they spoke, reflecting on times when different Englishes interacted or came in contact with one another, and analyzing those situations to come to a broader purpose for their chosen audience. For the full assignment description, see Appendix C. Figure 1 shows the rubric that students were provided along with the assignment sheet.

Inquiry 1 Rubric

Evaluate each of the following criteria by placing an “X” on the line under each category. Your score does not need to line up with a numerical value on the line (you can place the mark in the middle). Use the comments section to explain your response. Then, use this evaluative rubric to help in crafting your argument about your essay in your writer’s letter.

Inquiry

The assignment explores an incident of interest to more people than the author. There is an evident question or problem inherent in the incident. The essay demonstrates in-depth engagement and insightful analysis.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

<-----1--------------------2-------------------3-----------------4-----------------5----->

Comments:
Audience/Purpose

There is a clear audience and purpose for the assignment, which inform the choices the author has made in terms of structure, organization, style, and mechanics.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

Comments:

Reflection/Analysis

The assignment uses strategies of reflection and analysis to think critically about the events of the narrative and the way Englishes interact in the author’s life. This means that the assignment includes more than a summary of events or the narrative structure; instead, the assignment explains why something occurred and looks for a deeper meaning that points to the purpose of inquiry.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

Comments:

Narrative

The assignment uses narrative structure to explain an event or an order of events. The narrative is engaging, detailed, and specific.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

Comments:

Structure/Organization

There is a logical structure and sense of organization to the assignment. This may not necessarily mean that the narrative is chronological or that the narrative and analysis are separated or intertwined. Rather, the structure and organization of the essay is successful for the author’s intended audience.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

Comments:

Style & Mechanics

The assignment uses a tone and style that is appropriate for the intended audience. This includes word choice, sentence structure, and other mechanical choices (like punctuation and paragraphing) that are effective for the context of the assignment.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>

Comments:

Open Evaluative Criterion

Choose an aspect of your writing that you don’t feel fits into the criteria for evaluation listed above. Give it a name and explain what it means:
Figure 1. Inquiry 1 Rubric. This figure illustrates the criteria students were asked to assess and the scale used for assessment by both student and instructor.

This rubric included inquiry, audience/purpose, reflection/analysis, narrative, structure/organization, style and mechanics, and an open evaluative criterion where students were able to identify a criterion they felt was important and should factor into their grades, but that did not seem to relate to any of the categories already on the rubric.

After discussing the rubric broadly—including how I wanted them to “mark” a spot on the line where they felt their inquiry fell and what the categories included—we discussed some of the challenges of using a rubric while rating a sample student essay from our College Composition at Miami textbook. I used different sample essays with each class to “practice” rating. After looking at a sample essay (which students were to have read before class), I asked students to rate the essay independently on the rubric. Then, we discussed where the majority of ratings fell for each category, and why we had decided on a specific rating. I tried to resist “norming” students so that they simply agreed—or tried to agree with—my own assessment of the text in question. I did not want working on the rubric to feel like I was training students to read their writing as composition instructors. Although much of the research surrounding student self-assessment of rubrics focuses on how well they “align” with the instructor rating (Andrade and Boulay, 2003; Lindblom-Ylanne, Pihlajamaki, & Kotkas, 2006), this was not the most important factor for me. Rather, I hoped that using the rubric would help create a space for dialogue between me and my students, both on the sample essays we evaluated together and on their own projects. I also wanted to trouble the idea that grading was an objective process and help students understand the ways our own subjectivities contribute to our understanding of a text and the way we approach evaluating it. During this activity, I also tried to model what students might use as open criterion in the rubric. For example, in one class we discussed the title of the sample essay, and how that might be a good criterion to include, as titles are certainly important to an essay or paper, but don’t seem to fit into any of the included rubric categories.
Student Responses to the Open Criterion

Even with this practice assessing student writing using the rubric, however, students still seemed to struggle with parts of the rubric. Most notably, there seemed to be confusion about what types of criteria could be used in the open evaluative criterion slot. In class, we discussed how this criterion was for the student to include something that they felt their essay should be graded on that wasn’t included in the other categories of the rubric. What I discovered was that many students were working with a different set of vocabulary than I was, and by asking students to complete an open criterion in the rubric, I was inviting them to bring to the forefront all of the essay-writing terminology they had encountered over the years. Because of the “uptake” (Freedman, 2002) of previous grading criteria, many students included criteria that I felt were closely linked to other categories. For example, a common open criterion was Voice or Tone, even though both of these are often seen as synonymous with Style—and “tone” appears in the description of the Style & Mechanics category. In this case, “voice” or “tone” might be terms students were more familiar with, especially because both are often brought up in literary analysis. As most students come to Miami straight from high school, and often taken English courses that tend to emphasize literary analysis, these terms might have been more comfortable or more understandable for them. Additionally, “style” seems to be a relatively limited term in that it occurs in many composition and rhetoric discussions, but is likely not used elsewhere. While lab reports certainly require a specific style of writing, it is likely conceived of as a concern of “voice” (as in, the requirement of “passive voice” over “active voice”) or “tone” (as in, lab reports require a “more formal tone”) and either of these words might have more aptly promoted transfer between different contexts for students.

As I discovered throughout this process, the language that I used might have actually impeded backward-reaching transfer because of disconnections between the students’ experiences and their understandings of the vocabulary I used to develop the rubric. Because we were able to discuss these differences, we began to understand the different writing backgrounds and come to a common language about talking about writing in our course. This process should,

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6 “Uptake” is a term from genre studies, largely theorized by Anne Freedman (2002). This idea relies on understanding genres as social actions (as Carolyn R. Miller discussed in 1984) because they “take up” points and ideas from each other through exchange. “Uptake” also helps individuals to recognize texts as fitting into specific genres (or not). Here, I draw on these ideas to explain the ways that students learn and internalize ways to discuss writing, drawing on their past experiences with assessment in their attempts to talk about their writing in a new context.
Hopefully, help students to think about how they can identify similar confusion in the future, as the instructors they have in the remainder of their academic career will certainly call similar ideas by different names.

Many students also included “dialogue” as an open evaluative criterion, even though it might have been linked closely to the category of narrative. None of the five students that included this as their open criterion defined the term “dialogue.” The rubric includes a category for using narrative, of which dialogue is certainly a part. But at least a few students seemed to think it was different enough from the use of narrative to include it as a separate category, and many of the students clarified this with the comments and descriptions that they made. For example, Evan said that he “thought [his] dialogue could be smoother and convey what [his] conversations with [his] dad were actually like” (Evan, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Diana also made similar comments, saying “I think my dialogue for the paper gives a clear example of the problems my friends and I have communicating. I wrote the dialogue in how I actually told my friends about the event, and I think it gives it a bit of character and tells the reader more about me and my team, in ways that writing about the events couldn’t” (Diana, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Finally, Victor, who described the category as “quotes” rather than “dialogue,” said, “I used quotes to show my dialogue with Guido so the reader could imagine he is in the conversation. The dialogue is organized and matches how each of us spoke English” (Victor, Inquiry 1 Rubric). This language is particularly interesting because “quotes” are likely what students are asked to include in other writing situations, such as when writing a research paper or responding to an assigned text.

While “quotes” may not convey a largely different criterion than “dialogue” here, thinking about the narrative details in this way may help students to think about using dialogue as source material. Although the narrative allows unique conventions for quoting—for instance, I encouraged them to make their dialogue look like it would in a published story—dialogue certainly functions in a similar way as using quotes from outside sources. Further, Victor’s description indicates a deeper engagement about what it means to use quotes in the narrative. Whereas most students who included dialogue as their open criterion seem to see it as solely the type of dialogue they included and how the dialogue functioned, Victor also seems to be thinking about the way the dialogue is incorporated. Quotes might convey the idea of “supporting evidence”—connecting the use of dialogue with the use of quoting as a research-writing strategy.
While this criterion is nonetheless still wrapped up in the idea of narrative, the inclusion of dialogue as an open criterion illustrates the ways that students conceive of what they attempt to bring into their assignments. While I might expect students to see “dialogue” as a component of narrative, by thinking about it separately, the inclusion of dialogue seems to hold greater importance to the student’s writing.

It is also possible that students saw dialogue as a more specific aspect than I had initially considered it. It is possible, for instance, to write a narrative without using dialogue. Again, the inclusion of this open criterion might be an instance of students reusing terminology they had been asked to use in other writing and reading contexts. Given my assumption that many students had experience with literary analysis and understanding literary texts, “dialogue” is probably a term they had at least discussed. Further, some students worked particularly hard to incorporate specific details in the form of dialogue, and that effort might have contributed to why students wanted to evaluate it separately from narrative. Finally, dialogue is more particularized than narrative, and including it as a grading criterion might help foster more student engagement with what they chose to illustrate through dialogue—which, hopefully, can be linked to helping students think about choosing quotes effectively in other types of writing assignments.

Perhaps more interesting, though, are occasions when students attempted to label a criterion and the description seemed to hint to something else entirely. One student included “personality factor,” which he described as “Ability to include the personal experiences that prove the interactions with different types of English. I.E. proof and overall support.” This inclusion is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the label “personality factor” led me to believe this category would also be linked to the idea of style, voice, or tone. Many students commented, either in the rubric or their writer’s letters, that the essay felt very “personal.” But the description of this student’s criterion is slightly confusing as to what he intends to evaluate. At first, it sounds like his ability to include personal experiences, but “proof and overall support” do not feel like categories for a personal narrative assignment. Proof of what? However, it also seems that this particular student is already thinking about himself as a rhetor. In a narrative, the examples an author uses and the way he or she conveys the story he or she wants to tell are really the only “proof” one has. But more importantly, these concepts relate to the idea of ethos. This student seems to be grappling with naming and explaining a rhetorical strategy he does not yet have the sufficiently complex wording for. Given the course’s focus on rhetoric—and the
relatively limited discussion of rhetorical devices and appeals we had had at this point in the semester—it is both interesting and promising (in terms of thinking about transfer) that a student is already thinking about himself as a rhetor and how his use of evidence can affect his credibility. However, the student’s description and naming also left me confused, and in the flurry of reading and grading almost 50 essays, I missed the connection to ethos and, thus, failed to seize a potential teaching moment.

Some students included criterion that seemed to arise from the context of our class discussion about the assignment. Use of rhetoric, title, and intro and conclusion were each included by at least one student in the open evaluative criterion on the rubric. In fact, title appeared seven times, perhaps because we had spent part of our discussion of the sample essay talking about how the title—“A Comprehensive and Autobiographical Analysis of Psychological, Sociological, Economic, and Psychosocioeconomic Impacts of the Trenchant Use of Rhetorical Strategy and Strategems”—related to it. I do not doubt that our discussion of the sample essay’s title led students to think about their own titles and, ultimately, include it as a criterion for their rubric. I think this comes through in Julia’s comments on her rating of her Title, “For me, I always struggle with figuring out the perfect title for a paper. It seems like such a simple part of a paper, but it does take a lot of thought and it gives the reader an initial impression of what the paper might be about, so I always want to have an intriguing title. I think the title I chose is somewhat intriguing and does a good job of telling what the paper is about” (Julia, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Many of her comments—from wanting to give the reader an “initial impression” to trying to be “intriguing”—are also ideas that we discussed when talking about titling an inquiry during class. Another student, Jenny, had similar comments: “I think my title is strong. A title is the first thing a reader will read. It needs to be engaging and make them want to read more. I believe I believe with my title the reader will be intrigued to read more” (Jenny, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Here, Jenny is beginning to think about how to connect with an audience, explaining why she thinks it’s important to have an effective title.

Although several students simply did not include an open evaluative criterion, other students listed criteria that were not only very helpful for the grading process, but that also helped me think about what students consider when writing their essays. Students included criteria such as creativity, humor, and interest. Another student included “overall effort,” which was difficult for me to assess because I often don’t see all of the work a student puts into his or
her inquiry, but was also very valuable because this particular student did describe the work he put into the process, including having peers read it and visiting the Howe Center for Writing Excellence. Including this as a criterion might be difficult to assess, but could be a good way to prompt students to think about describing their writing process for a particular assignment.

While reviewing students’ own articulations of criteria, I had difficulty mediating instances when students were simply conceiving of existing criteria differently than I did. Students’ prior knowledge often differed from my expectations. These unmet expectations were very apparent in the ways students discussed criteria on their rubric, and I realized from this that developing our rubrics collaboratively would be the best way to make sure that my students and I were on the same page in terms of the criteria to be graded on and what each of those criteria meant. Because having the language to discuss writing is a key component of transfer, it is important that the language used within a single course be defined and used consistently by both instructors and students. The process of coming to that language, however, should be a collaborative one that engages students in acts of backward-reaching transfer in order to model strategies for encountering new writing assignments. As Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) explain, “our energies as writing instructors and WPAs could be spent on helping students learn how to translate discourses about writing from one site to another” (p. 65). By including students in the evaluative process and the construction of evaluative rubric, I hoped to bring to the classroom a discussion of writing terminology and meanings to foster the analytic skills needed to understand criterion in new environments.

**Collaboratively Developing the Evaluative Rubric**

For our second assignment, I decided to create the grading rubric with my classes. This process is advocated by a number of scholars who research the effects of rubrics, especially Andrade (2005), Inoue (2005), Adsanatham (2012). This process led to a couple of interesting findings. Students had already begun working on the assignment, which was, admittedly, rather complex. Inquiry 2 is, broadly, a rhetorical analysis. But because I value transfer and know that “argumentation” is often expected of students when writing, and because I had had trouble in my previous 111 teaching experience with getting students to make an argument during the rhetorical analysis, I structured this assignment in a different way. First, students had to select two texts that dealt with the same topic. Then, they had to assess their rhetorical effectiveness—
specifically thinking about the texts’ audiences and their employment of ethos, pathos, and logos. Finally, students had to make an argument about which text was more rhetorically effective. For the full assignment description for Inquiry 2, see Appendix D. I hoped this would lead students away from simply identifying how ethos, pathos, and logos were used without any sense of purpose or concluding “so what.”

I began our creation of the rubric with a small-group activity that asked students to collaboratively compose a description for an “A” paper. This was a space for students to work together to begin thinking about what criteria they should be graded on without my involvement. Many of their descriptions, however, mimicked the kinds of criterion I had included on our Inquiry 1 rubric or that had come up in previous class discussions. Some groups created bulleted lists of categories, while others wrote out a full description of what the paper should do. One group created a post that looked more like a rubric itself.

After having students talk about an “A” paper and create a short forum post, we discussed as a class the criteria for grading. I kept a list of what students suggested, which I later put into a rubric format that looked similar to our Inquiry 1 rubric, as students said they liked having the spectrum to rate themselves. Because of the nature of this assignment, I ended up with a different rubric for each class, and I’ll discuss each of them separately.

Inquiry 2 Rubric [Class 1]

Minimum Requirements Checklist: You will not receive higher than a B if you do not have all of these.

_____ 5-6 double-spaced pages
_____ Works cited in MLA format
_____ Writer’s letter on new page
_____ Completed Rubric
_____ 12-point, readable font
_____ MLA Header on all pages

Inquiry 2 Outcomes

Rate yourself on the given scale. Use this rubric to both revise your inquiry and shape your writer’s letter. Leave any additional comments at the bottom of the rubric.

Knowledge of Topic
The writer demonstrates a knowledge of the topic of both texts, as well as a knowledge of rhetorical strategies and devices at play in them. The inquiry focuses on those rhetorical strategies.

<WEAK> <FAIR> STRONG>

Audience and Purpose
There is a clear audience that has some stake in the writer’s topic or will get something from reading the inquiry. This audience is stated in the writer’s letter. There is also a specific purpose, or take-away, for the audience.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Argument
The author makes a meaningful argument about the two texts that is supported throughout the inquiry. This means that there is a clear thesis statement.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Examples
The author has incorporated examples from the texts that are appropriate for his or her argument. These examples are also incorporated well, meaning that the reason for their inclusion is apparent and that more has been said about them than just that they are an example.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Structure and Organization
The essay uses a structure and organization that is appropriate for the intended audience. This means that the paper doesn’t veer from the topic, that the overall organization is effective, and that the structure of individual paragraphs makes sense.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Introduction and Conclusion
The introduction and conclusion are interesting and effective at grabbing the readers’ attention and wrapping up the main ideas of the inquiry.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Style and Tone
The author uses a style that is appropriate for the audience. This means that word choice, phrasings, and mechanics were all intentionally selected for the author’s intended audience.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Mechanics
The essay is polished. There are few mechanical issues and any that do exist do not impede the readers’ understanding.

<WEAK> <FAIR> <STRONG>

Comments:
As you can see in Figure 2, some of the categories in Class 1’s Inquiry 2 rubric are similar to the Inquiry 1 rubric that I had provided: audience and purpose, structure and organization, style and tone, and mechanics. In their suggestions, students seemed to be focused on the idea of the audience or reader. I see this as students connecting my emphasis on audience and purpose in evaluating Inquiry 1 to the current assignment. Helping students identify connections between our class activities is a first step to helping them identify opportunities for transfer between vastly different writing contexts.

