Writing in Context: Adopting a Genre-Based Approach

Ashley Hall and Kim Stephens

_____

This essay presents two case studies of assignments that are redesigned into genre-based writing prompts. The authors describe institutional and programmatic changes including the elimination of all non-credit bearing basic writing courses in favor of an ALP model and explain how these changes, coupled with an increasing focus on adult learners at our university, create an exigence for the work detailed in the case studies. They ground their discussion in scholarship focused on Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) and multi-genre assignment design. While the authors ultimately believe that the redesigned assignments presented in case studies are applicable and appealing to many students, they draw from principles of the andragogical model to make an argument for why genre-based assignments are especially relevant to and useful for adult learners who are basic writers.

_____

Introduction

Teachers and scholars of basic writing have frequently understood and positioned their work in response to the exigencies created by the makeup of the student population present in any given classroom, and they have long recognized the complex matrix of factors that shape the demographic profile of who is labeled and categorized as a basic writer. In this essay, we add our voices to the chorus of scholars who have advocated for the importance of basic writing instruction while resisting social, political, and administrative pressures or policies that segregate, stigmatize, or disenfranchise basic writing students. Taking this stance as a point of departure, this essay argues for a genre-based pedagogy as a response to the increasing presence of adult learners in basic writing classrooms.

Institutional Profile and Context

We use a mid-sized, Midwestern public university with a large commuter-student population as a case study for exploring the benefits of a genre-based pedagogy for adult learners who are designated as basic writers through our institution's writing placement process. Our institution is like many other colleges and universities in that we have tried a variety of different approaches to meet the needs of students who are placed into our basic writing courses. Over the years, we have offered stand-alone developmental (DEV) classes, stretch classes that span two semesters (Glau), and intensive classes loosely based on the studio model (Grego and Thompson;

Newsome; Pritchett). Research has shown that studio and stretch models can lessen students' anxiety and that students benefit from additional individual attention from the instructor and/or peer tutors (Glau 4; Newsome 3). These approaches also encourage students to act autonomously, leading to higher levels of responsibility for their own learning from the beginning by allowing students to select their level of writing with guidance (Blakesley; Hern; Royer and Gilles). These findings resonate with a number of recent studies of disposition that have identified correlations between students' attitudes or their self-perceptions about writing and their subsequent ability to transfer what they learn in a composition course to other contexts (Driscoll; Driscoll et al.).

For a variety of reasons, stand-alone developmental classes have been sharply curtailed. In a 2012 article published in the *Dayton Daily News*, Brett Visger, deputy chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, argues that "People don't go to college to enroll in remedial courses. Remediation is a speed bump" (Pant). As rhetoric and composition scholars, we do not consider students who are designated as basic writers through our writing placement process as being in any way remedial or deficient. Yet, we recognize that there is a view prevailing throughout the legislature and the public that equates developmental (DEV) classes with remediation. This view has created administrative pressure to reduce or eliminate DEV courses.

In fall of 2016, after piloting the integrated structure of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) pioneered by Peter Adams at the Community College of Baltimore County, the Writing Programs Committee, in partnership with the English Department chair, decided to eliminate all stand-alone remedial writing courses that are not credit bearing and all stretch courses that increase a student's time-to-degree. Now, all basic writing instruction at our university happens using the ALP model. As a result, all students at our university who take first-year writing enroll in English 1100. Students who are designated as basic writers are included in those classes but receive additional support through the ALP model. By the conclusion of the summer 2018 semester, 635 students had participated in ALP classes in our writing program.

The decision to switch completely to an ALP model was significant, especially when we consider that historically many of the students who have placed into basic writing are those with the most limited funds. While a range of models for basic writing pedagogy exist, some add more debt or out-of-pocket cost or extend the student's time to degree, which also has financial ramifications. ALP helps address these concerns, which is part of the reason it is so popular at our university. The way the ALP model is structured, though, also means that basic writers at our university complete exactly the same assignments as other English 1100 students. Therefore, in designing assignments for basic writers, and accounting for basic writers who are adult learners, it is essential that our assignments be versatile, widely appealing to most students, and aligned to the outcomes of our writing program.

In light of this new model, student engagement, which is always a concern, is becoming even more important for us. Programmatic changes coupled with shifting demographics in the makeup of our student body—especially the anticipated larger percentage of adult learners in general education courses—calls for an adaptation of writing assignments, especially those used in ALP sections. Therefore, modifications to teaching materials and assignment designs need to account for both the heterogeneous nature of the ALP classroom and the overarching goals of the broader first-year writing curriculum.

