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Questions of Transfer: Writers' Perspective on Familiar/Unfamiliar Writing tasks in a Capstone Writing Course

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QUESTIONS OF TRANSFER:

WRITERS' PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILIAR/UNFAMILIAR WRITING TASKS IN A

CAPSTONE WRITING COURSE

by

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ABSTRACT

QUESTIONS OF TRANSFER: WRITERS' PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILIAR/UNFAMILIAR TASKS IN A CAPSTONE WRITING COURSE

Heather G. Lettner-Rust
Old Dominion University, 2010
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Understanding what students bring from one writing context to another may be the central concern for teachers of writing from elementary school to adult learning. Research from the field of composition studies offers knowledge about writing as process(es) (Emig, 1971; Shaughnessy, 1979; Russell, 1999), as socially constructed performances (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Bartholomae, 1985; Bloom, 1985), and as part of a larger activity system (Russell, 1997). This dissertation ties together theories of writing as an activity in a broader system of tools and outcomes and current research on transfer in writing in order to illustrate writers' perspectives on particular writing tasks. Essential to the understanding of what students are doing is to know what tools students report using to complete familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks. Data collected include surveys of 148 students in a capstone writing course as well as interviews from 13 students who completed the survey while enrolled in the capstone writing course. Findings suggest that the concept of "high-road transfer" (Perkins & Salomon, 1988) is not present in participants' writing skills, processes, and knowledges as they approach what they perceive as unfamiliar writing tasks. Significant to this study is the finding that participants' perception informed their description of writing tasks. Certain familiar writing tasks were described as unfamiliar if parts of the tasks were altered. Furthermore, the perception of a writing task as unfamiliar informed the participant's use of external

tools. Some participants experienced what the researcher termed a “moment of erasure” in which they claimed that the unfamiliar writing task was completely new and they had no idea what to do. The pedagogical implications are that if participants do not perceive certain familiar writing skills as applicable to the current task—when in fact, they should be, then it is as if those skills do not exist. Teaching for the unfamiliar may help to avoid the “moment of erasure.” The final chapter presents pedagogical implications for instructors in light of the findings regarding writers’ perspectives on familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks.

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To my grandmother Alma Tease Rust (1919-2010), valedictorian of the graduating class of Milford (Delaware) High School 1938, who could have written one of these too if she wanted.

And to her husband of 69 years, Harry Samuel Rust (1918-2007), who asked me during the summer of 2007 when I'd graduate. I'm done, PopPop!

To our daughter, Grace Alma Lettner Rust, who will write one of these too if she wants. But, whose question about when I will finish caused me such distraction that I backed into another car in the parking lot.

To our son, Harry Glaswell Lettner Rust, who often waited patiently for me to finish writing a sentence before I could watch him play outside.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Understanding what students bring from one writing situation to another may be a central concern for any teacher of writing from elementary school to adult education. Understanding what students say about their writing in specific situations may help teachers facilitate students' writing production in new environments. The field of composition studies has turned to interdisciplinary sources to answer questions about student performance and instructional design; the resultant "con/fusion" (Gallagher, Gray, & Stenberg, 2009) has produced erudite and wonderfully rich research informed by rhetoric, linguistics, psychology, science, and education, to mention just a few. Furthermore, scholars have developed a rich understanding of writing as processes (Emig, Shaughnessy, Russell), as socially constructed performances (Flower & Hayes, Bartholomae, Bloom), and as an activity system (Russell, Engeström). But what do students say about their processes? This study works to complement the field of composition studies by offering knowledge of what writers are doing largely from the writer's point of view. By surveying and interviewing students of a specific writing environment—a college capstone writing course, this study seeks to understand how writers define and complete a specific writing assignment, so that teacher/scholars can better facilitate teaching and learning about writing.

