2016 Northeast Modern Language Association Conference
Roundtable: 7.17 Evaluating Student Writing (March 18, 2016)
Audience Takeaway

This packet includes one-page summaries and/or example evaluation tools from the following presentations:
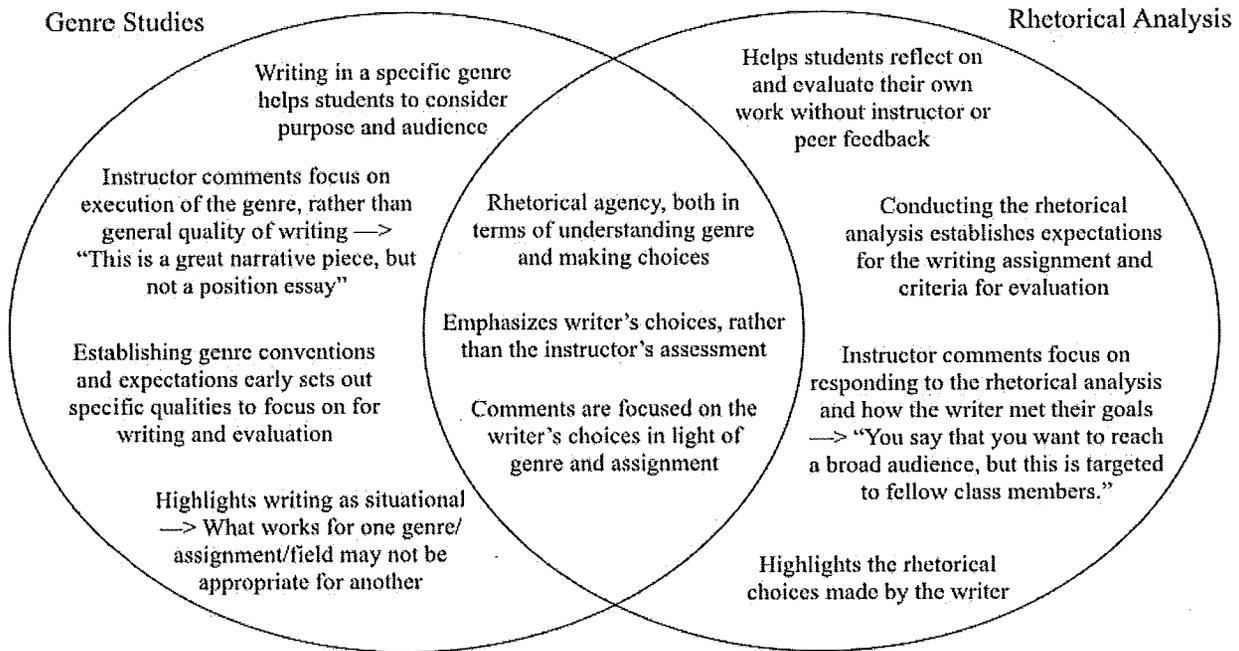
- "Using Genre Studies and Rhetorical Analysis to Evaluate Student Writing" by Whitney James

- "Feedback in the Electronic Writing Classroom" by Joseph Gansrow

- "Training the Student to be Editor-in-Chief" by Jayanti Tamm

- "Terms of Assessment" by Lisa Blansett

- "The Grading Contract in the 21st Century" (addendum by Heather Urbanski, panel chair)

Large print and/or electronic versions of some of these materials are available upon request (contact drurbanski@icloud.com).

"Using Genre Studies and Rhetorical Analysis to Evaluate Student Writing"
Whitney Lew James, Emerson College

By positioning writing assignments as genre studies and incorporating rhetorical analysis, students gain rhetorical agency and awareness and instructors can focus on helping students achieve their goals as writers. This diagram catalogs some of the major benefits of using genre studies and rhetorical analysis in assignment design and evaluative feedback, individually and when paired to build on one another.