Students identified “knowledge of the topic” as one of the first criteria they thought was important for their Inquiry 2 project. When this came up in their “A” paper activities, students said, “For an ‘A’ paper with inquiry 2, you must demonstrate your knowledge on your topic. . .” and another group said an A paper would “Discuss the topic of the issue.” But even though only two of the five groups brought this up in their activities, students seemed to believe that demonstrating knowledge on the topic—that is, the topic their two articles were centered around and the topic of rhetoric—was an important part of creating a strong paper. However, I must note that this particular category is one point where I had to work with students to make sure that the rubric we created was measuring the outcomes that needed to be emphasized in this inquiry. In looking over my notes from creating our rubric, I noticed that students did not seem to be thinking about the idea of rhetoric, which for me was the most important part of this assignment. Some student comments from our class discussion on what they needed to do for this category included “analyze both [texts you have chosen]”, “[think] it over”, “research” and use support for the texts you are analyzing, but “don’t do other research.” In fact, “rhetoric” does not appear in my notes from our conversation that day, and it only appears once in the group activities, when one group of writers described an A paper as “address[ing] rhetorical strategies we learned in the readings and assess[ing] the effectiveness of each chosen text.” When formalizing the rubric, I made sure to include in the description of “knowledge of topic” that this meant not just the “topic” of the texts they had chosen, but the topic of rhetorical analysis, as well.

Students in Class 1 also seemed to emphasize the use of examples. In their group activities, the class collectively referenced examples six times, from “evidence from texts or personal experience” and “good examples to support thought or argument” to “uses quotes and
sources” and “support with facts.” Because one group mentioned “citations,” I suggested we consider examples both for whether they were effectively chosen and whether or not they were effectively/appropriately incorporated into the essay. This one criterion illustrates how both the students and I took part in the process to create a rubric that included the languages we were accustomed to and what we valued in terms of writing.

Class 2’s rubric for Inquiry 2, which is shown in Figure 3, is very similar, though there are a few noticeable differences.

**Inquiry 2 Rubric [Class 2]**

**Minimum Requirements Checklist:** You will not receive higher than a B if you do not have all of these.

- 5-6 double-spaced pages
- Works cited in MLA format
- Writer’s letter on new page
- Completed Rubric
- 12-point, readable font
- MLA Header on all pages

**Inquiry 2 Outcomes**

Rate yourself on the given scale. Use this rubric to both revise your inquiry and shape your writer’s letter. Leave any additional comments at the bottom of the rubric.

**Context & Background**
The author provides some context for the two texts (s)he is working with and the argument they are going to make.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>
←------------------→

**Argument and Analysis**
The author makes a meaningful argument about the two texts that is supported throughout the inquiry. This means that there is a clear thesis statement.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>
←------------------→

**Examples**
The author has incorporated examples from the texts that are appropriate for his or her argument. These examples are also incorporated well, meaning that the reason for their inclusion is apparent and that more has been said about them than just that they are an example.

<WEAK>  <FAIR>  STRONG>
←------------------→

**Audience and Purpose**
There is a clear audience that has some stake in the writer’s topic or will get something from reading the inquiry. This audience is stated in the writer’s letter. There is also a specific purpose, or take-away, for the audience.
Structure and Organization
The essay uses a structure and organization that is appropriate for the intended audience. This means that the paper doesn’t veer from the topic, that the overall organization is effective, and that the structure of individual paragraphs makes sense.

Style and Tone
The author uses a style that is appropriate for the audience. This means that word choice, phrasings, and mechanics were all intentionally selected for the author’s intended audience.

Mechanics
The essay is polished. There are few mechanical issues and any that do exist do not impede the readers’ understanding.

Comments:
Figure 3. Class 2’s Inquiry 2 Rubric. This figure illustrates the collaboratively-generated criteria students and I developed for this inquiry.

There are a few main differences between the rubrics for Class 1 and Class 2. First, Class 2 more aptly identifies “context and background” as an important criterion. As a class, we decided on the description for this category, “The author provides some context for the two texts (s)he is working with and the argument they are going to make.” Only one group of students (out of five) mentioned something related to context and background in their A paper activities; they said, “The student would need to explain why this topic is relevant.” Again, however, students felt it would be important to include some sort of context or background for the audience in order for them to understand the point of the inquiry. Further, this category relates to kairos. Because we created the rubric early in the drafting process, students may not have felt comfortable using the rhetorical terminology because it was still relatively new to most of them.

An interesting thread in both classes is that mechanics becomes its own category rather than being connected to “style” as I had for the first inquiry. Students in both classes seemed to be focused on grammatical correctness, likely because it had been a major component of grading writing in their pasts. Most students—and indeed, many university faculty—see grammar as a
major indicator of writing quality. Though I wanted to resist this notion, I cannot deny that students will inevitably be asked to focus on such concerns in other writing contexts.

In short, collaboratively developing grading rubrics with the students whose writing will be graded is a worthwhile process that creates a conversation about writing and expectations that may not otherwise happen. The process also allows students to think more critically about the writing assignment’s requirements. While I felt that students’ writing benefited from the collaborative creation of the rubric, many students stated that they did not have a preference over being given a rubric by the instructor or being asked to contribute to its creation.

**Student Comments When Self-Assessing Using the Rubric**

I’ve discussed some of the challenges and successes of how bringing a discussion of rubrics into the classroom can help engage a dialogue with students about their writing. But what did it look like for students to actually rate themselves on the rubrics? What kind of comments do they leave? What did they have to say about the process of self-assessing? To help answer these questions, I turn back to the Inquiry 1 assignment and the rubric for it I previously discussed.

For our first inquiry, I expected students to feel challenged by the act of self-assessing. Peggy O’Neill (1998) explains that students may feel “inexperienced” and be “resistant to self-assessment and reflection” (p. 68). Although I do not believe students openly resisted the process, the types of comments students left on their rubrics show that students might be “uncomfortable in the role of evaluator” and need more practice in making self-assessment and reflection “meaningful” (O’Neill, 1998, p. 65). Because of this, I expected students to struggle or feel uncomfortable about completing the task of self-assessment at the beginning of the semester.

In order to better understand how students responded to the rubrics, I coded their responses for one of the criterion, Audience and Purpose, into a variety of descriptive categories to see the types of rhetorical moves students made in their comments. These categories represent themes of student response that emerged throughout the semester that can, interestingly, be narrowed in on in the first inquiry. Student comments were coded into six themes: (1) Showing Misunderstanding of the Criterion, (2) Making a Statement Without Context or Support, (3) Explaining Audience or Purpose, (4) Expressing Concerns, (5) Explaining Choices, and (6) Making Connections to Class Discussion. In a few cases, responses were coded multiple times.
because they fit more than one category. Table 1 shows the breakdown for how student responses were coded.

Table 1

*Themes in Student Comments on Inquiry 1 Audience and Purpose*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Comment Theme</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Comments&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing Misunderstanding of the Criterion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Statement Without Context or Support&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining Audience or Purpose</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing Concerns</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining Choices</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Connecting to Class Discussion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Audience and Purpose category was described on the rubric as: “There is a clear audience and purpose for the assignment, which inform the choices the author has made in terms of structure, organization, style, and mechanics.”

The Audience and Purpose category is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, students left a wide variety of responses to this criterion. Second, this criterion referenced other criterion on the rubric. While this showed the connectedness between criteria, it also led students to focus on issues of organization and style rather than discuss the audience and purpose. Finally, we discussed this criterion extensively in class and it appeared on every rubric throughout the semester. Audience and Purpose became a major concern for students, and, at the end of the semester, many of them indicated that they had grown most in this area.

**Showing Misunderstanding of the Criterion**

Five responses illustrated how students might have misunderstood what the criterion really asked them to think about. While we had discussed the criterion in class and its relationship to other criteria on the rubric, this specific category mentioned quite a few aspects of writing: audience, purpose, organization, structure, style, and mechanics. Because of this number

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<sup>7</sup> This includes both students who did not fill out a rubric at all and students who rated themselves but did not leave comments on the rubric.

<sup>8</sup> Because students were completing simultaneous reflections in which they might have provided some similar information, I did not dismiss a comment as “without context or support” without first checking to see if such context or support was provided in the student’s writer’s letter. In these three cases, there was no conversation between the rubric comments and the information in the writer’s letter.
of aspects, a few students seemed to narrow in on terms inappropriately. Rather than focusing on the audience and purpose and how it affects these other criteria, a few students focused on the other criteria themselves. For example, Kimberly wrote, “Paper has great style and structure but organization could be better” (Kimberly, Inquiry 1 Rubric). She focuses in on the end of the rubric description, and instead of addressing her audience and purpose, she makes some unsupported statements about her style, structure, and organization. How does the paper exhibit “great style,” and how was that style affected by the audience and purpose of the narrative?

Likewise, Cecilia said, “I think that my paper reflects on myself as a person and is organized, because I separated the paper by parts. The first part discusses how I act in the morning and as the paper moves on, talks about how I act in the night. The style of my paper is a lot different than most styles” (Cecilia, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Cecilia provides a lot of interesting information: she explains how she attempted to organize the paper and how she thinks that distinguishes her paper from other papers in the class. However, she doesn’t connect this explanation back to the ideas of audience or purpose, and it seems unclear how she is distinguishing between organization and style in her comment. Seeing how students misunderstood a criterion is an important facet of student-teacher dialogue, and without Kimberly and Cecilia’s comments, I may have never realized their misunderstandings of what I was evaluating for in terms of audience and purpose.

**Making Statements Without Context or Support**

Three responses showed that students were attempting to place an evaluation on their audience and purpose, but do so unsuccessfully. In these cases, students don’t provide enough information for me, the reader, to fully understand their evaluation. For example, Jonathan said “the clarity of my audience has hopefully progressed through my drafts, and while it may not be perfect it has certainly improved” (Inquiry 1 Rubric) while another student, Ricky, said simply “purpose is clear” (Ricky, Inquiry 1 Rubric). These kinds of statements are the beginnings of really valuable and interesting responses, but need more details in order to be helpful for the teacher or for the student when looking back at the rubrics after some time has passed. Yes, it’s important to know that Jonathan sees his audience as improved, but from what? And how did he make those improvements? In this case, there was no conversation between Jonathan’s writer’s letter and rubric comments—reading both of them together did not lead to any new insights or
understandings of the other text. Instead, these statements continued to be obscured by missing context.

**Explaining Audience or Purpose**

The most common way students responded to this criterion was to explain who their audience was or their purpose in writing to them. The majority of students focused on their audiences, and their responses illustrate the struggle that students tended to have when thinking about an audience for their narrative. In some cases, this showed that students had either ignored or forgotten the instruction not to limit their audience to the instructor or classmates, such as Dalton who said, “The audience I was writing to would be the teacher, who has questions and wants answers” (Dalton, Inquiry 1 Rubric). In other cases, students made quick statements about who they were writing to. Molly’s response is representative of the way students tried to explain their audience: “I thought I did an ok job of designating an audience since it pretty much appeals to any person who has or has come in contact with someone with an accent” (Molly, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Students who tried to explain their audience and purpose did not say much about how or why they chose or targeted that audience. Cassidy began to think about these relationships when she wrote, “My audience is my peers and those who can relate directly to my experience. My writing is influenced by this seeing as it is casual” (Cassidy, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Cassidy clearly understands the relationship between her audience and her style, but she does not go into more detail in order to explain the choices she made or provide details that illustrate where in the paper she used casual writing to reach an audience of peers. In the first assignment of the semester, students struggled with specificity when identifying audiences, which likely contributed to the challenge of discussing their purposes and rhetorical choices.

**Expressing Concerns**

Seven responses showed student concerns about the way they addressed their audience. These student comments helped provide a starting point for my responses to their evaluations as I was better able to understand the reasonings behind their ratings. For example, Abigail said, “I feel like I made it evident who my paper is geared towards. My only thing is that if an older person or someone who is not on facebook read the inquiry they may not know some of the terms” (Abigail, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Abigail *had* made it clear, both in her writing and her writer’s
letter, that her audience for her essay on Facebook users were people who used Facebook and were familiar with the interactions that take place on the social networking site. She doesn’t repeat that information on the rubric; instead, her response illustrates an uncertainty. What if someone who isn’t familiar with that language reads her paper? She is correct in stating that they would not understand exactly what she was talking about. Abigail’s response shows how audience can be a difficult topic for students, especially when they first begin to think critically about it. When reading these inquiries during the semester, I felt happy that I dissuaded students from saying “everybody can relate to this!” or seeing people in general as the audience for their papers, but Abigail’s comment reminds me that understandings of audience are fluid, and that it can be difficult to help students understand that it’s okay if there are people that might not understand their writing.

Similarly, Sara said “I feel like I always write and not to one specific person or group. I just write and I think it shows through in this piece” (Sara, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Here, Sara is admitting a “flaw”—that she doesn’t really think about her audience when she writes, and that it “shows through” in her narrative. It seems that more students did not express concerns because it can be seen as risky. Ellen Schendel and Peggy O’Neill (1999) explain that “self-assessments can serve a gatekeeping function because by participating in the assessment students may expose their own weaknesses” (p. 200), especially when students see the self-assessment as part of the grading process. But by exposing a recurring “weakness”—and a concept that Sara might not have previously identified as a weakness—Sara becomes more conscious of what she thinks about when she writes, which, hopefully, will help her alter this habit and improve the way she conceives of audience. If anything, I would encourage students to talk about their weaknesses in some form of reflection because a more productive dialogue can come from responding to such weaknesses with strategies for addressing that aspect of writing.

Explaining Choices

Five responses helped to explain the students’ choices in their writing, in varying amounts of detail. These students attempted to show a connection between their audience and the choices they had made that connected to it. These comments are especially helpful for both the student-author and me, the teacher reading their papers and rubrics because they create an awareness not just about the grading criterion but about how these students actually approached
the paper, as well. Serge wrote, “I used many details throughout my essay to try and explain events and help my audience get a better understanding of what was going on at that specific time” (Serge, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Although Serge does not specifically “evaluate” his audience here, he brings up two really important points that I was able to respond to. First, he mentions something he did (“used many details”). Then, he tells me why he did this: “to try and explain events and help my audience get a better understanding.” This comment shows that thinking about audience made Serge make specific choices and include specific elements of narratives. While Serge could, of course, be even more specific, this is a very strong type of comment to be made at the beginning of the semester.

Madison makes a similar comment, saying “Coming up with an audience was difficult, but once I had a target audience in mind, college students learning about different Englishes, I tried to better explain military terms and things that might not just be common sense” (Madison, Inquiry 1 Rubric). Madison wrote her narrative on the different languages she used while participating in a military leadership retreat for high school students, including the casual slang she used with her peers and the more formal language of speaking with a high-ranking general. Her comment shows how she made specific choices—like explaining military terminology—in order to help her audience understand something they might not be familiar with. Because she makes such a concrete statement about her rhetorical choices, I was better able to evaluate how well she had accomplished her goals.

**Making Connections with Class Discussion**

Two students’ comments had strong connections to discussions that had occurred in their respective classes. Nicole writes, “I chose not to write for an exact audience. However, I believe it is clear that I am writing to both figure skaters and non figure skaters because I use skating terminology but also explain it” (Nicole, Inquiry 1 Rubric). At first, this comment was a little frustrating because I felt like Nicole was being resistant by not choosing an audience. But as I thought about it more, I recalled an in-class activity where Nicole had volunteered to have her zero draft peer workshopped by the entire class. During that time, we had discussed her use of skating terminology and how it showed that she was probably writing to an audience of fellow figure skaters. As a class, we talked about the kinds of changes she might make if she wanted to target non-figure skaters—and I tried to emphasize that neither audience was “incorrect,” but that
it was a choice she could make. When Nicole says, “I chose not to write for an exact audience,” I think she is really saying she chose not to pick figure skaters over non-figure skaters, a dichotomy that was accidentally established during class discussion. While Nicole might have tried to describe her audience in other ways but did not, her idea of what the audience could be was probably limited by our full-class discussion of her paper.

Gretchen also makes a connection to our class discussions when she writes,

When I was writing, I feel like the audience wasn’t something I thought about a lot, so I think that shows a little through my narrative. I think my diction was affected by my knowledge of the audience, however. I knew my narrative wasn’t for a college application, so I used more relaxed words and sentence structure. I also think my style was influenced by the audience because I made some parts more informal as if I was talking in conversation, which ended out to work out well. (Gretchen, Inquiry 1 Rubric)

Gretchen’s comment about her narrative not being for a college application might seem “out in left field” to someone who had not participated in class discussion. However, Class 1 had identified the college application process as a time when they had written a narrative. In class, we discussed how they probably had a specific audience and purpose in mind for that narrative: trying to get the admissions committee to accept them. When Gretchen includes this comment, it illustrates how she is drawing on those previous experiences—both writing another narrative with a specific audience and our discussion in class—to understand how audience might have played a stronger role in the narrative she’s currently working on.