This research study grew from my teaching and learning experiences within a specific course at a specific institution. My questions about what students were and were not doing within writing assignments spring from this course but are also broadly applicable to what students do when they are faced with a new writing task. And that

can be any where. In the spring of 2004, Longwood University piloted a writing course unique to Longwood and the field of composition and rhetoric. Longwood University's general education capstone writing course, "English 400: An Advanced Writing Seminar" currently brings together students from a variety of disciplines after they completed 75 credits and at least one, if not both, of their writing intensive courses in their major. The institution, in effect, requires students to return to the English department for the last semester of their two-semester composition sequence just as they are exiting their major and beginning to consider the glimmer of graduation. The goal for the interdisciplinary capstone writing course is for students to investigate issues of civic leadership and interrogate ways to address the rhetorically complex site of the public sphere in which those issues play out. Placing an interdisciplinary advanced writing seminar during the junior/senior year as a General Education course allows Longwood to develop or continue the development of composition and research skills at a crucial period of students' scholarly study.

In order to assess the developed skills of Longwood student writers from FYC to the capstone writing course, a pilot study was run by the Director of Composition and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment during the spring of 2009. Student writing samples from the first-year composition courses were scored along with the papers from the capstone interdisciplinary writing course. The results of this pilot study suggested an insignificant improvement in specific criteria (see Appendix 1). In addition, my observation and assessment of student writing as an instructor of the capstone writing course since its initial piloting in 2006 is that students struggle with seemingly basic tasks for this public writing course such as writing letters to civic

officials, composing speeches for town meetings, or developing an email to public leaders about current events. While the rhetorical situation of the public sphere is a significantly complex construct (Ryder, 2008; Welch, 2008; Wells, 1996), students perform in less than satisfactory ways even when instruction seems to sufficiently theorize the situation.

The students seemed unable to access or adapt previously learned skills, knowledges, and processes associated with writing and research. In research conferences, they'd bring piles of papers and place them on the desk, simply stating: "I brought all this printed out stuff I got from the internet." Or their questions about locating sources seemed too easy to even answer: "How do I find back articles from the local paper?" And finally, the key declaration of despair: "I don't understand what you want me to do."

With regard to the expectations of writing, students again seemed unable to access or adapt basic understandings of the rhetorical situation into which they were entering. One student wrote an email to former Vice-President Al Gore informing him of the dangers of global warming. More recently, a student wrote a letter to President Préval following the earthquake in Haiti and suggested the creation and enforcement of stricter building codes for residential housing. Not only was the content of the letter questionable but the delivery system at the very least was problematic, if not improbable. And finally, a group of students wanted to influence local recycling practices in area restaurants, a worthy goal considering the potential amount of waste generated by commercial versus residential sites. However, their design of a research instrument hinted at trouble. They developed a 3-page survey with a one page

informational introduction that quizzed the restaurant managers about their knowledge base and then delivered the survey during the lunch hour. No one completed the survey. One manager accused them of spying for the franchise across the street.

It may be too easy to build the exigency of a study based on a few egregious errors by student writers. But these examples speak to a general pattern of rhetorical ignorance or sophistication representative of many students over many semesters. They tripped over smaller and larger writing tasks.

The question then becomes: What are students learning in their previous writing courses? And if they do claim to know certain skills, are those skills showing up in the writing they are producing? These questions involve the study of “transfer” (Perkins and Salomon, 1988). Specifically, scholars have asked, what are students ‘transferring’ from previous writing instruction? Is “transfer” possible? If so, under what conditions do students enact “transfer” from previous instruction? Research on transfer in and among composition courses has been primarily concerned with earlier stages of student development and composition. The research regarding the transition out of FYC and into writing intensive courses (Wardle, 2007; Nelms and Dively, 2007) and from FYC to other disciplinary coursework (Bergmann and Zepernick, 2007) has illustrated a problematic tension in our assumptions of what students carry from course to course. My study represents an extension of these previous studies and is positioned to capture data from a unique developmental stage of the student writer—the junior/senior year writer.