Genre Studies

Writing in a specific genre helps students to consider purpose and audience

Instructor comments focus on execution of the genre, rather than general quality of writing —> "This is a great narrative piece, but not a position essay"

Establishing genre conventions and expectations early sets out specific qualities to focus on for writing and evaluation

Highlights writing as situational —> What works for one genre/assignment/field may not be appropriate for another

Rhetorical agency, both in terms of understanding genre and making choices

Emphasizes writer's choices, rather than the instructor's assessment

Comments are focused on the writer's choices in light of genre and assignment

Rhetorical Analysis

Helps students reflect on and evaluate their own work without instructor or peer feedback

Conducting the rhetorical analysis establishes expectations for the writing assignment and criteria for evaluation

Instructor comments focus on responding to the rhetorical analysis and how the writer met their goals —> "You say that you want to reach a broad audience, but this is targeted to fellow class members."

Highlights the rhetorical choices made by the writer

Two major moments in the writing process jump out as important moments for self-reflection and possible placements for rhetorical analysis: before peer review and revision and following submission/completion.

Draft	Rhetorical Analysis Placement 1	Peer Review	Revision	Submission	Rhetorical Analysis Placement 2	Instructor Feedback/ Grade

Placement 1: Incorporating the rhetorical reflection earlier in the process is helpful to guide students toward desired genre conventions and to forecast evaluation criteria. This gives students a chance to re-evaluate not only how they are completing the assignment, but what their goals are as a writer. Here, you are emphasizing writing as a process. I find this useful earlier in the semester when students are still coming to terms with the course, major concepts, and my evaluation practices.

Placement 2: As students become more advanced in making rhetorical choices, a rhetorical analysis after completing the assignment can help to reinforce genre awareness and provide a way to position instructor comments as responses to student goals. This placement is often helpful for multimodal assignments or larger projects in which students may or may not accomplish their goals, but instructors want to emphasize the thought-process, rather than execution.

For more, including example rhetorical analysis prompts, visit www.whitneylewjames.com/student-assessment-nemla2016.

Feedback in the Electronic Writing Classroom

Joseph Gansrow

1. Use it or lose it: take advantage of electronic resources
   - Project excerpts
   - Use monitoring software in Orwellian fashion and in Renaissance studio fashion
   - Teach students to use the comment key in Google Drive/Word

2. Feedback and outcomes alignment
   - Rubrics and assignment guidelines must clearly define outcomes
   - Reiterate desired outcomes throughout the writing process

3. Feedback, feedforward, feedleeward, feedwindward: diversify feedback modes
   - Mini conference conducted face-to-face at instructor and student desk
   - Mini electronic conference
   - Email
   - Encourage use of writing center
   - Electronic gradebook possibilities

4. Timely and inviting feedback
   - Timely v. voluminous
   - Enhances final product
   - Fosters trust and improves student-teacher relationship
   - Helps instructor to learn global strengths and weaknesses
   - Fosters productivity