In response to strategic initiatives at our university, the growing number of adult learners we serve--including those who are designated as basic writers, and the need for our assignments to be versatile, widely appealing to most students, and aligned to the outcomes of our writing program, we argue for a genre-based pedagogy. We maintain that genre-based assignments such as the ones we present in this article as case studies meet these requirements. We further maintain that this approach to assignment (re)design can heighten student engagement, validate the lived experiences of students inside and outside of the classroom—which is especially important to the adult learners we work with—and provide rich new opportunities for adult learners to co-construct knowledge about genres by sharing and reflecting upon their experiences with a wide array of genres outside of academia. This pedagogical approach, we thus argue, helps all students understand the relevance of particular genres and better navigate genres they encounter outside the classroom. Rhetorical skills developed through the study of genre are not only crucial for writing effectively in college but can also be immediately applied by adult students in their personal, professional, and civic lives.

Contested Territory

Since the publication of Carolyn Miller's now-canonical article "Genre as Social Action," the field of writing studies has developed rich and nuanced theories that move us away from a view of genre as a fixed, static category and toward an understanding that genres coordinate, mediate, and facilitate work, whether that work is social, personal, political, or civic in nature. The field's increased focus on rhetorical genre studies (RGS) has provoked debate about how to teach genre in writing classes and whether genre can actually be explicitly taught in a classroom setting. We think it can.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his important work on genre theory, encourages an expanded view of rhetorical genres that includes casual conversation in addition to other common daily genres such as business documents (Bizzell and Herzberg 1208). Bakhtin's more capacious view opens up a wide array of genres as worthy of serious scholarly analysis (Bazerman; Schryer; Bawarshi; Bawarshi and Reiff; Devitt). Why then should a wide array of genres not also be considered as worthwhile pedagogical resources that can be used to help students engage with genres in ways that validate their lived experiences while simultaneously helping them develop critical awareness about the value of those experiences?

In *Engaging Writers with Multigenre Research Projects*, Nancy Mack presents a multi-genre approach to writing instruction in which "Genres name a specific type of writing that authors actually compose such as blogs, letters to the editor, memoir, and magazine articles" (28). Mack's approach is well suited to the needs and interests of adult learners in basic writing classes. When adult learners who are labeled as basic writers are allowed to compose in a range of genres they encounter and produce in their day-to-day lives, the experience provides opportunities for these students to demonstrate, practice, and refine their ability to use multiple voices—voices that are authentic and meaningful to their lives both inside and outside the academy. Just as Mack demonstrates that the multi-genre approach encourages critical thinking by better enabling students to connect their lives outside of the classroom with their school writing assignments, so too we assert that such an approach is particularly apt for adult learners who are basic writers, especially in light of the part of the andragogical model that calls for educators to recognize and affirm the variety and depth of life experiences adult learners can and should be authorized to use as resources in their learning.

Many students' primary experience with academic writing comes in the form of assignments that ask them to write a research paper. The label "research paper" implies to students that there is such a thing as a research paper genre—a more or less stable way of responding when a professor asks students to produce writing called a research paper. Yet, a recent study that analyzed over 700 writing assignment prompts at a research university reminds us that while professors from every discipline ask students to write "research papers," what they actually expect students to produce varies greatly from field to field (Hall). Instead of having students practice writing in the non-genre of the research paper, genre-based and multi-genre projects provide a foundation that can help students understand why the expectations for their writing differ from discipline to discipline or even class to class. Most notably, Mack maintains that "multigenre writing challenges students to experiment and assemble various genres and modalities in order to develop dynamic elements into a coherent presentation. These meaningful projects provide a powerful learning experience about writing, language, ethical representation, and critical thinking" (Mack, *Engaging Writers* 2). Multi-genre projects allow students to work through the writing process while engaging with several types of writing styles, voices, purposes, and audiences (Mack, "The Ins, Outs, and In-Betweens" 95). Even more beneficial is the realization among students that experiences outside of the first-year composition course often become relevant in their writing. This realization is again especially apt for adult learners who, according to the andragogical model as summarized by Barbara Gleason, "learn more effectively when they are self-directed rather than dependent on a teacher" and "learn best when they know why they need to know something" (Gleason 8).

 While allowing students to engage with genres with which they are familiar is a useful and important first step in an effective genre-based pedagogy, we also recognize that the topic of a piece of writing can be just as meaningful. To bridge the gap between classroom-based writing

and lived experiences outside of the classroom, students completing multi-genre projects are frequently encouraged to research and write about a topic with which they have a personal connection. One appeal of a multi-genre project, especially when compared to a traditional research paper, is that students have an opportunity to engage with subject matter related to their own lives and incorporate their personal experiences and connections in a manner that promotes engagement and increases personal investment in the work—a clear advantage over simply prompting students to "choose an interesting topic."