Gretchen and Nicole both illustrate how audience and purpose played a role in the construction of their rubric comments. The rubric served as a space to create dialogue between me and the student, and both of their comments show how that dialogue is rightfully affected by other contextual factors. In realizing these connections between class discussion and these two students’ comments, I understand the obstacles that an outsider’s perspective brings to understanding transfer. As Rebecca Nowacek (2011) was able to see connections in conversations with different teachers in the Interdisciplinary learning community she studied because she observed the class meetings, I am only able to understand Gretchen and Nicole’s comments as connected to class discussion because I was present in the class. If Gretchen were to write a narrative in a second course and make a comment about the college application essay genre, another instructor might see it as moving off-topic or a disconnection, resulting in
unsuccessful\textsuperscript{9} transfer. This fact illustrates a key issue with looking for transfer: as researchers, we see only certain kinds of evidence of transfer in students’ writing itself. Instructors in other courses at the university may need to be clued into students’ prior learning in order to understand that students may not be making completing disconnected comments about their writing.

\textbf{Growth throughout the Semester}

By the end of the semester, nearly all students commented that they had improved in writing to a specific audience throughout the course. This assertion is further supported by the way students wrote about their audiences. Many students were much more conscious about how they targeted an audience in their rubric comments at the end of the semester. This is especially clear for the several students that returned to their original narrative for their fourth project, in which they remediated a previous piece of writing from the class into a webtext.

For example, Nicole chose to work again with her inquiry about the languages she uses to discuss figure skating. Her discussion about her audience in both her writer’s letter and her rubric is quite clear. She designates “anyone who is interested in the sport of figuring skating or interested in finding out more about me as a person” as her audience, saying that “Because the website gives information about the sport, it can be an effective resource for those interested in learning what goes into becoming a successful figure skater” (Nicole, Inquiry 4 writer’s letter). On her rubric, her sense of audience really underscores her comments: “By approaching [this inquiry] in a ‘blog’ type of way, I think I was able to keep my audience engaged and interested in my topic. I like the ways in which I included pictures and video so that viewers can actually see my family, friends, coaches, and how they all relate to both skating and communication” (Nicole, Inquiry 4 Rubric). Nicole does not focus solely on how having an audience has affected her writing. Rather, her discussion here seems to focus on the strategies she took to address that audience. Since she saw herself as addressing someone who was “interested in learning what goes into becoming a successful figure skater,” Nicole tried to build a relationship with the viewer that would establish her as an authority on figure skating—both by the content of her inquiry and by the way she includes personal artifacts such as images and videos. By moving out

\textsuperscript{9} I prefer “unsuccessful” to other terms that are commonly used for this phenomenon, like “failed transfer” and “negative transfer.”
of the standard academic essay, Nicole is able to better connect to a well-chosen audience, which allows her to create a better understanding of what it means to target an audience.

**Student Comments about Using the Rubrics**

Throughout the semester, students seemed to grow in their abilities to rate their essays, and also seemed to understand why I was asking them to rate themselves using the rubric. In a survey conducted at the middle of the semester, the majority of students said that they were able to assess their own writing and critical thinking. Thirty-four of 42 (80.9%) students said they agreed to some degree, while only eight students (19%) said they disagreed to some degree. Additionally, the majority of students agreed that using the rubrics to evaluate their work was helpful. Figure 4 shows how students enrolled in these two classes responded when asked if using the rubrics was helpful for them:

![Figure 4. Student Responses about Helpfulness of Rubrics. This figure shows the breakdown of student responses in percent about using rubrics to self-assess their own work.](image)

At this point in the semester, students had completed two of the major projects of the class and were in the process of working on the third inquiry. After only evaluating their writing using the rubrics twice, almost 70 percent of the students who completed the survey (n=42) said they agreed to some degree that using the rubrics was helpful.

Although less common, discussion of the rubrics sometimes came up throughout the drafting process. For instance, one student explained a moment of clarity he had about the
rubrics on his Inquiry 2 rubric. Evan wrote, “Looking at the rubric while writing really helped to keep my paper to stay focused on the analysis. It is a tool that I have neglected for a while but found it very beneficial for this paper and will use the rubric in papers to come” (Evan, Inquiry 2 Rubric). This response shows how Evan’s understanding of the purpose of the rubric changed throughout the course, and corroborates one of Adsanatham’s (2012) findings that grading criteria can be used at multiple points in the process successfully. Although I tried to encourage students to use the rubric while drafting and revising, Evan shows us how an “a-ha!” moment might be more beneficial in getting students to understand the varied uses of the rubric. In this sense, the student discovered for himself another way the rubric could be used, hopefully making future rubrics more meaningful to him.

After the semester, I interviewed four students to ask about their experiences in English 111. Students had a variety of responses when asked if they thought using the rubrics was helpful and if they had advice for other students who had to use the rubrics or teachers who planned to use them in their classes.

Colleen, a student enrolled in Class 2 and planning to major in the School of Creative Arts, said “Um, I think that was another confidence boost, just like looking at the prompt and figuring out what you were going to do and then um just going from there, I guess. And then once you’re writing a paper you’re looking back at the rubric and figuring out what you need to be doing if you get off track or. . .it helps to explain when you go to the Howe Writing Center and you show them the rubric, they’re like, okay, well this is what you need to do to fix your paper. And then you can attack it from that direction.” Here, Colleen hits on a number of interesting points about the uses of the rubric. First, she explains how it helps in “figuring out what you were going to do” and how “once you’re writing a paper you’re looking back at the rubric and figuring out what you need to be doing if you get off track.” These two statements show that, at least for Colleen, the rubrics function as “a heuristic, a planning guide, a revision checklist, a list of standards to achieve,” four of the five uses for rubrics Adsanatham (2012) found in his research of his own English 111 class (p. 164). Additionally, Colleen shows how the rubric can help when talking about the paper with others. Colleen explained that she often visited the writing center multiple times, especially early in the semester. The rubrics helped her to discuss the requirements of the paper with her consultant, and in some cases they collaboratively came up with plans for drafting or revising.
Likewise, Marisol, a student in Class 1 planning to major in communications, had interesting comments about how she used the rubrics, explaining “Rubrics are life for me. Because sometimes I get so confused on what I’m doing, and then if I look back at the rubric, it’s like point-blank of what I need to do so that’s really helpful. I liked the rubrics.” She also explained how some rubrics are more effective than others at helping her as a student:

Um, in my feminist theory class, we have a rubric but sometimes I get frustrated with rubrics that aren’t to the point, and are just paragraphs and paragraphs for what each part needs to do, and I like it better when it’s like ‘this is what you need,’ ‘this is what you have to include,’ ‘you have to have this many references and you have to have this format’ like cut and dry. It’s more helpful.

Marisol seems to be saying that rubrics are helpful as long as they are clear and concise, two issues she was concerned with in her own writing throughout the semester. It seems that this clarity makes it easier for Marisol (and perhaps other students) to use the rubric as a planning guide or checklist. In fact, it seems that Marisol used the rubrics in these ways throughout the semester.

**Implications for Classroom Use**

**Collaboratively Creating Rubrics**

Although there were certainly struggles with creating rubrics collaboratively, I found it benefited my classes in a number of ways. First, it opened up a place for us to talk about and negotiate the vocabulary we needed to talk about our writing. Over the course of the semester, I realized that vocabulary is one aspect of writing that different fields tend to take for granted, and understanding the differences in vocabulary can be a struggle for students. For example, one student asked me during a conference if there was a difference between a bibliography and a works cited. Later, in class, I had to explain my choices in requiring MLA format, and we were able to discuss how “conventions” vary depending on the field in which we are writing. If we had not spent so much time talking about vocabulary—like style v. tone v. voice—that student might not have even thought to ask about the differences between the bibliography and the works cited. The discussions we had creating the rubrics seemed to give students the confidence to speak up in class, to ask questions, to make authoritative statements about writing.
Students knew and understood the criteria as they were drafting, so they were able to incorporate the requirements into the paper from the outset, rather than making last-minute revisions based on grading criteria given to them at the end of the writing process. Having terminology for the criteria is a first step in metacognition, as learners now have the vocabulary needed to discuss a particular writing assignment. Additionally, that students were able to use these rubrics at various stages in the writing process supports a similar finding by Adsanatham (2012). Although discussing the criteria together as a class did not always mean students and I understood each of the terms in the same way, having a common terminology was a starting point for understanding writing assignments and writing expectations.

**Student Self-Assessment of Rubrics**

Students overall seemed to find the act of assessing using the rubric helpful, and I strongly recommend incorporating such strategies into any class that requires writing. In my first year of teaching, I was not comfortable developing the rubrics with students, but I do wish that I had asked students to formally assess themselves on the rubrics. At the end of the Fall 2012 semester, I noticed that students and I were beginning to more often refer to the rubrics in classes and using the language of the rubrics to talk about writing during class. This practice can help students to identify and understand writing expectations in other courses, as well.

Adam, a business student enrolled in Class 2, explained that he “wasn’t a huge fan” of the rubrics, mainly because “it just like kinda got repetitive [. . .] cause I know I’m not great at like organizing my ideas and that’s one of the like tough things for me, so like I remember repetitively going through it and I would also put down like not a great score for organizing ideas and I would always put I’m just not really great at organizing my ideas and stuff like that” (personal interview). As Adam’s issue here illustrates, the rubric may be limited as a planning guide or an aid for writing if students are unsure of the next step to take after evaluating. A more interactive rubric may be helpful in this case. Rather than students simply rating a criterion and moving on, it would be helpful to provide references to useful sources. In this instance, the description for the criterion “organization” could include not only an explanation of expectations, but information about where to find help or assistance if the student rates that criterion low. Such references could be to one of many online writing lab websites, such as the Purdue OWL; to a textbook assigned in the course; or to similar materials found freely on the
web. Such explanatory materials could help prevent students who are struggling with a given factor by providing them with tools to improve that aspect of their writing.

It is also essential to provide sufficient time for using the rubrics. In this study, I asked students to rate their drafts and turn in the completed rubric with the draft that would be graded. Because of this timing, I suspect many students put off completing the rubric until the end of the writing process, thereby making it more difficult for students to use the rubric in any way other than a tool for evaluation. It would be more effective, I suspect, to have students rate and comment on their peer feedback drafts before the peer review session. It may also be helpful to have students comment on the rubrics during peer feedback sessions, rather than to simply use them as a guide for the responses. Lindblom-Ylanne, Pihlajamaki, and Kotkas (2006) found that law students participating in a study on the accuracy of self-, peer-, and instructor-evaluation felt peer assessments were “fair” when conducted using an evaluative rubric that was also used for student self-assessment and instructor assessment. By using a single rubric for a variety of individuals to evaluate a given piece of writing, we will further help to demystify the grading process, decenter the teacher as evaluator, and create a common classroom language for discussing writing.
Chapter 3

Reflect, Project, Imagine: A Heuristic for Locating Opportunities for Transfer

Two of the most common suggestions for aiding effective transfer of writing-related knowledge are reflection and metacognition (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2007; Rounsaville, Golberg, & Bawarshi, 2008; Nelms & Dively, 2007; Jarratt, Mack, Sartor & Watson, 2009). However, simply having reflective activities does not guarantee that students will develop metacognitive language. In fact, Miami’s composition program already integrates reflective writing to bolster student knowledge about what they have learned. But as an instructor teaching “writers’ letters,” I realized that students either excelled or fell significantly short of my expectations, writing letters that were shallow, unengaged, and, ultimately, unhelpful for either the student or the instructor/reader of the paper. In some ways, the “writer’s letter” became ambiguous for both me and my students, and coming into this project I knew that I needed to carefully reconsider both my purposes for assigning and the uses I had for these letters that accompanied students’ final drafts of papers. I first determined that writers’ letters could not be the students’ only practice or engagement with reflection throughout the semester, especially when the final project of the class is an “engaged reflection” that encompasses the entire course.

To help students develop reflective skills over time, I developed an activity that I believed would allow students to foster reflective skills by engaging Yancey’s (1998) various notions of reflection. Specifically, I wanted to tap into the idea of “constructive reflection,” which she defines as “the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events, and the associated texts” (Yancey, 1998, p. 14). This form of reflection seems to be the most difficult to incorporate into a class: it takes time because it has a “shaping effect,” and it is less constrained by time or textual limits because it occurs “between and among composing events” (Yancey, 1998, p. 14). However, I was less concerned with the shaping of a “multi-selved, multi-voiced identity” and more concerned with incorporating reflection that occurs “between and among composing events.” Often, students will complete an assignment, turn it in, and be “done”—never thinking about it again. But if we see writing—and learning to write—as a recursive activity rather than a sequential one, this student mindset needs to be changed (a task, of course, which is easier said than done). I wanted to try to engage students’ prior knowledge in order for this activity to
specifically help students with the act of transfer. By showing how class activities are not isolated, but take place within the students’ learning trajectory and various contexts, I wanted to show that the learning that would occur in the course is really developmental in the sense that it isn’t a “fresh start” but rather continues to build on the learning that came before it. This understanding is particularly important to understanding transfer because it prevents us from looking for simple “skill” transfer and instead moves into thinking about student generalization, recontextualization (Wardle, 2007), and/or integration (Nowacek, 2011) of knowledge. Further, I needed an activity that could model what I expected students to do in my class and what I hoped they would be able to continue later in their writing lives. I believe we must model with/for students what we mean when we say “transfer”—otherwise students may not understand what we want them to do if we are explicitly attempting to teach for transfer. Further, I wanted to value students’ prior learning, and that meant I needed to know what they knew and if they thought it was applicable to the types of projects we were completing in class. What resulted from these desires was a three-step activity that engages students’ previous, current, and future learning: Reflect, Project, Imagine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFLECT</th>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>IMAGINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is this assignment like previous writing assignments you’ve had? What skills do you already have for this assignment?</td>
<td>What will you struggle with in this assignment? What is new or interesting? What are you excited about learning through this project?</td>
<td>What tools will you learn through this project that you can use elsewhere? What contexts exist where you might use similar analysis, critical thinking, or writing strategies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5. Reflect, Project, Imagine Heuristic.** This heuristic is designed to help students understand their writing assignments and to promote backward- and forward-reaching transfer.

The Reflect, Project, Imagine (RPI) heuristic is designed to engage in a number of thought processes that should help promote both backward- and forward-reaching transfer (Salomon & Perkins, 1988). Using the RPI heuristic, students were first asked to reflect on how
the new writing project was similar to previous writing projects they had completed. This step specifically required students to recall writing projects they had previously completed in an effort to get them to see connections between work they had already done and new tasks. Then, students were asked to project what they thought they might struggle with or what was new or exciting in the project. This step was intended to help students see what might be difficult in the project so that they could later reflect on those same issues or concerns. Finally, students were asked to imagine where they might use such skills, tools, or writing strategies in the future, whether academically, professionally, or personally. This step was intended to help students see how a current project may relate to future projects, with the hope that students will remember these connections when they encounter new projects in the future. Overall, this activity was planned not only to help students integrate previous learning while in the FYC classroom, but also to help students be in the practice of reflecting in initial writing stages. Although students may not be asked to fill out an RPI form in other writing contexts, it may be helpful for them to engage in similar reflective thought processes as they begin new writing tasks.

As an instructor, I found using the RPI activities to be an important part of starting each inquiry. These heuristics helped me to understand my students’ writing backgrounds and helped me to “run interference” on misunderstandings about the assignment. For example, our Inquiry 2 project asked students to analyze two texts on the same topic. In their RPIs, numerous students translated this to “two texts with different opinions on the same topic.” Students were clearly drawing on previous writing assignments, but here this transfer was unsuccessful because it unnecessarily limited their ideas about “texts” in a way that could be detrimental for their papers. After seeing this as a recurring theme, I spent time in class explaining that, while they were welcome to bring two texts with opposing viewpoints into their work, it might be more difficult to write a rhetorical comparison of the two. It would actually be easier (and perhaps more beneficial) to compare two texts whose arguments were similar so that they would focus on how the authors were making their arguments, not what the arguments actually were.

RPI activities were especially helpful when it came to understanding what my students understood: about their writing, about writing in general, and about assignments. Like the rubrics, the RPI heuristics became a generative space for inquiries and dialogue, and they became spaces to understand how students talk about their writing and writing abilities.
Examples of RPIs Generated in Whole-Class Discussion

Students completed the RPIs with a range of thoroughness and complexity. A number of interesting themes arise, however, when looking at student uses. It is especially interesting to understand what students bring with them to the inquiry and how they identify what they already know that could be applicable to this new writing situation. What does it look like when students attempt to perform backward- and forward-reaching transfer?