This study develops a framework and methodology for answering the above questions by extending the work of a number of areas of research. One foundational

area of study is the work of scholars in composition who examined writers as they wrote and spoke of their writing (Emig, Shaughnessy, Flower & Hayes, Bartholomae, Bloom). My study recognizes the important lens crafted by David Russell with activity theory as a way to conceptualize the complex systems of activities students enter when faced with writing tasks in specific environments. And finally, this study benefits from the work in transfer started by McCarthy, Flower, and Beaufort, and carried on specifically by Wardle, Nelms and Dively, and Bergmann and Zepernick. These researchers of transfer (and any teacher of writing who is concerned about what students carry from one writing environment to another) are interested in what Nelms and Dively call “systematically building upon our field’s understanding of a construct that is so crucial to our students’ success in the academy and beyond” (p. 219). Research in my study builds on these areas—the writers’ perspective and transfer—to understand what students export and carry with them from previous composition experience and analyzes the students’ writing skills, processes, and knowledges used as they face familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks in a capstone writing course.

This dissertation study represents my attendant inquiry into the processes of the students. To that end, I began to question what was happening for and within them.

My research questions were:

1. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report having used or been required to use in their writing-intensive courses at Longwood University?
2. How do students define the writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes required in a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University? and

3. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report using in completing a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?

To that end, the purpose of this study was to:

- discover how the students perceive writing tasks
- understand how students negotiate completing the writing tasks of the capstone writing course
- and understand what students bring forward or not from past instruction.

To answer my research questions, the first step was to ask the participants of the capstone writing course what writing skills, processes, and knowledges they reported using in previous composition courses. My thinking was that this information would suggest the battery of tools participants could access in completing the writing assignments for the capstone writing course. Using an electronically-delivered, group administered survey, I queried 13 of 20 sections of the spring 2010 semester of the capstone writing course in order to record the frequency with which participants used or practiced a list of writing skills, processes, and knowledges. The first three sections surveyed served as a pilot study to ensure the participants' readings of the survey could be completed without difficulties in comprehension or other unintended error. Next, eight sections of the capstone course were surveyed and analyzed for this study.

The second step to answer my research questions was to interview selected participants of the capstone writing course to record their descriptions of a self-selected writing assignment and to gather an explanation of what they found as a useful aid to completing the assignment. Using audio recording equipment, I conducted semi-structured interactive interviews with 13 participants who were presently enrolled in the capstone writing course and who had completed the survey. I analyzed the transcripts

for participants' description of writing tasks and useful aids in completing their writing tasks. By examining each participant's explanations of the writing assignment, I was able to code the information into four categories: 1) genres of writing; 2) familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks; 3) internal tools used for completion of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks; and 4) external tools used for completion of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks.

My conclusion is that questions of transfer may be inadequate to explain the participants' use of external tools for unfamiliar writing tasks. Through the lens of activity theory, my analysis suggests that participants rightly recognize the change in the outcome or objective of the new activity systems and are using new tools.

The following is a chapter-by-chapter organization of the study:

Chapter 2: Presents an overview of the literature on composing processes, particularly foundational studies with respect to planning and pre-writing processes, transfer, and a review of the research questions.

Chapter 3: Describes the context of the study, the research site, the composition program of Longwood University, the capstone writing course, and the role of the participant-researcher.

Chapter 4: Presents the research methods of the survey and the interview, justifying the choice and design of the methods.

Chapter 5: Presents the findings and analysis of the survey and the data.

Chapter 6: Provides a summary of the study, limitations of the study, discussion of the study, and pedagogical implications.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses literature covering two main areas that inform this study of college writers' approaches to assignments in a capstone writing course. The college writers in this capstone writing course were faced with entering the public sphere as citizen rhetors. Their discourse was often designed with difficulty, produced with problematic or prescriptive prose, and delivered to the wrong audience. This study was developed to understand more about this tortured event. My research examines how students in a capstone writing course approach a particular writing assignment in terms of what skills, processes, and knowledges they bring to the assignment from past writing experiences and what skills, processes and knowledges they use to complete an assignment. In order to examine those activities, the research questions were:

1. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report having used or been required to use in their writing-intensive courses at Longwood University?
2. How do students define the writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes required in a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University? and
3. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report using in completing a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?