We have observed that students at our university—particularly adult learners who may be returning to academia after a long absence or entering college for the first time—often struggle to compose using an academic voice. Mack describes her experience using multi-genre projects that are relevant to her students' lived experiences or the experiences of their communities, explaining that she finds "working-class students can successfully compose texts that have complex representations of their families, peer groups, and communities" (Mack, "Ethical Representation" 54). We likewise see this with adult learners in our ALP program. When adult students in a basic writing class are able to bring their life experiences to bear on their research and writing, their personal connections can be used to open up new understanding for everyone in the classroom regardless of designations based on age or academic performance.

Joy Ritchie, who studied a writing course in which a workshop structure was used, noted that this approach can accommodate multiple voices and promote dialogue through students' self-evaluations and "sense of themselves as writers" (157). Ritchie further observed that "the personal, educational, and linguistic histories students bring to our classes contribute to the rich texture of possibilities for writing, thinking, and for negotiating personal identity" (157). The approaches described by both Mack and Ritchie are consistent with many traditions in basic writing pedagogy and are particularly relevant to adult writers, who frequently bring a rich array of life experiences into the class. We must not fail to recognize the value of those experiences; we must find ways to integrate and validate those experiences; then, we must use pedagogical strategies that help students capitalize on those experiences and critically extend the knowledge they already possess by applying it in new ways. We argue that multi-genre projects accomplish this tripartite goal.

Moreover, multi-genre projects provide an opportunity to address some of the non-cognitive issues Dana Driscoll has found to impede the transfer of knowledge from a writing classroom to other contexts. For instance, Ritchie reports that she "saw the important impact [students'] unique histories had on their response to the writing workshop and to their developing sense of themselves as writers" (157). When adult students are invited and authorized to share their experiences through a multi-genre project, the value of those experiences is affirmed. Rather than feeling like outsiders, adult students can be empowered to make meaningful contributions from which younger, traditionally-aged students learn and benefit. We argue that these outcomes, achieved through well-designed multi-genre projects, accomplish many of the same

goals Bartholomae established at the University of Pittsburgh by prioritizing rhetorical concerns over surface-level issues while still insisting upon the importance of acknowledging and addressing persistent language errors. A multi-genre project does not merely require students to write in a variety of templated styles; it invites and requires students to analyze how language works and changes from one situation to another. When students learn these concepts and concretize them into skills that are applied and practiced in the classroom, they can then be transferred back into students' personal, professional, and civic lives—something that can be immediately useful to adult learners in a basic writing classroom.
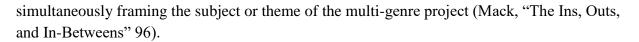
The individual agency that is created through multi-genre projects exemplifies the logic of the New London Group's pedagogy of multiliteracies, which seeks to value the literacies students already have when they arrive in the classroom and to find ways to extend those literacies in critical and meaningful ways (Cope and Kalantzis). While multiliteracies pedagogy has been generally accepted and widely integrated into many "regular" first-year writing courses, there is little research to date on its use in basic writing and with adult learners. We argue for a re-evaluation of the variety of genres *and lack thereof* typically assigned in basic writing courses. We further argue not only for a genre-based approach but a genre-first approach to basic writing pedagogy. So then the question becomes how do we do this? What does it look like?

Mack provides guidance on how to design a low-stakes writing activity to prepare students for creating a multi-genre project. She describes her own process, which involved starting by "designing an activity in which students made a private list of all their perceived transgressions such as transferring from another university, taking longer to graduate, being older, having children, working, being on welfare, living with parents, being a single parent, having had another career, and so on" (Mack, "Ethical Representation" 56). The relevance of this activity to the concerns, interests, and lived experiences of adult students in a basic writing class is immediately apparent. Mack continues: "Then in a second column I had them list the positives that could be matched to these supposed negatives such as perseverance, determination, maturity, responsibility, dependability, frugality, affiliation, independence, altruism, and so on" ("Ethical Representation" 56). In this part of her description of the activity, it becomes clear that some of the non-cognitive issues that adult students in a basic writing class are likely to encounter are being recognized, integrated into the writing activity itself, and renegotiated in a way that has the potential to not only heighten engagement with the work but also foster growth in terms of students' self-perceptions.