For Inquiry 1, we completed the RPI activity during whole-class discussion. A benefit of this is that I was able to model the kinds of thinking I expected of students, showing them that we can draw connections between our ENG 111 activities and other classes at the university as well as the writing we do outside of the university. A second benefit (which also leads to a bit of a limitation) is that numerous students contribute to a single document, and what one student suggests may be something another student hadn’t thought of. Such dialoguing around the RPI functions as a brainstorming session about transfer, wherein students illuminate opportunities for transfer for each other in addition to themselves. This might also be a limitation, however. We cannot assume that all students come from the same writing backgrounds, and what one student identifies as prior knowledge might not be shared by another student. While collaboration is important, it might cause some students to feel more overwhelmed or underprepared for the assignment, especially if they do not share the background the RPI assumes. Figures 6 and 7 show the completed RPI heuristics for Class 1 and Class 2, respectively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFLECT</th>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>IMAGINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is this assignment like previous writing assignments you’ve had? What skills do you already have for this assignment?</td>
<td>What will you struggle with in this assignment? What is new or interesting? What are you excited about learning through this project?</td>
<td>What tools will you learn through this project that you can use elsewhere? What contexts exist where you might use similar analysis, critical thinking, or writing strategies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

--like personal statement: personal experience  
--differences between writing & speaking voice and how they sound different  
--similar to a research paper (you’ll have to quote yourself)  
---analysis is kind of like research  
--compare/contrast essay  
--MLA (used it before)  
--similar to writing & creative works we read  
--similar to creative writing assignments  
--similar to journaling  
--Similar to lit analysis:  
--making connections between things  
--drawing conclusions about the story  
--identifying themes & other stylistic features  

--struggle with making a direct connection between different types of Englishes  
--struggle to reach page limit  
--writer’s block  
--finding an audience who cares about the situation  
--it’s exciting to not have to use a text  
--learn the type of English you use isn’t proper for certain situations/people  
--new perspectives on communication with others  

--in the future, we might interview someone who speaks a different type of English than us  
--we will reflect on everything we do in this class  
Narrative  
--cover letter on a resume  
--texting friends to tell them about a day  
--blogging  
--speech at a friend’s wedding  
--eulogy  
Analysis  
--ENG 112 (if required)  
--nearly all of our majors will require it  
--leasing an apartment or buying a vehicle

Figure 6. Class 1’s Completed Inquiry 1 RPI.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFLECT</th>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>IMAGINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is this assignment like previous writing assignments you’ve had? What skills do you already have for this assignment?</td>
<td>What will you struggle with in this assignment? What is new or interesting? What are you excited about learning through this project?</td>
<td>What tools will you learn through this project that you can use elsewhere? What contexts exist where you might use similar analysis, critical thinking, or writing strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Struggle:</td>
<td>--have to put selves in other people’s shoes, can be helpful when communicating with other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--freewrite from Tuesday</td>
<td>--finding the different English</td>
<td>--job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--college application/personal essays</td>
<td>--filling 5-6 pages</td>
<td>--babysitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--dialogue like in a short story or novel</td>
<td>--don’t know teacher expectations</td>
<td>--different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--journals</td>
<td>--we’re a new genre (writer’s letter)</td>
<td>--if communication is failing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--articles in a magazine</td>
<td>--Haven’t written a formal essay in a while (AP courses only did in-class)</td>
<td>--new audiences at the college all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--most novels or short stories</td>
<td>New:</td>
<td>--everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>--writing essay from a different angle/approach</td>
<td>--small problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--English: response to a novel or text, “critical lens essays,” Open-ended questions prepping for standardized/placement tests, quote analysis in class, research papers for history,</td>
<td>--not having a super-strict prompt</td>
<td>--looking at marketing or advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn:</td>
<td>--first college paper!</td>
<td>--researching for any subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--How often we switch “Englishes” without realizing</td>
<td>--getting to include personal experiences</td>
<td>--really any major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--understand perspectives and interactions of others</td>
<td>Learn about selves as writers</td>
<td>--contracts, buying a house, decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--gain some insight into what other people are thinking.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7. Class 2’s Completed Inquiry 1 RPI.**

From both of these activities, we can see that students have a number of prior experiences that prepare them for writing a reflective narrative in which they analyze (a selection of) their different Englishes. Students in Class 1 pointed out that this assignment might be similar to the personal statement needed for college applications because it requires personal experiences. They also felt creative writing assignments they had completed in the past or journaling would be useful to this project. Interestingly, they said this assignment might be like a research paper because “you’ll have to quote yourself.” At a more basic level, these students pointed out that many of them had already used MLA before, so they wouldn’t have to worry too much about formatting.
What is most interesting on Class 1’s RPI is the possibilities for transfer that they identify. In thinking about where they might use these skills or strategies again, the students saw connections between what might seem like some very disparate contexts, illustrating that, at least during full-class discussion, high-road transfer is a possibility. Students said they might use the narrative skills they developed while writing a cover letter for a resume, texting friends, blogging, or giving a speech at a wedding or a funeral. I want to note that none of the contexts in which they predict they will use narrative strategies are academic. Only the résumé cover letter feels like a professional context where students might use a narrative. Otherwise, students see only non-academic situations where they might later need to tell a narrative. This may underscore the findings of Bergman and Zepernick (2007), in which students treated the writing completed in FYC courses as “fluff” or somehow different from the writing they would use elsewhere (p. 125). If students do not perceive connections to other academic contexts in a course specifically designed to teach for transfer, does that mean students will not take that particular assignment as seriously? The current study cannot, of course, address this question. As an instructor, I might have helped to identify other academic contexts where students might encounter narrative or need to write one; however, even I struggle to think of such rhetorical situations, beyond creative writing or literary journalism courses. More understandings of the types of writing students complete at the university would certainly aid this project in identifying opportunities for transfer of writing-related knowledge.

Class 2’s RPI yields slightly different results. These students identified genres where they had encountered narrative before, whether they were writing or reading. First, they identify an activity we had previously completed in class as a time when they had used narrative, as well as the college application essay or personal statement. Then, students identified where they had actually analyzed something: responding to a novel or text, writing what a student referred to as a “critical lens essay,” and writing research papers for history classes. Class 2, however, identified some really interesting rhetorical situations where they might use what they learned through this essay in the future, including jobs or when interacting with people of different cultures. They also said this analysis would be helpful “if communication is failing,” so they at least began to recognize how understanding different Englishes would help them to communicate with others and, more importantly, improve that communication. Likewise, understanding how to adapt to and learn an unfamiliar English (or language in general) could help them “put
[them]selves in other people’s shoes” in order to better communicate with them, as well as in a number of legal environments, such as signing a contract. Whereas Class 1 focused more on the genre they would be writing to imagine new contexts, Class 2 seemed to focus more on the purpose of the assignment (to learn something about how we use different Englishes) and when and why that might be helpful to them in their futures. By focusing on purpose, students in Class 2 seemed to make more complex connections between the critical thinking strategies they would use to write this assignment and other rhetorical situations where they might draw on those strategies. Their insights suggest that purpose is a fundamental aspect of understanding the rhetorical situation and rhetorical choices an individual might make. Further, their responses to this activity illustrates that students are able to identify potential aspects for high-road transfer by engaging in discussion that asks them to focus on strategies that are used to complete a specific task or create a specific understanding.

Quantitative Discourse Analysis of RPIs Completed by Individual Students

Students “Reflect” at the beginning of Inquiry 3

These collaboratively completed RPI heuristics provide interesting insights into the ways students thought about the Inquiry 1 assignment, but looking at individually-completed RPI heuristics yields interesting themes for reflection and teaching for transfer. I will now turn to an analysis of RPIs completed for the third inquiry of our course in order to better understand how students reflect on previous writing and identify potential sites of transfer. Although the RPI activity cannot definitively ensure that students will transfer prior knowledge to the current situation or what they are learning now to future situations, the activity does illustrate some interesting trends for understanding how students approach new assignments. Because our Inquiry 2 (rhetorical analysis) taught writing strategies that would be helpful for completing the Inquiry 3 (public argument) assignment, it is particularly interesting to see if and how students are identifying connections between these two projects completed back-to-back in the same course on their own. While each inquiry in the courses I teach is designed to build off of the previous inquiry in some way—and this is often explicitly stated in the assignment sheet—looking at the types of comments students leave on the RPI can show when this is (or isn’t) evident to them.
Our Inquiry 3 assignment was very obviously connected to Inquiry 2. For Inquiry 3, students were asked to choose a controversial topic or issue being covered in the media, research the issue to find multiple perspectives on the topic, and then write an argument (or arguments) about the issue by either completing a research paper or writing two letters to audiences that could actually do something to “resolve” the issue (See Appendix E for the full Inquiry 3 assignment sheet). In Inquiry 2, students had been asked to choose two texts on a topic and analyze them for rhetorical effectiveness—a strategy that would be necessary to complete the research portion of the Inquiry 3 assignment. Because this connection between rhetorical analysis and conducting research feels rather apparent, I coded student comments in the “Reflect” column of their Inquiry 3 RPI heuristic to understand whether or not they had focused on this connection, and if there were other, prior writing experiences that students had brought up. First, I coded students’ comments into one of two overarching categories: students that “listed skills” or students that “listed specific assignments or rhetorical situations.” I then coded individual comments into five categories that seemed to arise across multiple student RPIs: (1) Comments about Connections to Inquiry 2; (2) Comments about Using Rhetorical Techniques; (3) Comments about Targeting an Audience; (4) Comments about Prior Experiences with Research; and (5) Comments about Prior Experiences with Argumentative/Persuasive Writing. Table 2 shows the number of comments coded into each category.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Percent of Total Coded Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections to Inquiry 2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Rhetorical Techniques</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to Target an Audience</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Prior Experiences with Research</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Prior Experiences with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative/Persuasive Writing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Speaking generally: skills v. specific assignments & rhetorical situations.** In thinking about the Inquiry 3 RPI, I first wanted to understand how students had approached the activity.

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10 This column asks students, “How is this assignment like previous writing assignments you’ve had? What skills do you already have for this assignment?”
This was the first time they completed the RPI heuristic individually. Of the 41 students included in the sample, 40 completed the Inquiry 3 RPI. Of those students, 28 completed the “reflect” column by listing skills they felt they had or would need for the assignment. Twelve students, on the other hand, listed specific assignments or rhetorical situations that might prepare them for this assignment.

There was great variety in the ways that students listed skills they already had or would need for the assignment. Many of these 28 students focused on skills that had been developed throughout the ENG 111 course, which I will discuss in more detail in the rest of the analysis. However, some students’ “Reflect” columns look more like a list of buzzwords, including only the names of skills that would be required of them in this assignment, such as Maddox’s list:

- Have to analyze texts
- Give different perspectives
- Use research
- Done in MLA format
- Knowledge of rhetorical techniques
- Paper needs to be completed double spaced
- Work Sited Page
- Cited sources
- Create drafts
- Peer reviews
- Editing[.] (Maddox, Inquiry 3 RPI)

While this listing may be helpful for students to understand what the assignment is asking them to do, simply listing skills may not help these students see connections between past writing assignments and the current project, and it does little to help me see what aspects of the assignment students already feel prepared for.

Likewise, there was some variance in the ways students mentioned specific assignments or rhetorical situations that were similar to the current project. Of the twelve students in this category, seven mentioned an ambiguous “research paper” that they had written at some point in their high school career. One student said this was like the “current event research paper” which

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11 Although students were told to complete the Inquiry 3 RPI individually, there were a few instances of students completing it in pairs or small groups. The RPI was assigned as out-of-class homework with another activity they could work on in small groups. However, the majority of students did complete this activity on their own.
was a “recurring essay prompt since elementary school.” One student said she had written a paper in which she “showed both sides” of an issue in high school. Although a bit vague, each of these comments show that students expect their previously-learned research skills to still be applicable now that they are in college. These last two comments, about the “current event research paper” and a paper that “showed both sides” of an issue, also suggest that students are carrying with them conceptions of the assignment and research itself that may not translate into the actual Inquiry 3 project. For example, the Public Argument inquiry does ask students to research a current topic, issue, or concern, but I would be quite hesitant to frame it as a “current event research paper”—a genre that seems limited to acts of researching, learning, and regurgitating information, not actively engaging in a topic and the discourses surrounding it. Renea’s comment about showing “both sides” of an issue might also raise concern when completing research for this project. A major outcome of this assignment is understanding that there are multiple perspectives on an issue rather than seeing controversies as having “two sides” that are simply for or against whatever the issue or concern is. Many students come to this project thinking that they will either be for or against a topic, like legalizing marijuana or the ongoing war in Iraq. Most issues are more complex than this binary thinking, and other issues students ultimately find interesting can’t be fit into a binary. Renea’s comment illustrates a major concern when teaching research on a public argument, especially when students feel like they have already learned how to do this.

Three other students that had mentioned specific assignments also illustrate the kinds of knowledge that students bring with them and how they understand connections between rhetorical situations. For example, Evan said that this assignment was similar to a paper he was writing on George Washington in a history class. While Evan doesn’t go into many details—for example, I’m curious about how these two assignments are really similar—his comment shows another context besides their high school writing experiences where students are asked to do research. It is also likely that the ways he was completing research and then using it in his paper are also similar—following early notions of transfer, we might expect source documentation and quote integration to be two learned skills that easily transfer between contexts with minimal effort (although this assumption does not speak to disciplinary differences in what it means to do research and style guides that dominate the particular fields, I think it is important to value students finding these connections on their own). Another student, Harriett, listed four different
assignments she had completed in the past, including a paper on Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson and a health class presentation on a specific disease. Like Evan, Harriett shows the very different kinds of research that students could be asked to do at different points in their academic careers. All of these various experiences will contribute to a student’s performance on a given research assignment, even if they do not seem immediately connected.

Finally, Victor gave extensive detail about an assignment he had completed in the past, saying “I had to choose a design for a robot and choose which one would be more effective in producing cars for Ford. This was important to research because the better robot would increase income for the company and the buyers would have a well-built car.” This comment is interesting for a number of reasons: first, Victor recalls very specific details about the assignment and its purpose, indicating a high level of engagement with it. Second, he doesn’t classify this particular assignment either as a research project or an argumentative paper, though clearly both strategies are required in this assignment, showing that he may be connecting these writing projects based on skills rather than genres. Third, his comments show an awareness about the purpose of assignments and the implications of doing research, two factors that are very important to the Inquiry 3 project. Victor’s specific details about this assignment illustrate some very clear connections between what he has been asked to do in the past and the assignment he will now be completing.

By creating these two categories, I do not want to imply that students who listed specific assignments or rhetorical situations better explained themselves than students who listed skills when asked to reflect on previous writing assignments. This simply isn’t the case: students who said they had completed a research paper in high school could be engaging with the activity less than students who listed three or four skills they already have that they felt would prepare them for this assignment. What this particular aspect of the analysis shows is that there are multiple ways to approach the RPI sheet, and helps me to understand the comments students make and how to help them make better comments that will more effectively engage their prior knowledge. Indeed, it is difficult (if pointless) to attempt to say that one type of comment is more beneficial to students than others. However, it does seem to me that this activity will be most helpful when both types of responses are elicited. Without a list of strategies needed, it may be difficult to accurately reflect on them. Listing a series of assignments may be important for the student, but the more robust explanation that Victor provided was most helpful for me, as an instructor, to
understand the connections he was making between his previous and current research assignments. It may be helpful for the instructor to prepare a list of strategies that will aid students in writing the assignment ahead of time that students could refer to while working on the RPI. Or, students and instructors might collaboratively develop this list of strategies together, helping to model effective strategies for understanding assignment sheets.

**Connections to Inquiry 2.** Twenty-five comments showed students making connections between the new, Inquiry 3 assignment, and the Inquiry 2 assignment they had just completed. Making up 25.8% of the coded comments, this actually feels rather low considering the assignment sheet for inquiry 3 began with: “Inquiry 3 will build on a number of ideas we’ve been working on this semester: targeting a specific audience, writing with a meaningful purpose, using rhetorical strategies to understand texts, and building arguments of our own.” All four of these ideas had been tasked of students for Inquiry 2, as well. Although many of these ideas get mentioned in some capacity on the RPI heuristic, I was surprised not to see more explicit connections to Inquiry 2 come up. It might be that students did not want to point out connections that were explained on the Inquiry 3 assignment sheet, or students may be demonstrating their knowledge of the instructor as the audience for this heuristic and assuming that I already know these connections. While I want to believe that many of my students were considering the audience of their Inquiry 3 RPI, it seems more likely that students simply did not think about these potential connections to Inquiry 2 while completing the RPI. That being said, the students who did comment on the similarities between Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3 brought up several key points that build on connections I might have later explained to students.

Nineteen of the comments included a reference to understanding rhetoric, using rhetorical analysis, or analyzing/understanding texts. These three strategies were heavily emphasized during Inquiry 2, so it does not surprise me that they are the most common connections students see between inquiries. Student comments about these ideas ranged from “using rhetorical strategies to understand texts” (Ricky, Inquiry 3 RPI) and “For Inquiry 2, we worked on analyzing articles” (Jenny, Inquiry 3 RPI) to “This assignment will encourage us to look at rhetorical strategies used by the writers of different sources, which we did on the last assignment” (Madison, Inquiry 3 RPI) and “One must analyze a particular article, identifying arguments, facts, and opinions such as Inquiry 2” (Matt, Inquiry 3 RPI). These comments, and
the many like them, show that students understood that rhetorical analysis was going to be a key component of the assignment, especially in doing research and coming up with their argument.