Thus, it was necessary to review the field of composition studies to understand how scholars understood writers' approaches to assignments in terms of planning or pre-writing. The first section of the literature review covers several foundational studies which discovered ultimately that student processes are recursive, varied, and influenced by multiple connections to communities and institutional practices. The review of

composition studies includes activity theory which affords a discussion of student writing processes in terms of a multiplicity of outcomes, situated within the activity network of institutional practices and tools available. Finally, a review of transfer research in composition explores students' ability to use writing skills, knowledges, and processes from one environment to another environment.

COMPOSING PROCESS(ES)

Several foundational studies have reported how particular students write. Of course, most of the early work examines inexperienced, basic, or unskilled school writers. The terminology regarding the students in question changes for some scholars, although one may argue that the binaries represent parallel differences—novice/expert (Flower & Hayes, 1980), unskilled/skilled (Perl, 1979), inexperienced/experienced (Sommers, 1980). In many cases, the research involved unskilled writers, and the exigency of each study was inherent in the situation. That is, the research grew out of writers' apparent limited success in some aspect of concern to the researchers. This study does not make this distinction; in fact, the participants are labeled as experienced *and* inexperienced writers, both/*and* rather than either/*or*. Furthermore, I am not discussing or defining their success, merely that they are experienced with writing. The students in this study are labeled as *experienced* writers since they are third- or fourth-year students ensconced in their disciplinary studies. They've all had some experience with writing for their major (or majors, in some cases). In addition, the participants in this study are defined as *inexperienced* writers in this context of the capstone course as their assignments required them to write for a public audience beyond the academy. Simply put, they are experienced writers facing new tasks, an important distinction for

this study. As such, this study examines what experienced student writers reported doing when faced with tasks in which they are both experienced and inexperienced—familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks—a situation all writers face. This review of literature has as a primary goal to examine foundational studies of students' planning and generating processes for writing assignments. The order of discussion of writing process research proceeds chronologically for the most part to represent the development of thinking in the field of composition studies. However, the composing processes are examined with regard to what scholars understand about students' planning or generating writing. The following studies complicate scholars' notions as the studies build a construct of the student writer that starts with the writer, her purposes and strategies, the writer in her construct of how she understands the assignment, and then the writer in community, the university, and lastly within multiple contexts or activity systems.

The Writer

Early empirical studies in composition that changed the way we understood student writers were centered on the student primarily but also the student's work. That approach to composition study often addresses stages in what theorists and practitioners identify as a set of actions a writer progresses through in order to produce a piece of work: planning, pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading. Although Joseph Petraglia (1999) calls the process movement "the right answer to a really boring question" (p. 53), the process movement should be revered as "a revolt against a particularly limiting 'current-traditional rhetoric,' 'desiccated rhetorical principles devised by second-rate rhetorical theorists'" (Kitzhaber as cited in Russell, "Activity",

p. 80). Russell's sentiment suggests, as many agree, that the process movement was important enough to change the way researchers and instructors theorized and situated student writing within praxis. Hence, a discussion of what students are doing in any empirical study of writing starts with the process movement. Both Janet Emig's (1971) and Mina Shaughnessy's (1979) studies revealed that students approach writing assignments with little prewriting or planning. In fact, the need to recall prior learning or processes—a central theme for current composition researchers and instructors—was largely absent in the discussion of the writers in early composition research. In both Emig's and Shaughnessy's studies, the researchers seemed more concerned that the students had approached the assignment without a sense of their *own* purpose or desire to re-invent topics. Coming from what was later labeled the expressivist school of composition, the researchers' inquiry about self-discovery and invention were understandable. Purpose, rather than prior or transferred learning, then, was the engine for students' pre-writing processes and research inquiries.