A project such as this incorporates more advanced rhetorical skills than students typically engage with when brainstorming and picking a topic for a traditional research paper. Moreover, addressing surface level issues can be woven into the work in a way that helps students see the role of editing in creating coherence and aesthetic unity in the creative presentation of their work. Metacognition, achieved through written reflection in introductory and concluding letters to the instructor or even narratives, allows for further engagement with the writing process while

simultaneously framing the subject or theme of the multi-genre project (Mack, "The Ins, Outs, and In-Betweens" 96).

With our rationale for using multi-genre projects and genre-based assignments in basic writing courses established, we now turn our attention to the process of redesigning existing writing prompts into multi-genre and genre-based assignments. Below we provide two examples of assignments that we revise and analyze to demonstrate our approach. The first example is "The Mindset Assignment." In its original form, this assignment requires students to watch two YouTube videos concerning the role of mindset in learning and its effect on students. Then, students are prompted to compose a one-page written response. The assignment, which is shared with all ALP instructors via an online repository, is a key component of the ALP program at our institution and is part of the recommended course design. It is typically sequenced as an early assignment and presented to students in the first few weeks of the semester. The second example takes a fairly traditional news analysis paper and redesigns it into a genre-based assignment sequence. For both of the example assignments below, we first present and discuss the original assignment. We then present and discuss our redesigned version of the assignment.

Example 1: The Mindset Assignment

Original Assignment

<div align="center">Mindset Assignment</div>

Watch the two mindset videos:

- "The Growth Mindset," produced by the Khan Academy. Sal Khan talks with Stanford Professor and mindset researcher Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* ("The Growth Mindset").
- "The Power of Believing that You Can Improve," a TED Talk by Carol Dweck ("The Power").
-

Take notes and make sure that you understand what a "fixed mindset" is[1] and what a "growth mindset" is. You probably will need to view the video more than once.

Write a 1-page, single-spaced response to those videos and any other assigned texts on mindsets. Before deciding how you want to respond, read and think about the following questions. Note that you are not required at all to include your answers to any of these questions in your response. These questions are intended simply to help you think deeply about the subject of mindsets.

1. Have you ever dreaded taking a test in school, because the subject matter makes you feel dumb and you didn't want others to see that you just didn't get it, and you even told yourself that that subject doesn't matter anyway? That is, have you ever been paralyzed by the fear of being made to feel dumb and/or by the fear of being exposed to others as being dumb?

2. Have you ever been told that you are smart at something or talented in a certain way? Are there things that you feel you are really good at doing? Are there things that you feel you are really bad at doing? If so, think back and see if you can identify when you first started feeling these ways—and what might have given you the idea that you're really good at something and what might have given you the idea that you're really bad at something.

3. Have you heard before about this idea of how important your mindset or your attitude is to your learning and school success? If you have, where and when did you hear about it? What was your response to it then?

---

[1] The terms *growth mindset* and *fixed mindset* are not defined in the original assignment prompt. We provide the definitions, as offered by Carol Dweck, here in a footnote for the benefit of readers who may be unfamiliar with those terms: "Those with a *fixed mindset* believe that their talents and abilities are simply fixed. They have a certain amount and that's that…People with a *growth mindset*, on the other hand, think of talents and abilities as things they can develop – as potentials that come to fruition through effort, practice, and instruction" ("Mindsets").

4. Which mindset do you have? Ask yourself this: When I make a mistake in my schoolwork, do I think, "Well, I'm just not good at that"? Or do I think, "I ought to have done better at that." Which way of thinking goes with which mindset?

5. If a student has a fixed mindset, what strategies might that student use to develop a growth mindset instead?

6. If you have a growth mindset, what or who helped you to develop that growth mindset?

7. Have you had any teachers who you see as examples of either fixed or growth mindset? What influence do you think each of these teachers had on you?

There are several different approaches from which you might choose in writing your 1- page response to texts and video on mindsets:

1. You might write it to an audience of other students, providing them with information about mindsets and how to develop a growth mindset. You can bring in some of your own experience, if it is relevant.

2. You might write it to an audience of other students, focusing more directly on your own experience.

3. You might write it to me as your audience, discussing what your mindset is now, and, if it is a fixed mindset, how you intend to work on changing it to a growth mindset. If you have a growth mindset now, you should consider discussing how you think you developed a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset.

IMPORTANT NOTE: People don't just have a growth mindset or a fixed mindset about everything. Much more often, people have fixed mindsets about some things and growth mindsets about other things. So, just as an example, you might have a growth mindset about math but a fixed mindset toward writing—or vice versa.