Other students mentioned different connections to Inquiry 2 that I did not emphasize—and connections that might differ depending on the particular texts students chose for their Inquiry 2 project. Gretchen, for example, wrote “Similar to paper I just wrote (I addressed a controversy in Inquiry 2).” For Gretchen, the process of researching and evaluating sources would be much like the process of rhetorically analyzing and comparing two sources because she had opted to work with texts centered on a controversy for Inquiry 2. Although the topic she chose for Inquiry 3—Ohio’s “Heartbeat Bill”—seems quite different from her Inquiry 2 topic (texting and driving), she points out that she already had some familiarity with thinking about current controversies. This connection could not exist for students who had rhetorically analyzed a different type of text in Inquiry 2, such as product commercials.

Another student, Kellie, saw connections to the idea of argument and persuasion, saying “It is like our persuasive essays, where we had to analyze and use examples to support our argument.” Examples were a prominent part of the Inquiry 2 assignment, and making that connection shows that Kellie is thinking not only about the research aspect, but what she will be asked to do for the final products of the Inquiry 3 assignment. She recognizes that using examples to support her argument is going to be important for an assignment asking them to engage in a public controversy, regardless of the genre choices students made for Inquiry 3.12

Finally, Evan wrote that the assignment was “A little similar to the last paper but now we’re picking a side.” Like some of the problematic prior knowledge about having different perspectives on a single topic mentioned above, Evan, at least at the beginning of this assignment, sees the argument portion as “picking a side.” But what is interesting here is that he seems to be making a comment about the differences in purposes of Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3. In Inquiry 2, I explained (and had to emphasize quite heavily) that the argument they needed to make was not about what the texts were saying but how the texts were saying it. Evan seems to be pointing out that this assignment actually shifts the focus from the how to the what of the articles they look at. While it will be important for students to know how a text is functioning while doing the research portion, the arguments the texts are making are actually very important

12 It’s important to note that, at the time students completed the RPI, they had not been asked to make a firm decision about Inquiry 3B genres yet, so many of the students reference both genre options in their RPI.
for this inquiry. Evan may have trouble articulating this difference, but that seems to be how Inquiry 3 could be construed as different from Inquiry 2 by “picking a side.”

Although I said earlier that it troubles me that more students didn’t mention these connections between assignments, the students that did identify the similarities between Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3 are keen in their descriptions of what they would need to be able to do. And, some students bring up different connections than I had anticipated. I also think it is possible that students may not have felt the need to elaborate on all of the strategies that were used in Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3. Because the instructor and classmates are really the audience for the RPI assignment, some students might have felt like the connections were obvious and didn’t need to be restated. However, I think it is more likely that students simply didn’t think much about the connections between these assignments—even ones that were pointed out to them—because students tend to view writing as a “one-and-done” activity: they engage the process that is required of them, turn in the assignment, and stop thinking about it. Although the RPI is intended to help facilitate their thinking about past assignments, it is possible that some students simply did not engage this low-stakes writing well enough for it to be helpful.

**Comments about prior experiences with research.** Students commented the most about previous research they had completed, including some of the examples discussed about specific research assignments above. Forty of the comments (41.2%) were about previous research students had done or research skills they felt they already had. Many students had been asked to do research at some points in their lives. What is most interesting, though, is the way students talk about that research and how it prepares them for the assignment.

Some students made comments that could lead to unsuccessful transfer from high school or, at the very least, could seriously inhibit student learning in the ENG 111 course. One student said, “I know how to do research for a topic” (Austin) another said “Some skills that I believe I already have for this assignment is the fact that I know how and where to look up creditable sources” (Dalton). Both of these comments show how students might stick solely to research strategies they already know. Levi’s comment seems to sum up this concern: “I have had to write a research paper in High School every single year. I am very familiar with the whole composing process and how to gather information.” This comment both feels like a lamentation and a statement of confidence. First, Levi says he’s done a research paper “every single year,” a phrasing that seems to indicate that the research paper is old news and nothing new. Then, Levi
shows confidence by saying he is “very familiar with the whole composing process and how to gather information.” As an instructor, I do not doubt that students are familiar with doing research and that they already have a lot of tools at their disposal. However, I also know from teaching this assignment in the past that research ability is something that improves over time, and that students will need to learn new ideas about research in order to succeed in this assignment (and assignments they encounter in the future). While I want to value that students already know how to do research (to an extent), these comments illustrate prevalent attitudes in the classroom. Students may be hesitant to engage learning about the research process because they feel that it is something they have already learned how to do. It is also interesting to note that many of these students also commented later in the semester that their research strategies had changed. Austin, for example, wrote his final reflection on how he learned to take more time to research through the class, saying, “Finding sources used to take me about fifteen minutes, but for Inquiry 3 it took me a few days to find good, appropriate sources to use in my paper. My writing from one inquiry to the next immediately improved because of the extra work I put into my research” (Austin, Inquiry 5 Final Reflection). Although students might have initially felt like they already knew how to do research, many of them were able to develop more complex research practices than simply using the first Google search results.

**Prior experiences with argumentative or persuasive writing.** Although considerably fewer than the number of comments mentioning experiences with research, twelve comments were about student familiarity with persuasive or argumentative writing. Students mainly commented that they knew “how to make an argument” (Cecilia) or “argue a thesis” (Daniel). One student, David said, “This project is similar to an argumentative essay. I have also had to write letters, and letters to the editor displaying my stance on an issue.” Many students thought about this category in terms of argument or persuasion as a genre of writing, not as a tool or strategy to use in other forms of writing. That being said, I believe the relatively low number of students mentioning “argument” in their RPIs (especially in comparison to those discussing research) show a disconnection between research and argument. Although students seemed to understand argument as asserting a thesis or “taking a stance” (Colleen), only two of the comments mentioned how they would support that argument. Coming into their first-year of college, many of the writers in this study did not seem to have a background in researching to make an argument, beyond the idea of “picking a side.” As an instructor, I used this knowledge
of students’ experiences with research to help develop a more robust sense of argument and persuasion. We discussed a variety of argument strategies outlined in our textbook, and many of my initial responses to students’ ideas about their research was to help them understand that “multiple perspectives” did not simply mean “for/against” a certain issue. Helping students to move beyond “picking a side” was an important goal for myself as an instructor, not only because understanding multiple perspectives on a single topic is an outcome of our course, but also because I wanted students to understand that many of the issues they were researching were not simply issues to be “for” or “against.”

**Targeting an audience.** Twelve comments mentioned the idea of targeting an audience. Students seemed to recognize that they “know how to write towards an audience” (Austin), probably because, as Jenny states, “we have worked on targeting audiences in our writing so far” and, as Jonathan says, Inquiry 3 “incorporates what we learned about audiences in Inquiry 1.” I am honestly surprised that audience was not a more common comment on the RPI, considering it had been heavily emphasized in both of the first two inquiries and because it is an area of writing that students seemed to struggle with in the beginning of the semester. By the third inquiry, I hoped that students understood the importance of targeting a specific audience—and that at least a few of the students mentioned audience in their RPI is a positive notion. However, I think that more students did not mention audience is likely connected to another recurring finding of my research, that students don’t often think consciously about their audience when writing for academic environments—at least not in the first year. In fact, these first-year students were used to writing for teachers and classmates or standardized test procedures, cases where audience is ambiguous and often not a focal point. Their prior writing experiences may be creating instances of unsuccessful transfer when students come to the FYC classroom and are asked to write for a specific audience. These findings also mirror Tim’s experiences writing in history, as Beaufort (2007) documented.

**Using rhetorical techniques.** Closely connected to the idea of targeting an audience is the use of rhetorical techniques in students’ writing. Only eight of the comments (8.2%) acknowledged that students would need to use the rhetorical strategies in their own writing for this assignment (even though we had discussed using rhetorical devices as authors in Inquiry 2 when we first discussed them). One student said he would need to use “rhetorical devices in [his] argument” (Thomas) and another said “Using pathos, ethos, logos for convincing the audience”
(Zoe). Other students simply said they would need the rhetorical strategies or rhetorical knowledge, but not how they would need them or how they were prepared to use them. Since the RPI was completed early in the project, it is possible that many students were thinking more about the research and the topic they would choose than about how they would write the final product. However, if a goal of the RPI is to help students break down larger assignments into manageable pieces, the fact that students often neglected the final products in their RPI comments is disconcerting, and indicates that the RPI needs to be more fully integrated into the discussion and the process of a writing project for the RPI to really be effective.

**Final thoughts on reflect comments.** The comments that students made in the “reflect” column of their RPI were quite varied, but there were five salient themes that seemed to occur: some students saw connections to inquiry 2; students identified prior research experience, student identified prior argument and persuasive writing experience; students realized they needed to target an audience; and students realized they needed to use rhetorical strategies in their writing. While students varied greatly in the amount of details they provided in their comments, it seems that the most helpful comments were ones that were specific, whether that meant about a specific skill or a specific context for writing. But most students struggled with such specificity, and some students even struggled to do more than list a series of “keywords” from the assignment sheet. Although some of these less detailed comments might help students understand what they are being asked to do, these comments do not do much to help students understand what they are already prepared for. Further, many of the students’ comments, especially ones about research experiences, illustrate how students’ seeming preparedness might inhibit their learning. Many of the students stated that they had substantial research experiences and already knew how to do research. This attitude may make them less likely to engage in assignments that ask them to conduct research in ways that aren’t familiar.

**Students Imagining at the Beginning of Inquiry 3: Where Might This Learning Transfer?**

One way that the RPI attempts to teach for transfer is to help students think about where they might need these skills or tools again. Answering this question can help students to think about why we are doing a certain project in the class and to identify what they are going to learn
through the project. However, the “imagine” column\(^\text{13}\) is difficult to fill in—especially at the start of the assignment. By looking at student comments on how they “Imagine” they will use this learning in the future, I see that students struggle to pinpoint specific contexts where they might complete similar assignments or use similar writing strategies, but they seem to have a strong grasp of what tools and strategies they will actually use. I coded 109 student comments into five categories: Classes at the University, Work/Job, Personal Life, Context-Free Skills, and Comments that do not “Imagine.” Table 3 shows how each of the comments students left fit into these categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Percent of Total Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes at the University</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Job Experiences</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context-Free Skills</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments that do not “Imagine”</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty student comments focused on skills that they would learn in the assignment that they thought they would use later in life. These skills included research, writing an annotated bibliography, developing an argument, and relating to/persuading an audience. Here, students are picking up on the salient goals of the assignment and recognizing that these are all important strategies they will likely need at some point in the future. However, without some context for when they will actually use these skills again, students might not actually be able to recall this learning when they need it later. Some of this might be because students already felt prepared for research—they already have these skills, they didn’t see it as new learning, and thus they can only imagine that they will use them again because they are already using them again. It might also be that students did not identify a context because they feel they might use these skills at any point in the future, like persuading an audience. As an 18-year old first-year student, it might be difficult to imagine all the times you might need to persuade an audience to agree with you. However, without thinking specifically about context, students may not be able to actually use

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\(^{13}\) This column asks students, “What tools will you learn through this project that you can use elsewhere? What contexts exist where you might use similar analysis, critical thinking, or writing strategies?”
these strategies when they need them in the future. Instead, their future rhetorical situations will feel like new and vastly different situations that are disconnected from their past experiences.

That being said, there are still a number of interesting comments about where students might use these skills in the future. Sixty-one student comments mentioned a context in which they thought they would use these skills. Of these 61 comments, 19 were about classes at the university, 14 were about work or job experiences, and 13 were about students’ personal lives.

In terms of coursework, fifteen comments focused on “other” classes—not often designated by a field, discipline, or major. While most of these comments focused on writing research papers or writing for other classes, a few comments were more specific. For example, Molly noted that in the future she would need to know “how to find credible sources,” and Madison said “I will learn how to persuade in my writing and pay more attention to my word choice and my sources, which can help with writing later in life.” Some students began showing connections to their intended majors, as well. Levi said, “I know for sure I will have to use the strategies stated above as I go further into my ‘major’ classes” (although he does not specify what that major is). Jenny draws a comparison to a class she is currently enrolled in, saying “This will come in handy for my history classes because we often have to do research on topics and find supporting articles to back them up.” Another student, Zoe said the skills she is using now “could be used for future reports.” These students all show how students can think of more specific academic contexts where they might use writing-related knowledge that was discussed in the first-year composition classroom.

Both interesting and troubling is that only two students said they might use what they learned through the Inquiry 3 project in other assignments in our ENG 111 course. Given that I had strategically linked the assignments to build on each other, and given that I was asking students to think actively about how prior experiences prepare them for current writing contexts, it is interesting that students don’t identify the remaining two assignments as places where they might use these skills or strategies. Of course, students may be more caught up in the immediate project that they cannot imagine the rest of the projects that they will complete in ENG 111. However, I think a first step to facilitating transfer is helping students find connections between activities and learning in the same class. Even though I had been actively attempting to illustrate these very connections over the semester, students were mainly unable to identify such future
opportunities themselves, showing that students might be more likely to understand connections after-the-fact rather than be able to anticipate connections even in the immediate future.

It is perhaps more interesting to see the job and work experiences where students felt these skills might be helpful. While many of these comments were again a bit vague—“One day, I may need these skills in my workplace” (Parker)—other comments theorized potential jobs or situations. For example, criminal profiling and law were both mentioned as jobs that would require the professional to do thorough, accurate research. Another student identified law as well, saying, “people involved in law have to understand all of the arguments so that they can defend against them” (Daphne). Some of this vagueness likely comes from students being unsure of what they want to become, like Kimberly who said, “I might use similar analysis in later life through my career whichever that may be I know that I will have to persuade my audience and this type of researching and analyzing will help me for the future.” Because most first-year students are unlikely to be certain of their major, let alone what career they will take after school, it may be difficult for them to picture specific workplace activities where they will use certain kinds of writing, analyzing, and thinking strategies. Many of these comments were centered less on specific careers and more on rhetorical situations: many students expect to need to make presentations in their future careers, and they felt those presentations might require research, analysis, and argument. Diana went a step further and said, “Persuading your boss towards your proposal over another groups.” Here, the skills Diana anticipates needing would not just benefit the proposal her group makes to the boss, but will also be a part of how she convinces the boss to choose her group’s proposal over other possible proposals. Although the students who identify workplace contexts where they might use strategies from their Inquiry 3 assignment are sometimes a bit vague, they do see possible connections between writing done in class and at the university and writing done in their profession.

As a final note on specific contexts where students felt they could use such writing skills and strategies again, thirteen comments identified rhetorical situations that would occur in students’ personal lives. Many students said they would need these skills in “arguing with others about everyday topics” (Jonathan). The connections here might be as simple as persuading a group of friends to do something that the rhetor wants the group to do—students see the connections between presenting arguments in ENG 111 and engaging in “arguments” in the real world. Politics was also a common comment, likely because the 2012 Presidential Election was
occurring about the same time as we worked on this assignment. It seems that students, in trying to identify how they could use these strategies in “real life,” focused on how conducting research, targeting audiences, forming arguments, using rhetorical strategies, and engaging with multiple perspectives could help them to communicate with other people in a variety of situations. It is exciting to see students making such connections between their academic and personal lives, as academics and the “real world” are often seen as quite disconnected from each other.

I don’t believe that simply having students pick out connections for potential transfer will guarantee that transfer will happen when the time comes. Although Matt, Harriet, Cassidy, and Jonathan all mentioned “politics” as a place where they would use what they learned in ENG 111’s Inquiry 3 assignment, it would be foolish to assume that in all political situations they would use the exact same process to understand the issue and form their argument. This is not the kind of transfer I am looking for or that I think students should try to do. Rather, I would hope that these students would instead remember the amount of research they put into understanding a single controversy or issue, and would thus attempt to understand multiple perspectives on new issues and controversies before forming hard-and-fast opinions on them. That students see this as an opportunity to connect learning and experience does not mean they will actually make those connections; however, I believe the “imagine” aspect of the RPI creates the potential for students to see meaningful connections in places where they otherwise might not have. Because this current research project does not include a longitudinal aspect, more research needs to be done to understand if imagining locations and contexts for transfer actually does help students transfer.

**Student Comments on the RPI**

As we can see, students engaged the RPI heuristics to varying extents, with some using great detail and others doing the bare minimum to complete the activity. But what did they say about completing these assignments?

In a survey completed by students in the middle of the semester, students seemed relatively mixed in their opinions on the activities. Out of 42 students, the majority (14) only slightly agreed that the activities were helpful to their learning. Although 18 students ultimately agreed to some extent that completing RPI activities were helpful, 24 students disagreed to some
extent. At this point in the semester, not all students seemed to be convinced of the value of reflecting, projecting, and imagining as they began writing their new inquiries. Interestingly, there seems to be a notable difference between responses depending on which course sections students were enrolled in. For the first class, 14 students disagreed and 6 agreed (on some level) that the RPI activities were helpful, whereas in the second class, 10 students disagreed and 11 students agreed (on some level) that the RPI activities were helpful. Further, it’s important to note that only one student indicated that he or she strongly agreed the activities were helpful, but six students strongly disagreed. Figure 8 illustrates the overall responses of students when asked how helpful the RPI activity was. Out of 6 possible points, the average score for how helpful students felt the RPI activities were was 3.05 in the middle of the semester. The mid-semester survey had a response rate of 91.3%, with 42 out of 46 students responding.