For Emig's students, purpose was delivered by the assignment. Emig's study of eight twelfth graders suggested that the school environment provided purpose for the students' composition to the extent that there was no planning at all. Lynn, the student who Emig identified as a model for the paradigmatic shift in composition theory, "devote[d] very little time to prewriting, projecting, and reformulating her [writing] activities" (p. 73). Most of Lynn's effort was spent avoiding error or mistakes in surface-level concerns. The other basic writing students in Emig's study mimicked this prewriting process as well and "[w]ith one exception, the subjects all [began] to compose quite as matter-of-factly as Lynn" (p. 84). This observation begs the question

of whether the behavior was circumscribed by the context of current instruction or prior learning. Emig implied that Lynn's composing practices were carved out of the instructional design of the classroom. "Lynn seems susceptible to the teaching of composition she has experienced. Her view of what portion of the composing process is most important matches the views of her teachers who do not provide the time for the earlier, or later, portions" (p. 73). Another explanation for this lack of planning might be that Lynn and her peers do not find the assigned school genres or the contexts of the school assignments motivating enough to spend time on them. It may not be that they *could not*; it may have been that they *would not*. Purpose-driven inspiration, then, was not found within the students' expressive desires but was co-opted by the reductive nature of the assignment. It could be suggested that recall of composing knowledge was either an implicit or invisible process since the school-sponsored activities closely matched prior assignments.

If Emig's research suggested that students wouldn't plan their writing with self-initiated purpose, Shaughnessy contended that this phenomenon happened because students "[thought] of a purpose as what someone else [wanted] of them" (p.80).

Shaughnessy's argument was that students must find *their own* purpose to successfully approach and accomplish an assignment. Her research suggested the students have not been *taught* how to deliver this type of work; inexperienced writers struggle with the "mess and the privacy of the behavior called writing" (p. 82) because they do not "know what they ought—or want to—write about" (p. 82). She wrote that they:

have trouble locating their purposes. [. . .] Usually they have not been taught to notice their responses to things nor to value these responses as possible content for academic statements. As a result, they are in the habit of discarding

what they need most to be able to write—their felt thoughts—and trying instead to approximate the meaning they *think* is expected of them. (p.80)

Shaughnessy's point here suggests that given the guidance and space in the curriculum to plan their ideas, honor what they were thinking, and develop their responses, the students would produce writing of value to themselves and to the academy. In fact, Shaughnessy's observations that "the problem [for basic writing students] is not so much finding topics to write on as gaining access habitually to their own responses, their own thoughts, whatever the topic they are writing on" (pp. 79-80) might be aligned with Emig's own expressivist conclusions. While Emig's initial observation was that students didn't spend enough time planning, Emig's final assessment was that student writers need help finding their ideas. Thus, for students struggling to plan their writing or generate ideas, early empirical work suggested a focus on teaching the writer better strategies by looking 'within' the student and finding the writer's own voice in order to guide purpose.

This focus on the need for better writing strategies sounded very similar to Muriel Harris's (1985) evaluation of writing center clients a few years later in which she wrote that students may lack "variety, flexibility, and complexity" in their strategies. Examining the processes of five undergraduate students using think-aloud protocol, Harris singled out a few elements that marked unskilled writers. Along with the lack of variety in their strategies was poor management of inadequate strategies; they would sit for hours when asked to free-write rather than produce workable text. And lastly, the students would have gaps in their repertoire of composing strategies (pp. 178-9). Harris concluded that students' inadequate (or non-existent) strategies interfered with their abilities to approach assignments effectively. Simply, they

needed—but lacked—a clearer sense of the stages of an effective writing process and of how to fulfill each stage appropriately.

Early empirical work in composition suggested that the writer lacked strategies with which to access their own battery of skills or processes to use for the present writing environment. The shift from current-traditional teaching centered on the products of writing to teaching the learner had begun. Significant to this study is the concept of asking the writer what is happening in her writing and making observations that affect pedagogy. This study involves not only the new tasks faced by writers but also their perspectives about how to complete that work. Their perspectives involve products and processes, both internal and external, in complicated ways.