Analysis and Discussion of the Original Mindset Assignment

While the "Mindset Assignment" prompt above is fairly explicit, the writing it asks students to produce is what we call "ageneric." It lacks a recognizable genre in the same way that something
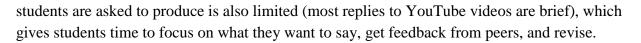
ahistorical lacks a regard for history. Instead of asking students to produce a real and meaningful genre, students are asked to "Write a 1-page, single-spaced response to those videos and any other assigned texts on mindsets." The prompt clearly articulates exactly how much writing the students must produce. The questions in the prompt are useful in helping students generate ideas for writing, but *what is* a 1-page, single-spaced response? What does this look like? What *should* it look like? If a student were uncertain, where could she go to find examples that could be used as a model? Since the work the students are asked to produce is ageneric, it is difficult (even for rhetoric scholars) to answer these questions with any level of precision.

Moreover, it is unclear why someone—anyone—in the "real world" would write a 1-page, single-spaced response to YouTube videos in the first place. In this assignment, the students are asked to write in a context of justification. The purpose of the assignment is to demonstrate to the teacher that a task has been completed and can consequently be assessed. Assessing student work is important and we are certainly not making an argument for doing away with feedback or grades. Those are useful and necessary ways of communicating with students about their work. If, however, the context is shifted so that the work students are asked to produce coordinates, mediates, or facilitates genuine activity that is social, professional, political, or civic in nature, then they are writing in a context of invention. Genre helps us get there. Furthermore, revising the prompt by applying genre to the assignment encourages critical thinking in a way that asking students to write a 1-page, single-spaced response does not.

Mindset Assignment Redesigned

To begin the activity, students watch the video "Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset: An Introduction") produced by the Project for Educational Research that Scales (PERTS), an applied research center at Stanford University ("Growth Mindset"). While watching the video, students make note of anything they find interesting or potentially useful. Following Mack's recommendations for how to design effective multi-genre projects, students will create a collection of texts in different genres, taking on different voices and styles for each element of the project.

First, students compose a comment that would be posted as a reply to the YouTube video. The comment is written in the voice and style of a college student and gives students a chance to reflect on the video they have watched, make sense of the content, and respond in a low-stakes informal genre, one with which most students are likely already familiar at least as readers if not as writers. Students should feel welcome to actually post their replies to YouTube, but that is not required as part of the multi-genre project. In addition to engaging students with an authentic genre for responding to content on social media, this part of the assignment helps shift students from the more passive role of consumers of information in online environments to capable producers of information that can be shared in online environments. The amount of content

students are asked to produce is also limited (most replies to YouTube videos are brief), which gives students time to focus on what they want to say, get feedback from peers, and revise.

Another benefit to this smaller part of the multi-genre project is that there is a ready supply of existing replies to YouTube videos available and easily accessible. Existing replies (which could be replies to the video students watched or to other videos) are analyzed and discussed in class. This interactive work with existing replies is used to introduce basic genre analysis skills such as collecting samples of the kind of text that needs to be produced, analyzing the samples to identify patterns in both form/structure and content, and using that work to establish what genre scholar Aviva Freedman calls a "dimly felt sense" of the genre (Freedman "Show and Tell" 230; Bawarshi and Reiff 108). These are also key composing skills that can be used as a scaffold throughout the remainder of the multi-genre project and the course, and beyond.

Students next create a list of aspects of their identity that they perceive to be in conflict with stereotypical portrayals of college students. (Here we borrow from the class activity described by Nancy Mack ["Ethical Representation" 56]). Some examples include

- Transferring from another university or college

- Taking longer to graduate

- Being older than classmates

- Having children

- Working

- Being on welfare

- Living with parents

- Being a single parent

- Having had another career

Beside these items, students create a second list of positive outcomes or lessons that can be learned from potential struggles. These should be directly related to the items on the first list. Some examples include

- Perseverance

- Determination

- Maturity

- Responsibility

- ○ Dependability

- ○ Frugality

- ○ Affiliation

- ○ Independence

- ○ Altruism

Next, using items from the list of "perceived transgressions" (Mack, "Ethical Representation" 56) they have generated, students write a "Dear Abby" advice column letter to the student newspaper taking on the role of a student who has a fixed mindset. The persona the student assumes for this part of the multi-genre project does not necessarily have to reflect their actual mindset but instead requires them to think about and try to understand how a student with a fixed mindset might write a "Dear Abby" letter seeking advice for one of the situations they brainstormed, which is likely to be a situation they have personally experienced or observed a peer experiencing.

This activity is an example of how, following the New London Group's multiliteracies pedagogy, students can bring in their lived experiences, make sense of those experiences, and begin to extend them critically. The activity can also help students begin to explore their own mindset and orientation toward learning, change, and development.
Using items from the second column of the list where positive outcomes or lessons learned have been brainstormed, the students now compose a response from "Abby" to the initial letter requesting advice. In this second letter, students assume the persona of someone who is giving rather than receiving advice, and who—based on personal observation or experience—finds value in possession of a growth mindset.