"Training the Student to be Editor-in-Chief"   Creative Writing   Jayanti Tamm

Dimension	Distinguished	Advanced	Proficient	Emerging	Not Observable
1. Story Structure	Establishes strong plot/ setting/character/point of view	Establishes plot/ setting/character/point of view	Some elements of story structure are evident.	Few story structure elements are present. Little blending of dialogue and narration	No story structure elements present
2. Characterization	Develops complex characters through dialogue, narration and action	Develops characters through dialogue, narration and action	Some character development	Little character development. Characters are indistinct or cliché	Characters are not developed.
3. Ideas	Develops ideas clearly and fully; uses a wide range of relevant details	Develops ideas clearly; uses relevant details	Some ideas are not clearly defined.	Develops ideas briefly; uses some detail	Uses incomplete or undeveloped details
4. Organization	Maintains a clear focus; exhibits a logical, coherent structure through appropriate transitions	Maintains a clear focus; exhibits a logical appropriate sequence of ideas through appropriate transitions	Establishes but does not always maintain an appropriate focus; some inconsistencies in sequence of ideas	The piece at times meanders because of no clear focus	Lacks an appropriate focus, but suggests some organization
5. Purpose	Purpose of piece is clear. Situation or subject described in piece is creative and unique.	Purpose of piece is mostly clear. Theme is clear and unique.	Purpose of piece is somewhat unclear. Subject is not unique.	Subject of piece and message are mostly unclear. Subject is somewhat cliché and unoriginal.	Purpose of piece is unclear. Subject is cliché and unoriginal.
6. Description	Creative, concrete language; uses literary devices and rich sensory detail	Writing uses concrete language, literary devices and sensory detail	Some use of concrete language, literary devices, and sensory detail in the writing.	Little use of concrete language, literary devices or sensory detail.	The writing lacks concrete language, literary devices or sensory detail.
7. Word Choice	Uses sophisticated precise vocabulary	Effective word choices	Word choices are sometimes unclear or choices	Little use of effective word choices	Word choice is ineffective.
8. Sentence Variety	Well varied sentence structure throughout	Good sentence structure and variety	Occasional use of sentence variety	Little use of sentence variety	No variety in sentence use or structure.
9. Sense of Audience	Unique voice; strong sense of audience	Evident awareness of voice and audience	Some awareness of voice and audience.	Little awareness of voice and audience.	Mechanical/unsuitable voice.
10. Grammar/ Punctuation	Smooth, fluid error-free punctuation/grammar	Mostly correct grammar, errors do not interfere with communication	Errors occasionally interfere with communication; verb tense errors.	Many punctuation and grammatical errors	Grammatical errors are awkward and interfere with communication
11. Spelling/Word Usage	Correct spelling; error-free word usage	Mostly correct spelling and word usage	Some errors in spelling and word usage	Many errors in spelling and word usage	Misspelled and misused words throughout

Terms of Assessment

Lisa Blansett
Associate Director of First-Year Writing
Department of English
University of Connecticut, Storrs

How do we evaluate student writing? How do we decide the criteria? What do we value in writing? And why do we value those particular features over others? Have we finally decided what constitutes "good writing"? Is "good writing" a universal category that we can build reproducible rubrics around? Do our practices around evaluation suggest a fixed and reproducible category of "good writing," achievable through "mastery"? I propose that we take a step back from rubrics that serve as lists of features and skills, or that repeat terms like "critical thinking" without further explanation of what we believe would demonstrate "critical thinking." Instead, I argue that we articulate the kind of *conceptual work* that we want students to do, articulating our own not-reproducible values as a framework for teaching and learning.

My current terms include (not parallel and devoid of further elaboration for the purposes of this handout):

Exploration
Project building
Complexity
Rhetorical moves
Participating in / situating critical conversations
Engagement with (rather than sampling of) texts, other writers, others' ideas.
Conscious choices
Accepting effects and consequences

The Grading Contract in the 21st Century
Heather Urbanski, Fitchburg State University

Long associated with Peter Elbow's groundbreaking work, the grading contract in the writing classroom can take many forms. Here is the basic description of how I use grading contracts in both first-year and upper-level writing courses for (semi-)weekly response/reflection papers.

<u>Syllabus Description: Reflection Papers</u>
These short, 500-word papers are designed to communicate your thinking in a vehicle that is less formal than an essay but more structured than a freewrite. There will be six opportunities for you to prepare a reflection paper [....]The topics for these papers will be directly tied to the assigned readings so keep a close eye on the specific prompt. You will receive course credit for these on a "grading contract" basis (see below). In order to "count," a reflection paper must demonstrate that you have considered the question/topic in a mature way, looking beyond superficial and initial reactions, and have assembled appropriate support for the preliminary conclusions. In addition, these papers must be submitted on time and reflect careful editing and proofreading as well as demonstrate the ability to use the ideas of others with proper (though informal) documentation and without plagiarizing.

Grading Contract for Reflection Papers

# of Completed Reflections	Grade
5 or 6	A
4	B
3	C
2	D
1 or 0	F

Contracts like this allow:
- Students to take more direct control over their grade.
- Professor to focus on responding to the content of paper rather than evaluating it for a grade.
- Weekly prompts to be tied directly to the readings assigned (sometimes the prompt is a reflection on a specific assignment, other times it's practice for an upcoming complex task that engages with week's reading assignments).