Another crucial work in composition allowed researchers and instructors to recognize that writing processes were just that—processes. Sondra Perl's (1979) study was an effort to design a "meaningful and reproducible method" of describing the writing processes of unskilled student writers. And, in fact, she offered a reproducible sheet with which to examine students' writings as a "sequence of codeable behaviors" (p. 39) that loop recursively. Perl concluded that "[c]omposing does not occur in a straightforward, linear fashion. The process is one of accumulating discrete bits down on paper and then working from those bits to reflect upon, structure, and then further develop what one means to say" (p. 34). She ended with the now famous call to teach "not only to the forms or products but also to the explicative process through which they arise" (p.39). Perl's legacy with composition was built upon the work of her predecessors, and her application to this current study is her work with invention and discovery as discussed next.

If Emig's work suggested that school provides or even deadens the student's sense of purpose and Shaughnessy posited that students need to be instructed in self-discovery so they don't reject or forget their purpose, Perl situated the writer's purpose externally as they considered and re-considered their written work.

Composing always involves some measure of both construction and discovery. Writers construct their discourse inasmuch as they begin with a sense of what they want to write. This sense, as long as it remains implicit, is not equivalent to the explicit form it gives rise to. Thus, a process of constructing meaning is required. (p. 35)

The writers in Perl's findings were purposeful and artful as they discovered meanings in a process that was less "random" than researchers had supposed. Her study illustrated that "very little appears random in *how* they write. The students observed had stable composing processes which they used whenever they were presented with a writing task" (p. 31). What researchers formerly understood to be a batch of unformed or ill-applied strategies now seem to be a conscious design of writing processes. Similarly, the focus of my study is discovering what may be a conscious design to the student writer's approach to a writing task. This study was completed in order to discover the student's interpretation of the writing task and the strategies employed to complete the writing task.

Perl's work prefaced more cognitive-based theories of composition as discussed next. Flower and Hayes' research highlighted student participants as writers who took meaning from within and around themselves and used that meaning to construct texts that met clear goals. A broader understanding of the writers' environment and how they construct the writing task helps to articulate the findings regarding perspectives of student writers as they approach familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks in a capstone

writing course. This course takes writers out of their disciplinary home, writing into a public sphere beyond the academy.

The Writers' Construct

The cognitivist approach to composition theory complicated researcher and instructor notions of students' work as they wrote. Perhaps one of Flower and Hayes' greatest contributions to the literature on histories of writing processes is their illustration of Perl's recursivity idea. That illustration added additional steps in an increasingly complex process of invention, decision-making, and revising. Not only did writers "create a hierarchical network of goals" (p. 286) according to Flower and Hayes (1981), but their research defined the Task Environment and Long-Term Memory as influential on the writing processes as well. Within the writing processes, there was now Planning, Translating, Monitoring, and Reviewing. Most of these processes all have sub-steps. Flower and Hayes's processes illustrated Perl's conclusion of the recursive nature of writing processes that scholars have now generally accepted. Other scholars, like Nancy Sommers (1980), have contributed to the work of Flower and Hayes by illustrating the recursive nature of revision in student and adult writing.

The cognitive model of composition suggested the students bring with them some notion of the work they do as well as the discovery of the situation into which they must write. The student in the Planning stage looked backward to Long-Term Memory where knowledge of writing topics, writing plans, and audience was stored. In addition, the student in the planning stage looked ahead to the Task Environment that involved the writing assignment topic and audience. Flower and Hayes's introduction

of the Task Environment as a rhetorical situation allowed scholars to see the writer at work interpreting the place(s) of composition before drafting began.

At the beginning of composing, the most important element is obviously the rhetorical problem itself. A school assignment is a simplified version of such a problem, describing the writer's topic, audience, and (implicitly) her role as student to teacher. Insofar as writing is a rhetorical act, not mere artifact, writers attempt to 'solve' or respond to this rhetorical problem by writing something [. . . .] But when [the writer's definition of the writing situation] doesn't [fit reality], there is a catch; people only solve the problems they define for themselves. If a writer's representation of her rhetorical problem is inaccurate or simply underdeveloped, then she is unlikely to 'solve' or attend to the missing aspects of the problem. To sum up, defining the rhetorical problem is a major, immutable part of the writing process. But the way in which people choose to define a rhetorical problem to themselves can vary greatly from writer to writer. (p. 279)