Next, students write an email to someone important in their life (a spouse or partner, a parent, a child, a sibling, or a friend), sharing what they have learned about mindsets in general, about the different kinds of mindsets researchers have identified, and about their self-exploration of their own mindset. This email can actually be sent to the intended recipient but does not need to be for the assignment to be completed successfully.

Finally, students assemble a portfolio with a cover page that identifies the range of genres and voices they have created with a letter or narrative describing their experience of learning to think about the same topic through multiple perspectives.

Analysis and Discussion of the Revised Mindset Assignment

The new recommended video focuses on adult students (rather than children) and applies mindset to goals, effort, setbacks, and academic performance. A key takeaway from the video is that fixed and growth mindsets exist on a spectrum, with students' positions on that spectrum shifting depending on the situation and subject. More importantly, however, the students pursue the core assignment goals by producing writing in a variety of authentic genres. Writing social media posts, letters, or emails is something students can reasonably be expected to do outside of a writing course. Therefore, the change to a genre-based assignment increases the assignment's relevance and should help students understand how what they are learning in the basic writing class can be usefully applied in other contexts.

In our implementation of this multi-genre project, students gain practice writing about the same topic with different voices and different genres. They are no longer merely rehearsing skills in a context of justification to prove to the teacher that they can do x, y, or z to demonstrate task completion. Instead, they are practicing a range of genres they can actually use in meaningful ways. We have moved students toward writing in a context of invention and discovery. And although students are not formally introduced to the theoretical framework that supports our pedagogical rationale, our implementation exemplifies the inherent relevance of Bakhtinian concepts of genre, polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia to multi-genre projects, as well as the strong alignment between multi-genre writing pedagogy and the goals and best practices of basic writing and adult learning.

Example 2: The News Tracking Assignment

Original Assignment

<div align="center">News Tracking Assignment</div>

Directions: For this assignment you will track a news story (no sports) across four different news outlets over a period of 5 days. You must use one local news outlet, one national news outlet, one opinion piece, and one source from the Sinclair online database. After you track your story you are ready to begin writing. Your essay should be at least three pages. Remember, you are not writing about the story itself, but your opinion of the coverage of the story.

Materials: News Tracking Chart, Bias Chart, Fake News and Click Bait Exercises

Make sure your paper contains the following points:

1. An introduction that explains your topic and your interest in the story.

2. A claim (also known as a strong thesis statement) that states your position about the story's coverage you tracked over the past five days.

3. A developed discussion that supports your claim. In other words, assume your audience is interested in the news story and you are writing to inform them about the coverage you've tracked. As you write, consider how you rank the sources. What are their strengths and weaknesses? Be specific —make sure that the examples you choose support your claim.

4. Move your paper toward a conclusion. Perhaps you want to structure your paper with the strong and weak sources contrasting one another. Or, perhaps you start with the strong and follow with the weak. Perhaps you find the sources equivalent. If so, what similarities do they have? How can you offer your reader a new concluding thought while reinforcing your claim?

Analysis and Discussion of the Original News Tracking Assignment

Once again, we see that the assignment prompt is fairly explicit, but the writing it asks students to produce is what we call "ageneric." Instead of asking students to produce a real and meaningful genre that relies on reading, tracking, and forming opinions on issues in the news, students are asked to write a three-page essay. Here again, the prompt clearly articulates exactly how much writing the students must produce. And the numbered items in the prompt are useful in helping students structure their thoughts. But *when* and *why* do people write three-page essays after tracking the news for several days? *Who* would create this kind of writing? What *purpose* would it serve? What would this kind of text look like? And where could uncertain students go to find examples that could be used as models? The revised version of this assignment furnishes students with a rhetorical situation and identifiable genre.

Revised Assignment

In the revised, genre-based assignment sequence, students are presented with a scenario. They are asked to imagine that the school is launching a weekly news analysis television show in the style of *Face the Nation* or *Meet the Press* and they are working on the show as research interns. This puts students into a role that is plausible for undergraduate students and can help them identify authentic situations in which they might reasonably be asked to read and write outside of a basic writing classroom.

Students start the revised sequence of activities by reading and/or watching local news and discussing issues such as click-bait and news bias, terms such as fake news, and concepts for analyzing the news effectively. Then students watch news analysis shows such as *Face the Nation* or *Meet the Press*. They watch several episodes of whichever show they pick, taking notes about how the guests draw from their knowledge of the week's news stories to discuss those topics and offer opinions. This helps students gain familiarity with how people at the professional level follow current events in the news and discuss those issues by offering opinion and analysis.