![Percent of Respondents](image.png)

Figure 8. Student Responses about Helpfulness of RPI Heuristic. This figure shows the breakdown of student responses about using the RPI to reflect on their writing experiences.

It is difficult to tell from the end of semester survey whether there is much difference in student opinions on the RPI, especially because of a considerable difference in number of respondents. Only 15 of 46 possible students completed the end of semester survey, giving it a response rate of 32.6%. Again, the most common response (with 5 students selecting it) was that students slightly agreed that the RPI activities were helpful to their learning. Seven students
responded that they disagreed on some level that these activities were helpful, while eight students agreed on some level. Out of 6 possible points, the average score for how helpful students felt the RPI activities were was 3.40, which is slightly, but not likely significantly, different from the midterm average of 3.05.

In addition, there are some interesting if disconcerting trends in students’ final projects. The majority of students did not mention the RPI activities at all in their final portfolios, even though these activities comprised a major portion of the class. Out of 41 students participating in the project, only three students mentioned the “Reflect, Project, Imagine” activities in their final reflections, and only three students included an RPI activity somewhere in their portfolio. These students, however, all seemed to find the activities helpful.

One student, Evan, said the RPI activities helped him “grasp the concept of the paper,” a theme that seems to be supported by the way students approached the RPI heuristics. Many students used the “reflect” and “project” columns to detail what the assignment was asking them to do, focusing on genres that they already knew (when reflecting) or that they would need to learn in order to successfully complete the assignment (when projecting).

Similarly, Austin said the RPI activities helped him “think more deeply about” a project: These worksheets became really helpful to me when starting a new inquiry. I would think more deeply about what I was going to write, rather than just read the directions once and dive right into my writing. I had never previously thought that deeply about what I was going to write, and because I was starting to do so, my writing really improved. My papers became more constructed, and I had a clearer thought process regarding what I was going to have to work on. This resulted in my papers staying on topic more than they used to in high school. Also when the RPI had me reflect on skills I would learn, I was more cognizant of the writing tools I possessed. Thinking deeply about papers before writing them is very important, the RPI worksheets greatly improved my work. (Austin, Inquiry 5 Final Reflection)

Another student, Adam, discussed the RPI activities in multiple locations of his portfolio. First, he said that “The RPIs had the biggest impact on me by being able to reflect on the previous inquiry and then to be able to imagine what I was going to have to learn for the next

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14 Students were asked to include in-class and information writing activities they found helpful in their portfolios. The most common inclusions were short, in-class freewrites (and often ones completed toward the end of the semester).
Inquiry. It was very important to reflect to be able to pick up on my mistakes and also to see what went well that I should try and do more often.” Later, Adam explained that the activities “forced us to read and fully understand the next Inquiry in order to prepare us to decide topics and think how we can use the tools we have learned with each topic. It also lets us think ahead on what things are new to each assignment and how this assignment will challenge us in ways that the previous Inquiries have not.” He also said the activities helped him think about “when we will use these tools again outside of the classroom.” Such a comment indicates that Adam anticipates these activities will help him achieve high-road transfer, as he assumes that he not only can, but will, use these tools from ENG 111 “outside of the classroom.”

In an interview after the semester, Adam continued to discuss the helpfulness of the RPI activity. I asked him if he had any suggestions for instructors who would want to use the RPI or Rubric activities in their classes, and I quote his response at length:

I would definitely use the RPIs. I think the RPIs are like the I thought they were like one of the biggest tools that we used that really helped to improve in uh cause most of the time when you’re in school and you’re thinking about assignments, as soon as you turn the assignment in, you kind of just start on the new assignment and you don’t go back and think about it, and that’s why I think the RPIs after we would go and read through our next assignment, we would be able to go back and review our last assignment and see how it would help us and I thought that was like a major help. (Adam, personal interview)

Adam’s response to this question made me think about another value of the RPI that I hadn’t previously considered. While I hoped it would help students see connections between assignments, he explains that it can also help them to keep thinking about completed assignments, even after they are graded. As an instructor, I found myself often flustered when I would explain a concept or strategy to a student while grading one inquiry, only to have the same student turn around and make the same “mistake” in the next inquiry. The RPI heuristic might help students to think critically about their feedback and what did or did not work in a certain piece of writing. This important step in “constructive reflection” (Yancey, 1998) might help students to better apply their learning from one major project to the next.

Adam’s use of the RPI, however, is a stark contrast from one of his peers, Colleen. In an interview, Colleen said that she “didn’t really like” the activity. She explained, “Initially, I think
it helps you to not get overwhelmed by the inquiry. But other than that, like I never looked back at them to see what strategies I would be using or after I didn’t think about it at all.” Where Adam seemed to be actively using the RPI heuristic, Colleen did not think much about the activity at the time and never looked back at it. When I asked her if it would have helped if I had specifically asked them to revisit the assignment, she responded that she “probably would have just reread them and moved on” (Colleen, personal interview). While some students really found the activity helpful, I wanted to also reach students like Colleen and find a way to make this reflective genre more meaningful for them. Talking with Colleen about this genre was interesting, though. Although she at first could not remember the name, she summarized very succinctly two questions students had to think about to fill in the heuristic. Even if she did not find the activity itself helpful, she seems to have internalized the reflective thought processes she needed to use to complete it.

Implications for Classroom Use

Given the disparity in student responses about how helpful this heuristic was to them, I saw a great need to revisit the RPI heuristic itself. I first wanted to create a better chart that would help students to complete the complex thinking needed, first by highlighting the necessity to come up with a list of strategies or concepts needed to address the current writing assignment, then by having students answer the questions about each of those strategies or skills. Figure 9 shows the revised heuristic, Reflect/Project/Imagine/Learn (RPIL, or “Ripple”).
Reflect/Project/Imagine/Learn

Use this heuristic to help you think through the Inquiry # project. By answering these questions, you should (a) better understand what the assignment is asking you to do; (b) understand how assignments you’ve completed in the past may have prepared you for this assignment; (c) anticipate what challenges might come with completing this assignment; and (d) help you see how this assignment might prepare you for future writing contexts. Be sure to consider writing done before this semester, in the class already, or in other classes you are currently taking.

We will refer back to this activity throughout the Inquiry # process. Think of it as a starting point for the writer’s letter you will write with your final project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills/Strategies to Complete Assignment</th>
<th>REFLECT Where have you used this strategy or skill before?</th>
<th>PROJECT What difficulties might you find trying to incorporate this writing strategy?</th>
<th>IMAGINE Where and how might you use this strategy or skill again?</th>
<th>LEARN What did you learn about this skill or strategy through this assignment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9. Revised Heuristic.** This revised heuristic, RIPL\(^\text{15}\), may help students to complete both kinds of responses needed: addressing required skills and strategies and reflecting, projecting, and imaging their experiences with them.

While I’m not certain yet how different student responses will be to the current revised version of the RPI, I do believe that the changes here will help students to complete the activity in ways that make them more attuned both to the skills and strategies they are using in a given project. By having students reflect, project, and imagine on each of the skills and strategies individually, it may help them to think less about assignments as genres—like one student who often referred to papers in the course as a “rhetoric essay”—and more about using skills and strategies across genres and types of papers. Incorporating a column for what they have learned will create an additional step to be completed at the end of the assignment, which seemed to be missing in the initial RPI uses.

Second, I have discovered through my research that this heuristic is not simply a tool for students, as I had intended it. In fact, the version used in the study might have been more helpful for me as an instructor than for some of the students. Because of student responses, I was able to create class activities to mediate the concerns they listed in the “Project” column or to help circumvent experiences that might lead to instances in unsuccessful transfer. For example, after

\(^{15}\) I owe thanks to Heidi McKee for suggesting the incorporation of the “Learn” column in the revised heuristic.
numerous students commented on the Inquiry 3 RPI I discussed earlier that they already knew how to do research, I created a Preliminary Search activity that guided them through conducting different types of research on three different topics. Students were asked to search their topics on Google, academic databases, and our library’s card catalog to help them develop a long list of potential sources as well as see if some topics might be better suited to the Inquiry 3 assignment because of the types of research they were able to find. Although I have used similar activities in the past, I saw a need to conduct this research activity early in our Inquiry 3 process to help students understand how their current research skills and abilities may need to be developed more in the class. Without the Inquiry 3 RPI comments, however, I might not have created an activity so well-suited to the needs of the majority of the students in my classes. For the future, I have revised the “Project” question slightly in order to get a better understanding of the problems students think they will face. This column is particularly helpful when creating class activities that are targeted to the experiences of a given set of students. Because of the ways students responded to these activities, I began to see the RPI as a place to learn about my students’ writing experiences and better tailor the classes to their needs.

However, I’m not sure that changing the taxonomy slightly will lead to better buy-in from students. How do I get more students to respond like Adam? I believe the answer to this question actually lies in one of Colleen’s comments. When she explained why she didn’t like the activity, she said, “I had never done that and I like to just like write everything down. When I’m doing an outline rather than ‘what have I learned,’ ‘what can I use to do this paper?’ and then. . .I just like to start and do it from there.” Colleen and I saw the purpose of the RPI as quite different. Colleen saw it as an opportunity to brainstorm and begin drafting her actual inquiry—or at least, that seems to be the message coming out of this comment. I don’t recall if I ever called the RPI activity a “brainstorming” activity, but this understanding of purpose might be a concern. If Colleen saw the RPI as brainstorming for her reflection, rather than her inquiry, I think she might view the activity differently. In the RPIL, I included in the instructions to “Think of [the RPIL] as a starting point for the writer’s letter you will write with your final project.” By emphasizing this activity as a starting draft of a reflection students will inevitably have to write, I hope to help students understand the purpose of the RPIL activity better and to be more engaged with it.
I also believe that incorporating more activities that ask students to reflect on or revisit the RPI L may be helpful in gauging student engagement. For example, students might struggle with imagining new writing contexts where they will need these tools or strategies, especially early in a project. By asking students to revisit the RPI L in small groups or with a partner towards the end of the writing process, they might have a better grasp on how they used these strategies in their current inquiry and may be better able to articulate potential sites for transfer. Additionally, asking students to use the “Project” column specifically to think about the challenges they had in the assignment will be helpful in creating their writer’s letters and reflecting on the choices they made throughout the assignment. Revisiting this column in particular may be helpful, as students may have new challenges that arise throughout the process, and documenting those is a crucial step in helping students to become more metacognitive about their writing.
Chapter 4: Implications and Conclusions

Several scholars and theorists have explained the benefits of metacognitive language: Elizabeth Wardle (2007), who showed that students in a Writing-About-Writing approach had internalized but never truly recontextualized the language used in the course; Susan C. Jarratt, Katherine Mack, Alexandra Sartor, and Shevaun E. Watson (2009), who found that students “lacked fluency in basic writing terminology” (p. 48); Anne Beaufort (2007), whose interviews with Tim show how one student discussed writing in a variety of ways, depending on how immersed in the discourse community he was. Even Asao Inoue (2005) and Chanon Adsanatham (2012) illustrate how the act of naming criteria for evaluation benefits student writers and their writing. But, I would argue, it is not simply a question of having a language with which to discuss writing. Students also need to be given opportunities and tools to learn how to navigate language differences that will inevitably arise as they move between disciplines and contexts for writing. Indeed, the students in this study came to their college writing classes with languages with which to talk about writing that they had internalized throughout their previous years of schooling. As an instructor, I saw that the languages students used and the language that I used to talk about writing often did not align at first. In fact, the reflective and assessment practices outlined here helped these students and myself to develop a language to use in our classroom community to discuss both student writing and the works we read.

As shown in student comments on both the rubrics discussed in Chapter 2 and the RPIs discussed in Chapter 3, students illustrated varying levels of detail and specificity in talking about their writing assignments and written texts. Like other competencies, the process for internalizing an effective language for discussing writing is a developmental one that needs to be nurtured through both time and practice. Understanding writing metacognition in this way—as well as understanding that students will need to know how to traverse new writing vocabulary after leaving the FYC classroom—has a number of implications for writing instructors, composition programs, and university-wide writing initiatives.

Implications for classroom instructors considering implementing rubric-based self-assessment or the RPI activities are addressed in detail in each of the body chapters, and I will begin with a summary of the most important points of those implications before moving on to a
discussion of the implications of this research for writing programs and university-wide writing initiatives. I will conclude this chapter with implications for future research.

I do not hesitate to recommend instructors adapt these activities to their own classrooms, for both theoretical and experiential reasons. First, integrating reflective strategies at different points in the writing process is a strong way to help develop metacognition. Reflection at the onset, when a new writing assignment is first introduced, can help students to learn strategies for backward-reaching transfer and can help them to feel more prepared and less overwhelmed by the assignment. RPIL is a genre that students may struggle with approaching, so completing this activity as a full class or in small groups may be a good way to help acclimate them to new reflective processes that they may not be familiar with. Even students who did not find the activity helpful overall acknowledged that “Initially, it helps you to not get overwhelmed by the inquiry” (Colleen, personal interview). Integrating the revised RPI like the one outlined in Chapter 3 (PRIL) and asking students to engage with it at multiple points in the drafting process can help them to understand their writing processes and act as a log to the types of strategies they used and challenges they encountered.

Additionally, asking students to self-assess their writing on the grading rubric was a very successful strategy for first-year writers. Many students came to a new understanding about the purpose of rubrics, using these tools in new ways or, for some students, actually considering the rubric for the first time. Asking students to self-assess their draft before peer review may be a good way to help students use the rubric to revise. Likewise, following Covill’s (2012) method of having students assess multiple drafts of the same paper on the same rubric could be beneficial in helping students to understand their writing development and make changes based on their assessments. As Marisol explained in her interview,

I know through my rubric like it really forced me to sit down and like reread and give like an honest opinion and of course I could have went back and changed stuff, but like by the end I was either too lazy or too drained out to do it, so. But, I mean, it definitely helps. I think it’s also good to get it done ahead so then you have like another day to actually like look at your rubric and then go back and fix those mistakes. Because I mean, if I would have done that I definitely would have been a little bit more successful... (Marisol, personal interview)
It was refreshing to hear Marisol say that her papers might “have been a little bit more successful” if she had felt capable of revising her drafts based on her assessments. Waiting to have students assess their drafts after peer review was a poor timing decision: many students forgot to complete the rubric or put it off until the very end of the process, leading them to assess their final drafts without any intention of making changes based on the rubric. Just as we intentionally scaffold multiple drafts so students cannot procrastinate writing their papers until the night before, reflection and self-assessment should also be incorporated in stages so that students are more willing and able to actually engage in the activities.

**Implications for Writing Programs**

The findings of this research lead to several implications for writing programs, as well as several specific recommendations for Miami’s writing program. Because many of these overlap, I begin now with a general discussion of implications for FYC, using Miami’s curriculum as examples when needed. Then, I will discuss how these recommendations could be implemented at Miami University.

**Implications for Writing Programs in General**

The “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing”—published in 2011 by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project—names metacognition last among its eight “habits of mind essential for success in college writing” (p. 1). In this document, they suggest four common strategies for cultivating this habit of mind: (1) “examine processes [students] use to think and write in a variety of disciplines and contexts”; (2) “reflect on the texts that [students’] have produced in a variety of contexts”; (3) “connect choices [students’] have made in texts to audiences and purposes for which texts are intended”; and (4) “use what they learn from reflections on one writing project to improve writing on subsequent projects” (CWPA, NCTE, and NWP, 2011, p. 5). Although reflection and metacognition do not appear explicitly in the CWPA’s (2008) “Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition,” that this habit of mind is essential for writing success indicates that writing programs may need to concern themselves more with aiding in that cultivation. As the “Framework for Success” indicates, “The responsibility for preparing students for college writing is shared by teachers, schools, students,
and families” (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011, p. 3)—and, I would conclude, the responsibility for developing students’ writing abilities is likewise shared by various instructors, departments, and disciplines. As Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines programs continue to grow, teaching writing is no longer solely the responsibility of FYC; that being said, writing programs—and FYC programs in particular—have the potential to play a critical role in the development of habits of mind like metacognition.

As WPAs consider the best ways to help cultivate metacognition, I propose we think explicitly about teaching for transfer. In order to do this, I suggest WPAs and others charged with the planning of writing programs and FYC courses consider the following:

- Fully integrate reflection and self-assessment into the curriculum.
- Prepare instructors with ways to value prior learning and model backward-reaching transfer.
- Ensure that opportunities for transfer are visible in courses that are potentially connected.