Perhaps the inefficiencies or ineptitude of the writers planning stages was a function of their difficulty with defining the 'rhetorical problem' of the writing assignment. This approach to composing suggested that Emig's writers were accurately interpreting less of a need to work on the purpose of the assignment due the prescriptive nature of the task environment. Hence, the writing problem may more realistically be, instead, be a thinking problem. This articulation posits poor writing as an underdeveloped interpretation of the rhetorical writing situation. Flower and Hayes suggest that what is wrong with student writing is not a question of who is skilled or unskilled, experienced or inexperienced with regard to writing strategies, but who has the tools to interpret the rhetorical problem. While their study was limited to the examination of writing assignments excluding the teaching environment, their findings while not universal to all writing situations are applicable to my study. To extend this approach into the issues inherent in this study, what is wrong with student writing may be that

experienced writers are inexperienced with the tools to interpret the rhetorical problem of the unfamiliar writing tasks.

Flower and Hayes's approach both streamlined and complicated the writing process. Their cognitive model of composition erases some of the nagging binaries that frustrate composition scholars, but it has also been roundly criticized because the cognitive model excludes the presence and influence of the community in and into which a student writes. One prominent voice of critique has been Patricia Bizzell. Bizzell (1982) argued that Flower and Hayes's model of the composing process ignored the presence of a discourse community during the generating process. With such a focus on the cognitive process, "'generating' (a subdivision of planning) means finding ideas by using heuristics, not by responding with individual initiative to the community's goals" (p. 399). I see the graphic model of the composing process as a helpful articulation of our expanding universe of the writer's construct; I don't agree with Bizzell that this necessitates a 'heuristic' interpretation of generation. She writes emphatically, "Producing text within a discourse community, then, cannot take place unless the writer can define her goals in terms of the community's interpretive conventions. Writing is always already writing for some purpose that can be understood in its community context" (p. 398). Perhaps Bizzell's concern can be framed as a significant reminder of Flower and Hayes's maxim that "people only solve the problems they define for themselves" (p. 279). When a writer attempts to represent the rhetorical problem of the writing assignment with an audience and the various constraints, the representation of the writing assignment is only as good as the writer's ability to understand all the parts of the rhetorical problem.

However, Flower and Hayes's cognitive model of composing can be seen as large enough to include an understanding of the community and its discourse strategies. The community and attendant discourse strategies are cast as part of the rhetorical problem. The 'rhetorical problem,' for which Flower and Hayes credit Bitzer's (1968) construct of the rhetorical situation, implicitly involves Bitzer's three parts: exigence, as some type of imperfection met with the urgency of the situation; audience as those who would listen to you; and the constraints as what operates against you in the situation and what appeals originate in the speaker according to her analysis of the situation. Vatz (1972), Consigny (1974), and Grant-Davie (1997) have expanded Bitzer's objectivist approach to the rhetorical situation to recognize the speaker's ability to interpret the dynamic environment into which the speaker writes and speaks.

These critiques make explicit what has been implicit—that is, the need to understand the community into which the student writer (or rhetor) is attempting to enter. Providing the needed articulation of the community in which students write is David Bartholomae, heir to the Shaughnessy legacy of error analysis. Understanding error and what student writers can not or will not do is foundational to the initial inquiry of this study of junior/senior college writers in a capstone writing course.

As a composition course placed at the end of the students' academic career, the capstone writing course should profit from a certain level of writing development. Certainly there was a developmental level of cognition and writing processes that instructors could assume were in place as students attempted to write for public, civic issues. Granted *any* writer is at a different developmental level than any other, but why

were some even basic writing skills, processes, and knowledges not being carried forward with a certain confidence into this course?