Next, students select an issue of interest and follow the issue by collecting sources, writing summaries, and noting their opinions. The notes are then structured in class as an annotated bibliography, a genre required in many research writing classes as well as in disciplinary classes that have a research writing component. Thus, gaining experience in producing the genre of the annotated bibliography also provides students with a writing experience that will become an antecedent genre from which they can draw and transfer knowledge when prompted to do so in their future coursework.

Finally, students are presented with the following writing scenario: as a result of their hard work and research, they are asked to help the show's host prepare for an episode by participating in a rehearsal. Students are placed into groups of three-to-four based on overlapping interests and topics. Each group is responsible for developing the transcript for a 15-20 minute episode of the show in which they offer analysis and opinion on their topic in response to questions posed by the show's host. Finally, students participate in live discussions, responding more dynamically than is possible in their written transcripts.

Analysis and Discussion of the Revised News Tracking Assignment

In this version of a genre-based assignment sequence, the preliminary steps are smaller assignments (such as the annotated bibliography) that feed into the larger more complex assignment that finishes the sequence. Students are also placed into roles that are more advanced than their typical role (as student) when writing in a classroom setting, but that are still plausible. There is a gap students will need to cross before they can step into the role of intern and write or

speak as someone working in this capacity. But the support structure of the writing class, including peer and instructor feedback, can help students prepare for new writing contexts. Such preparation is of particular interest to adult learners, many of whom are in school to change their employment and advance their careers.

While this genre-based redesign of the News Tracking Assignment asks students to work in a hypothetical scenario, we maintain that students are nonetheless being shifted away from writing in a context of justification and toward writing and using genres in a context of invention and discovery. Even something as highly structured and formulaic as an annotated bibliography is taken up as a form of written discourse that coordinates, mediates, and facilitates the actions related to launching a student-run television show focused on news analysis. We argue that writing an annotated bibliography in the role of an intern, even if that persona is a pretend role for an imaginary show, offers distinct advantages over merely rehearsing skills in a context of justification.

Conclusion

As Amy Devitt reminds us, "outside of genre studies, writers, scholars, and teachers often think of genres as formulaic and constraining" (337). In this essay, we have provided two examples showing that genres can also be generative. We have presented strategies for designing genre-based approaches with direct and immediate relevance and special value for adult learners in basic writing. In the two case studies, we demonstrate how to redesign existing assignments into genre-based writing prompts.

By analyzing our work and discussing our rationale for the choices we make in the redesign, we offer a heuristic for other basic writing teachers who wish to draw from the principles of the andragogical framework to craft assignments that affirm the life experiences of adult learners as learning resources that not only contribute to their own learning but that can also benefit the larger group of learners in the classroom. One limitation of the work we have presented in this article is the localized and relatively small scale of the project. We therefore invite other scholars, especially those doing empirical work and mixed methods studies, to systematically examine the use of genre-based writing prompts in basic writing classes with students of different demographic categories. We hope that the case studies we present here will then become part of a larger and ongoing inquiry into the role of a genre-based approach in promoting knowledge transfer and helping students—adult learners and "traditional" students alike—write more successfully in diverse contexts.

<div align="center">Works Cited</div>

Adams, Peter, et al. "The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 50–69. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43443881.

Bawarshi, Anis. "The Genre Function." *College English*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2000, pp. 335–60. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/378935.

Bawarshi, Anis S., and Mary Jo Reiff. *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Parlor Press, 2010.

Bazerman, Charles. *The Languages of Edison's Light*. The MIT Press, 2002.

Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, editors. "Mikhail Bakhtin." *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. pp. 1206–1210.

Blakesley, David. "Directed Self-Placement in the University." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2002, pp. 9–39. www.wpacouncil.org/archives/25n3/25n3blakesley.pdf. Accessed 15 Dec. 2017.

Cope, Bill, and Mary Kalantzis, editors. *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Learning by Design*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Devitt, Amy. "Teaching Critical Genre Awareness." *Genre in a Changing World*, edited by Charles Bazerman et al., Parlor Press, 2009, pp. 337–51.

Driscoll, Dana. "Connected, Disconnected, or Uncertain." *Across the Disciplines*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2011, https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/driscoll2011.pdf. Accessed 8 Aug 2017.

Driscoll, Dana, et al. "Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Student Dispositions." *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, Fall 2012. compositionforum.com/issue/26/beyond-knowledge-skills.php. Accessed 15 Dec. 2017.