**Fully integrate reflection and self-assessment into the curriculum.** Simply put, the short reflective memo that accompanies final drafts or a final reflective cover letter at the end of the semester cannot be the sole points of reflection in a course. In addition, self-assessment and reflection are not mutually exclusive strategies; we should emphasize more that assessing the strengths and weaknesses of student work should be a key part of reflecting on rhetorical decisions. In order to provide opportunities for this kind of reflective assessment, students may need to be asked to complete drafts of papers (or sections of papers) to different audiences or with different purposes. In doing so, students will be tasked with evaluating the different possibilities and explaining why they chose a particular one. For example, one instructor at Miami often asks students to write three introductions to the same paper, but targeted to different audiences. In an informal assignment, students are later asked to choose which introduction (and thus, audience) they think will be most effective for their final project. This activity makes reflection, assessment, and decision-making an active part of the writing process. Similar activities will help students to understand the uses and values of reflection, as well as provide opportunities for fostering students’ abilities to reflect on and assess their own work to build their metacognitive abilities about writing.
Prepare instructors with ways to value prior learning and model backward-reaching transfer. Teacher training and professional development is essential in the FYC classroom, especially when many classes are taught by graduate students and part-time faculty who often do not specialize in composition and rhetoric. Helping instructors to develop practices and activities that can model backward-reaching transfer is essential in developing metacognition and more actively teaching for transfer out of the FYC classroom. An informal writing assignment I conduct at the beginning of the semester asks students to explain what they already know about writing. This activity leads to a wealth of knowledge for me—I see many of the “rules” that students have internalized throughout their lives (and especially K-12 schooling). Sometimes, students have good ideas about writing and know things that will set them up for success in the course. At other times, students are clinging to rigid rules that can be applied in some contexts, but may not work well in others. Students are carrying these rules with them when they come into the FYC course, and discussing their prior experiences is a pivotal part of opening students up to learning. In one class activity, I learned that almost everyone in my course had been taught some rule about paragraph length—some that each paragraph should have 3-5 sentences; others that each paragraph should have a major point, 3 supporting claims, and 2 supporting examples for each of those claims. In this class, I used my own experiences about learning to write news articles to discuss the effect that paragraphing can have on an audience and why some of the rules students were using might be ineffective for certain audiences. In general, students were receptive, especially when they were able to contribute contexts for writing where their “rules” would successfully apply.

Similar discussions occurred often in my classroom and in student conferences. I found, though, that they were most successful when I valued the student’s prior learning and talked more about adapting what they knew than “forgetting” it. I have heard other instructors discuss telling their students to “forget everything they know about writing” when they get to college. This request feels counterintuitive in teaching for transfer and helping students to make more explicit the tacit knowledge they have about writing. While there are some occasions where I would like to tell students just to “forget” that rule, students seemed to be more receptive when we discussed building on their prior knowledge for a new setting. This method will also be more helpful for students when they encounter new writing contexts that differ from FYC. Instead of misapplying rules appropriate to the FYC course, students may be more able to understand the
different needs of the new discourse community and to build on their prior knowledge to adapt it to the new setting.

In addition to talking about students’ prior knowledge, I have found that the RPI/RPIL is an excellent space for engaging prior learning and backward-reaching transfer. This genre in particular can help students to make explicit their tacit knowledge by asking them to explain how they have used specific writing strategies before. It may also help them to see composition as an individualized process. If students see that the instructor cares about what they already know, students may be more willing to engage with class activities, even if they feel remedial. By developing class activities from students’ prior experiences and new concerns about the writing project, an instructor can better explain why students are engaging with a specific lesson.

**Ensure that opportunities for transfer are visible in courses that are potentially connected.** As Rebecca Nowacek (2011) showed with the students in an interdisciplinary learning community, students tend to see different courses as distinct and separated, even when they are explicitly connected. If students struggled with seeing connections between linked courses, it is no surprise that students will also struggle to see connections between courses that are not specifically connected. In instances of FYC sequences or vertical curricula, programs and instructors should actively make more apparent connections and opportunities for transfer. A few of the comments Adam made during his interview illustrate how students can compartmentalize their learning, even if it is related. Adam had spent a lot of time in his final reflection of 111 and in his interview discussing why the RPI had been so helpful, and was now enrolled in ENG 112—a second course in the FYC sequence at Miami. But when I asked Adam if he had done anything in his 112 class like RPI, we had this exchange, which I quote at length:

Adam: Um, we have not done it in class. No. And I have not done it on my own yet, either.

Caitlin: Why not?

Adam: [laughs] Cause we have. We’ve, we’re just. It’s only our first inquiry, so [okay] and we haven’t even finished it yet, so . . .

Caitlin: Okay. So where in the process are you, kind of?

Adam: We’re like right at the end, we’re like revising and stuff like that.

Caitlin: Okay. Um, well do you think that doing it would be helpful now? I mean, do you think that reflecting would be helpful now, or why are you holding off on that?
Adam: Um, I actually don’t know. Uhm, I think it would definitely be helpful especially um like after I’ve finished, after we get our first paper back to see our mistakes on it, see for the next paper what we can pick on that we learned in the last paper to include, and um or what we’re gonna have to like learn in order to get a good grade on the next paper.

As Adam was a student who seemed to really understand the value of the RPI, I was troubled that he would not think about using similar strategies to connect ENG 111 and ENG 112, even as he was explaining that ENG 111 had helped prepare him for ENG 112. The problem, though, seems to be that Adam did not perceive how reflecting on one course could make a difference in another course. As he mentions when I first asked him about using strategies from the RPIs and emphasizes at the end of this exchange, the RPI was helpful for looking back at a single assignment and preparing for the next single assignment. Adam was waiting for the opportunity for reflection to arise; as he says here, he seems to be waiting for the first paper to be finished to start his reflection in the course. Adam likely perceived the new English course as a different context for writing, even though ENG 111 and ENG 112 courses have the potential to be quite connected.

In fact, I gathered from my talk with Adam that there may have been very different approaches between my teaching style in ENG 111 and the teaching style Adam encountered in ENG 112. For example, Adam’s interview focused quite a bit on what he had learned about adapting to different audiences, and we discussed the writing he was currently doing and the audience he was writing for, which led to the following exchange:

Adam: Um, for 112 the first paper that we had to write was um basically just addressed to like the teacher. It wasn’t really addressed to like a specific like audience outside of that. It was just like a formal, like paper about the, uh, about the short story, so. I didn’t have to really adapt to like a different audience rather than just write about my feelings on the story.

Caitlin: Okay. So after last semester when I basically pushed you to have a non-classroom audience for every assignment, how is that easy? Or is it difficult to go back to just kind of writing with the instructor in mind?

Adam: It was definitely different. But um, I thought it made it, it made it easier cause it helped pick out mistakes that I had been making before. [. . .] I had never written to basically an outside audience like besides my teacher and I thought that was like a huge
help and uh, I realize that I’ll definitely have to do that again, especially with the Business 102 course, right out of the first couple weeks. So yeah. I thought it was a huge help.

From this exchange, I see Adam struggling to reconcile this difference between audiences in ENG 111 and ENG 112. He seems to be unable to articulate why it is “definitely different,” and instead focuses on why writing to a specific audience was helpful, identifying a connection to another course he is currently taking.

This question of audience is particularly helpful to think about because ENG 111 and ENG 112 share the common outcome of teaching rhetorical knowledge, explained in the Teachers’ Guide and other programmatic materials as “Students demonstrate an ability to write effectively for different contexts, audiences, purposes, and genres (particularly academic contexts, audiences, purposes, and genres) and demonstrate their awareness of audiences’ multiple perspectives” (p. 12, 17). I would expect Adam to build on his rhetorical knowledge and abilities to adapt to different audiences that were cultivated in ENG 111, but it does not seem that the potential for transfer between ENG 111 and ENG 112 is being realized. So how do we mediate this potential problem? How do we expose connections between potentially connected courses? This question does not seem immediately answerable. I believe, first, that learning about students’ prior knowledge and writing experiences can help instructors and students identify opportunities for transfer from previous writing contexts. WPAs and compositionists might consider undertaking research projects that seek to understand how students make connections between potentially linked courses. Having visible evidence of how students make connections between sequenced or linked courses can help us to understand and make visible these same connections to other students. Without that knowledge, such opportunities for transfer may be difficult to see.

**Implications for Miami’s FYC Curriculum**

Miami’s FYC curriculum presented an excellent context for conducting this study because of the existing emphasis on reflection and metacognition in learning to write. However, this study also presents some interesting implications specifically for Miami’s program. I began with general implications for FYC in the previous section; here, I would like to discuss in more
detail some strategies for integrating reflective self-assessment into Miami’s composition curriculum. Among these suggestions are:

- Consider alternative genres for reflective writing.
- Make “transfer” a focus of the FYC curriculum by using it to frame discussions of writing and teaching at Miami.
- Make ENG 111 and ENG 112 a more connected sequence.

**Consider alternative genres for reflective writing.** Miami has long asked FYC instructors to incorporate reflective writing into their classes. However, this component of the class is most often realized as a writer’s letter similar to the “student-teacher memo” Jeff Sommers (1985) discussed. The past two assessments of ENG 111, however, did not find that students were successfully articulating and reflecting on their composing practices and rhetorical decision-making. In 2010, the average score for “critical reflection” was 2.71 out of 4. In a 2013 assessment, the average score for the same outcome was 2.74 out of 4. Although the 2010 team recommended that the “Expectations for Writer’s letters need to be more extensive than they currently are. Students need to write more and treat these letters with more care and depth, reflecting not just on their composing processes but also on their rhetorical decisions” (ENG 111 Top 25 Direct Assessment of Student Writing Fall 2010 Report, p. 8), the 2013 assessment findings do not indicate that this recommendation has been realized. Given the recent critiques of the reflective memo as a genre (Jung, 2011), however, we should also consider alternative genres for reflections.

In my final course evaluations for the ENG 111 courses in this study, one student commented that the writer’s letters were not needed. Although I was first troubled by this suggestion to get rid of the writer’s letters, I soon realized that in my own research on the class I had found more interesting and more valuable information in students’ comments on rubrics and their RPI activities. In fact, many students reflected more in-depth in these two genres than they did in the writer’s letters, and I wonder if commenting on a rubric and completing a reflective writer’s letter at the same time for the same project is necessary. In some cases, the answer is yes. Students who opted to draft two letters to real world audiences for Inquiry 3 more effectively wrote about their rhetorical decisions and the differences between their two texts than most of their peers who had written more traditional research papers for the same project. The
task of reflecting on and discussing rhetorical decisions, however, could also take place in another form. When asking students to assess their own work using the grading rubric, better reflection on rhetorical decisions might occur by having students annotate their texts, using the comment features in MS Word to pinpoint specific strategies they are using and why. This strategy could also be effective without having students comment on rubrics; however, it seems that the writer’s letters and rubric comments tended to perform similar functions, and the rubrics did not lead students to draft more in-depth reflections. Considering alternative genres for reflection may help students to understand reflection as a strategy and to see the connections between reflection and self-assessment.

**Make “transfer” a focus of the FYC curriculum by using it to frame discussions of writing and teaching at Miami.** Among the findings of my research, I realize that “transfer” is a key concept for us to consider at Miami: it seems like the FYC program and general education requirements (currently the Miami Plan) can work in concert to make transfer a real possibility at our university. However, in my experience, there is little discussion of the question of transfer among instructors in FYC. There are many meaningful goals for FYC and a variety of teaching approaches; it would be silly to assume that Teaching for Transfer should be the prime approach to any FYC course, at Miami or otherwise. However, instructors should have an understanding of theories of transfer and how to teach for it. Especially for new graduate students, Miami fortunately has a strong professional development program to help new instructors teach the curriculum, from a three-week summer course to the year-long practica and workshop series. Theories of transfer should be more explicitly incorporated into the program. Because there are strong opportunities from transfer from Miami’s FYC, this theory could be used as a framing device to approach teaching. New instructors should be familiar with both the theoretical and empirical scholarship about transfer. Transfer may not be our sole consideration in FYC, but it should be an explicit consideration. I do not doubt that I would have been a stronger teacher in my first year if my pedagogy had been more grounded in transfer scholarship. Additionally, many of the programmatic requirements align with theories of transfer, and understanding this body of scholarship could help new instructors understand the value of some of Miami’s core practices.

**Make ENG 111 and ENG 112 a more connected sequence.** This suggestion is a bit challenging, given the nature of the courses. Students may take both courses, but many students
also receive some sort of placement credit for either ENG 111 or ENG 112 (or both). In fact, ENG 111 and ENG 112 are only “sequential” in number and the fact that both are required FYC courses. However, because the majority of students do take both classes, it seems obvious to try to more explicitly connect the two courses. As the Miami Plan is currently being revised and our writing program considers new possibilities for the futures of the two classes, we are at an exciting impasse for thinking about ways to make connections between the courses visible. One viable consideration might be similar to the two-sequence FYC curriculum Jenn Fishman and Mary Jo Reiff (2008) discuss in “Taking the High Road: Teaching for Transfer in an FYC Program.” The program’s origin has strong similarities to Miami’s current FYC curriculum, and considering the revisions to FYC at University of Tennessee-Knoxville could help Miami think about teaching for transfer at our own institution. Both of the courses in UT-K’s FYC sequence focus on rhetoric, with a first course focusing on learning to read rhetorically and make arguments using sources and a second course focused on conducting research on a topic using a variety of methodologies from various disciplines (such as field research, historical research, or academic research). If the two courses in Miami’s FYC program more obviously connected to each other, we could more meaningfully teach for transfer because transferring previously learned knowledge would be an integral part of completing the two courses.

**Implications for University-Wide Writing Initiatives**

Students are learning to write in a variety of courses at the university, and because of this fact, instructors and WPAs involved in university-wide writing initiatives, like WAC and WID programs and writing centers, also need to concern themselves with the question of transfer. Fraizer (2010) made an important discovery while using theories of transfer and discourse communities with his research participants:

the widest discussions of genre and the richest opportunities for ‘bridging’ [a term used for strategies to achieve high-road transfer] and expanded conceptual thinking came into play in this study when students were not only talking about writing that was in progress, but also hearing from others who were working on different projects in different activity systems. This discussion is less likely to happen in FYC or in a WAC/WID course, but might find a home in a “third space” environment where writers can reflect across
disciplinary boundaries and generalize about what they’re learning outside of the activity system of their work in progress. (p. 52)

Although such “third spaces” may be difficult to pinpoint, this raises an important point about the nature of transfer strategies. First, the FYC classroom can only teach so much, and if backward-reaching transfer is not specifically engaged, the strategies may not be as meaningful to students. Some strategies for teaching for transfer may be more appropriate in non-FYC writing contexts, which leads me to the following suggestions for university-wide writing initiatives:

- Encourage disciplinary faculty to incorporate reflective activities into the writing process.
- Compile a database of writing projects assigned to students at the university so that other instructors can potentially review them.
- Consider developing third spaces and integrating reflective strategies into the activities that happen in those spaces.

**Encourage disciplinary faculty to incorporate reflective activities into the writing process.** The strategies that I have discussed in this thesis—particularly the RPI/RPIL activity—can easily be implemented in courses that are not focused solely on writing. Incorporating the RPIL into courses in other academic disciplines will help students in the same ways that it aided students in my FYC classroom: it can make them feel more prepared for writing projects, help them to understand how the assigned writing connects to other writing contexts, and continue to build on reflective strategies developing in earlier writing contexts. Because the RPIL is a short, informal assignment, it takes up little class time (if any), but provides both the student and the instructor with a wealth of knowledge about the writing task. Further, instructors in the disciplines may be better able to articulate why certain rhetorical decisions are not effective in their discourse community if they understand how and why a student completes a particular assignment or uses a particular writing strategy.

Additionally, student self-assessment of writing can also be implemented in a variety of academic disciplines. Much of the research on students assessing themselves on rubrics happened outside the FYC context, such as in psychology (Covill, 2012) and law (Lindblom-Ylanne, Pihlajamaki, and Kotkas, 2006). Using rubrics is an excellent way to help establish grading criteria for writing, and may be especially important in classes where writing is not the
main content. Rubrics can also explain and elaborate on discipline-specific criteria in ways that are more understandable to students. If students and instructors commented on the same rubric, a method used in my study, it could help to create a dialogue about writing in these classrooms and may help students to better understand the assessment of their paper. Both of these self-assessment and reflective genres take a miniscule amount of time, but can have a large impact on student learning.

**Compile a database of writing projects assigned to students at the university so that other instructors can potentially review them.** While this suggestion may at first seem tedious and/or time consuming, I believe attempting to understand the various types of writing being assigned across the university can have a strong impact on the university-wide learning environment. Many of the biggest barriers to transfer are the institutional contexts that prevent both students and instructors from knowing what is happening in other courses, disciplines, and departments. Teaching for transfer in FYC would be conducted more easily if FYC instructors had an idea of the types of writing students will be asked to complete in other courses and the kinds of writing strategies needed to accomplish those tasks. If this suggestion sounds like placing the FYC classroom into the service of other departments, please bear with me. In the interest of teaching for transfer, it is vital to engage forward-reaching transfer in which students imagine opportunities where they might need the same writing skills, strategies, or concepts. It would be helpful to be able to say “A number of history and science courses will require you to do academic research and draft an annotated bibliography before doing your research” when teaching research and annotation in the FYC course. This kind of conversation makes the learning experience more immediate because students will realize that they are learning something they actually will use elsewhere. This database could also be helpful for instructors in any discipline to see the kinds of writing done by other instructors in their program or by instructors of courses in other departments. Instructors could upload full assignment sheets and/or rubrics or other supplemental materials that could be categorized by department, program, or course, as well as by the kinds of strategies required to complete the assignment. This database could be accessed by other instructors on campus. In addition to being a helpful tool in teaching for transfer, this database would also serve as a good historical record for university-wide writing initiatives.
Consider developing third spaces and integrating reflective strategies into the activities that happen in those spaces. Fraizer (2010) also makes this suggestion, and I believe it is worth reinforcing and elaborating here. Fraizer’s (2010) discussion includes spaces like studio courses and the writing center (pp. 52-53). Learning communities have also become a trend in higher education, and informal gatherings of those students led by an outside person (such as a resident assistant) could help students to make connections between their courses. Similarly, writing programs or writing centers could develop informal “support groups” that meet on a standard schedule (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) to discuss writing at the university. In these meetings, students could discuss a number of topics (issues or concerns, writing “triumphs,” etc.) that might help students to see connections and use reflection to engage with each other about their writing. These informal meetings could be led by graduate students or upper-division undergraduates if tenured and/or full-time faculty are unwilling, and would be an excellent opportunity simply to bring people together to talk about writing, using reflective strategies to generate new knowledge in the process.