Dweck, Carol S. "The Growth Mindset." Interview by Sal Khan. *YouTube*, uploaded by Khan Academy, 19 Aug. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh0OS4MrN3E.

---. "Mindsets: Developing Talent Through a Growth Mindset." Minnesota Youth Hockey
    Coaches Association e-Newsletter, n.d.,
    assets.ngin.com/attachments/document/0005/2397/Mindsets.pdf. Accessed 10 July 2019.

---. "The Power of Believing That You Can Improve." Nov. 2014, TED,
    www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve#t-
    1025.

Freedman, Aviva. "Do as I Say: The Relationship Between Teaching and Learning New
    Genres." *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, edited by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway,
    Taylor and Francis, 1994, pp. 191–210.

---. "Learning to Write Again: Discipline-Specific Writing at University." *Carleton Papers in
    Applied Language Studies*, vol. 4, 1987, pp. 95–115.

---. "Show and Tell? The Role of Explicit Teaching in the Learning of New Genres." *Research in
    the Teaching of English*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1993, pp. 222–51.

Glau, Gregory R. "*Stretch* at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University's *Stretch
    Program*." *Journal of Basic Writing,* vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 30–48. *ProQuest*. Accessed
    16 Sept. 2018.

Gleason, Barbara. "Adult Learners in US Postsecondary Education." *The Bedford Bibliography for
    Teachers of Adult Learners*, edited by Barbara Gleason and Kimmie Nuckles, Bedford/St.
    Martin's, 2014, pp. 7-19.

Grego, Rhonda C., and Nancy S. Thompson. *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio
    Approach*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2007.

 "Growth Mindset vs Fixed Mindset: An Introduction." *YouTube*, uploaded by PERTS, 9 Dec.
    2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5e4smtpKcuI&feature=youtu.be.

Hall, Ashley. "Activating Transfer Beyond FYC." Conference on College Composition and
    Communication, April, 2016, Houston, TX. Conference Presentation.

Hern, Katie. "Accelerated English at Chabot College: A Synthesis of Key Findings." The
    California Acceleration Project, Dec. 2011, cap.3csn.org/2012/02/24/new-report-chabot-
    accelerated-english. Accessed 6 Aug 2016.

Mack, Nancy. *Engaging Writers with Multigenre Research Projects: A Teacher's Guide.*
    Teachers College Press, 2015.

---. "Ethical Representation of Working-Class Lives: Multiple Genres, Voices, and Identities."
    Pedagogy, vol. 6, no. 1, 2006, pp. 53–78. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/192526.
    Accessed 14 Dec. 2017.

---. "The Ins, Outs, and In-Betweens of Multigenre Writing." *The English Journal*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2002, pp. 91–98. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/822231.

Miller, Carolyn. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1984, pp. 151–67. doi:10.1080/00335638409383686.

Mutnick, Deborah. "On the Academic Margins: Basic Writing Pedagogy." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, edited by Gary Tate et al., 2001, pp. 183–202.

Newsome, Alice. "Emotional Transitions: The Studio/Peer Instructor Approach to Basic Writing." Annual Meeting of the College English Association, 18-20 April, 1991, San Antonio, TX. Conference Presentation. eric.ed.gov/?id=ED337809. Accessed 31 Oct. 2016.

Pant, Meagan. "Ohio Adopts Standards for Remedial Education." *Dayton Daily News* [Dayton, OH], 20 Dec. 2012, www.daytondailynews.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/ohio-adopts-standards-for-remedial-education/mPKctFTUOonrItdo2zpLwN/. Accessed 16 Dec. 2017.

Pritchett, Glenda. "First-Year Writing: A Student-Centered Paradigm." *International Journal of the Humanities,* vol. 8, no. 8, 2010, pp. 65–69. *EBSCO*. Accessed 31 Oct. 2016.

Ritchie, Joy S. "Beginning Writers: Diverse Voices and Individual Identity." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1989, pp. 152–74. www.jstor.org/stable/358126.

Royer, Daniel J., and Roger Gilles. "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 54-70.

Schryer, Catherine F. "The Lab vs. the Clinic: Sites of Competing Genres." *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, edited by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, Taylor and Francis, 1994, pp. 105–24.

Ashley Hall

Ashley Hall is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literatures at Wright State University. She is the co-director of the New Media Incubator, a writing, media production, and innovation hub in the College of Liberal Arts. Her research interests include rhetorical genre studies, writing pedagogy, transfer, and digital rhetoric.

Kim Stephens

Kim Stephens is a graduate student in the Department of English Language and Literatures at Wright State University where she studies writing pedagogy, basic writing, and rhetorical theory. She is also the Coordinator of First Year Programs for the university.