Implications for Future Research

There is a continued need for research on transfer from FYC and between other writing contexts. I began this project wondering simply how two informal writing activities could help students learn to write and find opportunities for transfer, and many of the questions I address here arose naturalistically throughout the course of the study. One limitation of this research, however, is that a longitudinal study could not be conducted. It would be beneficial to continue researching how students continued to draw on these experiences (or not) and to document more than perceptions of transfer through continued interviews and analysis of students’ written texts.

Further, a number of the classroom implications for this study should be tested. Another study of first-year students in ENG 111 should research how students use the RPIL and whether the changes in formatting and more explicit purpose help students to see more value in the activity. A study that researches how asking students to self-assess their writing using rubrics at different stages would also be worthwhile, especially in understanding how rubric-based student self-assessment can benefit students’ writing processes and overall texts. Further research of these activities will also allow researchers to ask more questions about these strategies that were not addressed in this study. For example, it would be worth identifying what students see as the
most helpful part of the RPI heuristic, a finding that may help us to understand why some students find the activity helpful while others do not. Researching these revised strategies will lead to a better understanding of how students’ engage with these activities and help instructors to better facilitate metacognitive development to better teach for transfer.

In addition, more research needs to be conducted that utilizes more than students’ perspectives. Incorporating more teacher and instructor interviews and classroom observations is an important part in seeing and understanding transfer, yet these methods are less often incorporated. Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) and Fraizer (2010) have provided a foundation for the types of questions that might be helpful in understanding the instructor perspective on teaching for transfer. In a research project that seeks to follow students longitudinally, it makes sense to interview those students’ instructors about the writing completed in their classes. It might also be a feasible project to interview a number of professors in a single discipline to understand how they teach writing and if transfer is a component of that teaching. As I discussed Adam’s perceptions of audience in ENG 111 and ENG 112 earlier, it would have been even more powerful to have spoken with his ENG 112 professor to ensure that Adam’s perceptions were in fact the reality of the class’s expectations. As I learned completing this project, asking students to do a task a certain way (like targeting a non-classroom audience) does not guarantee that students will follow that request. Without the instructor’s thoughts and comments, it is impossible to see if students do not have opportunities for transfer or if these opportunities are simply “missed connections.” By continuing our research on transfer and students’ reflective and metacognitive abilities, we can build a better repertoire of strategies for these activities and better understand how to more effectively teach for transfer.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Survey Tools

Midsemester Survey
This survey is intended to help guide our ENG 111 courses and allow you an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback to me about your experiences. Your participation is optional and your responses will not be graded. However, they will help me as an instructor to tailor the class to our overall needs and to help provide individualized attention when needed. All questions are optional. Your individual responses will not be shared with other students.

What course are you enrolled in?
- Class 1
- Class 2

How familiar are you with the following concepts and/or processes?
[On scale of 1 to 6 with 1 being never and 6 always]
- Writing for different contexts
- Writing for different audiences
- Writing for different purposes
- Writing with and for different media
- Analyzing and adapting to diverse audiences
- Applying rhetorical terms and concepts (e.g., ethos, pathos, logos, kairos etc.)
- Understanding what rhetoric is and how it is used
- Revising writing
- Proofreading writing
- Organizing writing in effective ways
- Writing reflectively
- Writing analytically
- Writing an argument
- Responding to other students’ writing
- Assessing your own writing and critical thinking
- Using technology to conduct research
- Locating and evaluating sources
- Integrating and citing sources
- Using an academic citation method
- Supporting analyses with appropriate evidence

Please discuss three criteria that you feel make “good” writing. [open textbox]

Please rate the following statements. [On scale of 1 to 6 with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. N/A will be an option.]
- I am a good writer.
- I am qualified to write at the college level.
- I am improving as a writer.
- Taking ENG 111 will help me become a better writer.
- The tools and strategies I learn in ENG 111 will be useful when writing in the future.
- I find the course workload manageable.
I find peer feedback helpful.
I find instructor comments helpful.
I find conferences with instructor helpful.
I find assigned readings helpful.
I find forum activities helpful.
I find classroom discussion helpful.
I find small group activities and discussion helpful.
I find in-class freewriting helpful.
I find writer’s letters that accompany each inquiry helpful.
I find reflective activities helpful.
I find the Reflect, Project, Imagine activities helpful.
I find using rubrics to evaluate my own work helpful.

Which of the following writing genres have you been asked to do in classes other than ENG 111 this semester?
   Analytic essay
   Annotated Bibliography
   Argumentative essay
   Compare/Contrast essay
   Descriptive essay
   Essay tests
   Five-paragraph or 3.5 essay
   Letter writing
   Narrative essay
   Podcast or similar video creation
   PowerPoint or other Presentation
   Problem/Solution essay
   Research Blog
   Research essay
   Timed, in-class essays
   Other essay genres (please explain)

How many of your courses have asked you to do any writing so far this semester?
   0
   1
   2
   3
   4 or more

If you have more information you’d like to share about your writing experiences in other classes, please do so here: (open textbox)

What is your gender?
   Male
   Female
   Transgender
Is English your first language?
   Yes
   No

What year in school are you?
   Freshman/First-year student
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior

How old are you?
   18 and older
   17 and younger

May your instructor, Caitlin Martin, quote from this survey in research papers and presentations about teaching first-year composition and reflection? **If you are age 17 or under, your survey responses will not be used for research, regardless of your answer to this question.** Your survey is anonymous and any quotations would be used anonymously. Declining to allow your responses to be used in the research analysis will not affect your grade in this class. Allowing the information to be used is voluntary and you should feel free to decline for the use of your responses to this survey. Because surveys are anonymous, there is no opportunity to withdraw consent after pressing “submit.”
   Yes
   No
End of Semester Survey
This survey is intended to help guide my future ENG 111 courses and allow you an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback to me about your experiences. Your participation is optional and your responses will not be graded. However, they will help me as an instructor to understand how you perceived class activities and will help me create class activities and schedules for future courses. All questions are optional. Your individual responses will not be shared with other students.

What course are you enrolled in?
   Class 1
   Class 2

How familiar are you with the following concepts and/or processes?
[On scale of 1 to 6 with 1 being never and 6 always]
   Writing for different contexts
   Writing for different audiences
   Writing for different purposes
   Writing with and for different media
   Analyzing and adapting to diverse audiences
   Applying rhetorical terms and concepts (e.g., ethos, pathos, logos, kairos etc.)
   Understanding what rhetoric is and how it is used
   Revising writing
   Proofreading writing
   Organizing writing in effective ways
   Writing reflectively
   Writing analytically
   Writing an argument
   Responding to other students’ writing
   Assessing your own writing and critical thinking
   Using technology to conduct research
   Locating and evaluating sources
   Integrating and citing sources
   Using an academic citation method
   Supporting analyses with appropriate evidence

How important do you think the following concepts or strategies are in writing?
[On scale of 1 to 6 with 1 not at all and 6 being very]
   Brainstorming/invention
   Drafting
   Revising
   Peer Feedback
   Reflecting
   Editing

Which of the following is the most important strategy for writing? (Please select only 1)
   Brainstorming/invention
Drafting
Revising
Peer Feedback
Reflecting
Editing
None of the above

Please discuss three criteria that you feel make “good” writing. [open textbox]

Please rate the following statements. [On scale of 1 to 6 with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. N/A will be an option.]
I am a good writer.
I am qualified to write at the college level.
I am improving as a writer.
Taking ENG 111 has helped me become a better writer.
The tools and strategies I learn in ENG 111 will be useful when writing in the future.
I find the course workload manageable.
I find peer feedback helpful.
I find instructor comments helpful.
I find conferences with instructor helpful.
I find assigned readings helpful.
I find forum activities helpful.
I find classroom discussion helpful.
I find small group activities and discussion helpful.
I find in-class freewriting helpful.
I find writer’s letters that accompany each inquiry helpful
I find reflective activities helpful.
I find the Reflect, Project, Imagine activities helpful.
I find using rubrics to evaluate my own work helpful.

Which of the following writing genres have you been asked to do in classes other than ENG 111 this semester?
Analytic essay
Annotated Bibliography
Argumentative essay
Compare/Contrast essay
Descriptive essay
Essay tests
Five-paragraph or 3.5 essay
Letter writing
Narrative essay
Podcast or similar video creation
PowerPoint or other Presentation
Problem/Solution essay
Research Blog
Research essay
Timed, in-class essays
Other essay genres (please explain)

How many of your courses have asked you to do any writing so far this semester?
0
1
2
3
4 or more

Please provide any information that may help contextualize your answers to the previous questions here: (open textbox)

What is your gender?
Male
Female
Transgender

Is English your first language?
Yes
No

What year in school are you?
Freshman/First-year student
Sophomore
Junior
Senior

How old are you?
18 and older
17 and younger

May your instructor, Caitlin Martin, quote from this survey in research papers and presentations about teaching first-year composition and reflection? **If you are age 17 or under, your survey responses will not be used for research, regardless of your answer to this question.** Your survey is anonymous and any quotations would be used anonymously. Declining to allow your responses to be used in the research analysis will not affect your grade in this class. Allowing the information to be used is voluntary and you should feel free to decline for the use of your responses to this survey. Because surveys are anonymous, there is no opportunity to withdraw consent after pressing “submit.”

Yes
No
Appendix B: Notional Interview Questions

What do you remember most from ENG 111? What strategies were most helpful to you?

What strategies were not helpful to you?

(How) Do you still use any of the strategies we discussed in ENG 111 when writing?

Did the Reflect/Project/Imagine activities help you understand writing assignments? If so, how?

Did using the various rubrics help your understanding your own writing and writing abilities? If so, how?

    Have you been using rubrics for writing in any of your other classes?

How have your thoughts about writing/composition changed because of taking ENG 111?

Do you feel like your previous writing experiences prepared you for taking ENG 111?

Do you feel like ENG 111 has prepared you for other university writing requirements? How?

What courses are you in now that require writing, and do you think you are using the strategies we discussed in ENG 111 when working on those assignments?

Are you facing new writing challenges that ENG 111 did not prepare you for? What would be helpful to help you understand these new writing assignments?

In what ways is the writing you are currently doing similar to or different from writing completed in ENG 111?

What advice do you have for students asked to complete the RPI activity or to assess their work using rubrics?

What advice do you have for teachers wishing to implement any of these activities in their own classes?
Appendix C: Inquiry 1 Assignment Sheet

Inquiry 1: Different Englishes

This semester, we’ll be thinking critically about connections between writing contexts. For Inquiry 1, I’d like you to reflect on and analyze a time when your own different English have come into contact with each other. What are different “Englishes” you encounter or have encountered, and how do these affect your vision of the world or how you interact with the world? This writing project should share an engaging narrative of the ways different Englishes have been present and/or interacted in your life. You need to have an audience and a purpose in mind for this assignment. You might not necessarily be advancing an argument, but why else might you share this particular narrative (other than because you have to)? Who might be interested in your narrative, and what are your narrative’s implications? Think about the essays we read by Tan, Fu, and Ledbetter.

In addition to completing the reflective, analytical inquiry, you will also be responsible for including a writer’s letter and a completed copy of the evaluative rubric. This piece of writing will be required for all inquiries you complete this semester. See the handout on writer’s letters for more information.

Completing this inquiry will help you be able to:

- Understand your own composing process.
- Understand differences in types of Englishes.
- Understand strategies for reflection and analysis.
- Understand strategies for assessing your own work.

Manuscript Requirements:

- 5-6 double-spaced pages.
- You must use a works cited if you incorporate any outside source material (this is not a requirement for this inquiry).
- Use 2009 MLA Style. If you have questions about this style, see the section on it in How to Write Anything.
Appendix D: Inquiry 2 Assignment Sheet

Inquiry 2: Rhetorically Analyzing and Comparing Texts

Choose two texts that attempt to deal with the same topic (this will mostly likely be two texts of the same genre, such as two news articles or two youtube videos, but you might find success using two texts of two different genres), and analyze which is more rhetorically successful. This should advance an argument and should not compare the three appeals in each text. You will need to consider audience and purpose, as well as rhetorical appeals and potential rhetorical fallacies, in order to assert your argument. You will also need to have an audience in mind for your essay: Who might care about which is more effective, and what are the implications of your argument?

We’ll do some practice in class to think about the types of texts that might be effective for this project and to help demonstrate the way you should approach the inquiry.

As with inquiry 1, you will also be responsible for including a writer’s letter and a completed copy of the evaluative rubric.

Completing this inquiry will help you be able to:

- Apply basic rhetorical principles, concepts, and terminology to analyze and evaluate a text.
- Analyze the qualities of effective writing and speech.
- Recognize language as a powerful tool.
- Support analyses with appropriate textual or visual evidence.

Manuscript Requirements:

- 5-6 double-spaced pages.
- You must use a works cited page. This is NOT included in the 5-6 pages.
- Use 2009 MLA Style. If you have questions about this style, see the section on it in How to Write Anything.
Appendix E: Inquiry 3 Assignment Sheet

Inquiry 3A: Researching Arguments on Public Controversy

Inquiry 3 will build on a number of ideas we’ve been working on this semester: targeting a specific audience, writing with a meaningful purpose, using rhetorical strategies to understand texts, and building arguments of our own. For this writing project, you will research a current public controversy that is being covered in the media. For inquiry 3A, you will use both scholarly and popular sources to understand various stances and/or arguments on the issue. In inquiry 3B (which we’ll discuss in more detail later), you will advance your own argument about your chosen topic.

For Inquiry 3A, you will complete a proposal, annotated bibliography, and synthesis paper for 5 sources that deal with your issue. For inquiry 3B, you will be able to choose one of two options.

Completing inquiry 3 will help you be able to:
- Recognize language as a powerful tool in the public sphere.
- Analyze arguments.
- Engage with multiple perspectives on a single topic.
- Apply basic rhetorical principles, concepts, and terminology to analyze and evaluate a text.
- Apply basic rhetorical principles, concepts, and strategies to your own writing.
- Practice methods of research and source documentation.

Inquiry 3A Manuscript Requirements:

*Proposal*
- Explain what issue you are interested in and why you are interested in it. Address how you plan to research the issue, including what kinds of databases or searches you might use and what keywords or search terms you will use to conduct these searches.
- 2-3 double-spaced pages
- Use 2009 MLA Style.
- Be sure to attribute and include a works cited for any information you include from outside sources.

*Annotated Bibliography*
- Use 2009 MLA Style. If you have questions about this style, see the section on it in *How to Write Anything*.
- Double space all text.
- Must include 5 sources with a variety of viewpoints on your topic.
- Must include at least two paragraphs of annotation for each source.

*Synthesis Paper*
- 4-5 double-spaced pages, plus a works cited page (not included in the 4-5 pages)
- Use 2009 MLA Style.
Inquiry 3B Options

Option 1: Extended Research Argument
For option 1, you will write an 8-10 page research paper that discusses your issue and puts forth your own argument about it. You will choose an audience to write to, though your purpose is ultimately to persuade them to agree with your beliefs on the argument. You will also include a writer’s letter of at least 1 double-spaced page that makes an argument about your writing.

Manuscript Requirements:
- 8-10 double-spaced pages
- Include a works cited, not included in the 8-10 pages
- Include a writer’s letter of at least 1 page, not included in the 8-10 pages
- Use 2009 MLA Style

Option 2: Persuasive Texts
For option 2, you will compose two letters to real audiences that have a stake in your issue. After writing these two letters, you will write an extended writer’s letter (4-6 double-spaced pages) that explains the choices you made in each letter and makes an argument about your writing.

For example, if your “issue” is the defunding of Planned Parenthood, you might choose to write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper that explains why Planned Parenthood should or should not continue to be funded, as well as a letter to one of your representatives about why they should or should not supporting the defunding of Planned Parenthood. Your writer’s letter would then explain why you chose these two audiences, how you attempted to target them in your letters, and what you learned from writing these two persuasive letters.

Manuscript Requirements:
- Two letters of an effective length (typically not more than 1 or 2 pages), in the appropriate format
- Include a works cited
- Include a writer’s letter of 4-6 double spaced pages
- Use 2009 MLA Style for your writer’s letter and works cited
- Be sure to appropriately attribute any source information in your letters (we will talk about what this should look like).