The Writers' Community

David Bartholomae's (1985) work on students' writing in the university emphasized a notion of community that Bizzell's critique only introduced and helps to articulate the complexity students face in a capstone writing course outside of their disciplinary home. Bartholomae examined placement essays written by incoming first-year students and concluded that those writers assumed positions that were commonplace—or naïve. Students failed to see themselves as valid, deserving members of the university's intellectual community; the basic writer then was not the one whose writing was filled with error but the one whose subject position remains in the commonplace. By coining the phrase that students were attempting to “invent the university,” Bartholomae was granting students agency while acknowledging the complexity of writing outside of one's discourse community. While he granted that struggle, he also called for researchers “to turn their attention again to products, to student writing, since [. . .] a written text, too, can be a compelling model of the ‘composing process’ once we conceive of a writer within a text and simultaneously, then within a society, a history, and a culture” (p. 627). So, an examination of the writer preparing to write is a study of the writer as he or she invents the writer's community. And any struggle is about the students' skills in articulating discourse conventions apparent in the writing products.

Bartholomae's premise was built on what seems to be a return to the cognitivist's work:

Linda Flower (1981) has argued that the difficulty inexperienced writers have with writing can be understood as a difficulty in negotiating the transition between 'writer-based' and 'reader-based' prose. Expert writers, in other words, can better imagine how a reader will respond to a text and can transform or restructure what they have to say around a goal shared with a reader. Teaching students to revise for readers, then, will better prepare them to write initially for the reader in mind. (pp. 608-609)

It is at this stage in research that planning and pre-writing introduce the reader into the conceptual model which helps to articulate the difficulties writers in the capstone writing course face with the public sphere audience. Who are their readers? How do they research such a dynamic body? Flower and Hayes assert that planning and generating text with the reader in mind required the student to research and know the reader, whether the reader was part of the university discourse community or not. Early studies referenced this stage of planning as writing without an audience. Emig's student was, as Shaughnessy wrote, "carry[ing] on a conversation with [her]self" (p. 81) in hopes of getting close to what the audience wanted. Shaughnessy's word for this invention process was "approximate" (p. 82); Bartholomae's word "invent" suggests a return to the students' individual and isolated context as they tried to build a university from a representation they were just beginning to understand.

Thus, the writer that hesitates or falters may be simply attempting to reach a new reader. As Bartholomae wrote, "When the writer says, 'I don't know,' then, he is not saying that he has nothing to say. He is saying that he is not in a position to carry on this discussion" (p.608). When writers were stuck or without words to respond or generate content, Bartholomae described this as a process of understanding context. This process may help to explain particular writers of this study as they face an unfamiliar writing task. Rather than being without strategy or voice or flexible

strategies, the writers in this study through Bartholomae's lens resist confronting the unfamiliar writing task because they understand the broader notion of carrying on the discussion in this new environment.

Understanding this new environment was further complicated by Lynn Bloom (1985)'s case study of graduate writers. She suggested that there was more than one context to understand within the writer's universe and that the "anxious writer out of context may be neither writer nor anxious" (p. 119). Her case study of two graduate writers found that the writers' various contexts were defined as internal and external factors woven together in complicated ways. Those internal contexts were artistic, temperamental, and biological factors such as someone's age, personality, and creative process. The external contexts were the professional and university sites such as the social and academic environments as writers attempted to 'simply' write. Bloom wrote: "Teachers, [. . .] with anxious writers need to understand the writing problems as fully as possible in the appropriate contexts in order to provide specific, workable solutions adapted to the writer's temperament and to the performance of multiple roles in multiple contexts" (p.132). Similar to Bartholomae's students inventing the university, Bloom's graduate writers were inventing the graduate university. As the graduate writers approached writing assignments then, they had to balance being a novice ensconced in various competing and complicated contexts in what appears to them to be an expert world.

This balancing act is a complicated task employed by many writers of novice status, regardless of age. Bloom's graduate students and Bartholomae's undergraduates were writing for an expert whose intellectual interests were vastly different from their

own and were attempting to write effectively for this audience—all while trying to demonstrate their ease with the complex situation, distantly-related audience, and fuzzy purpose. One could extend this complex situation to many students. The participants from the capstone writing course in this study are no different. They are student writers out of their disciplinary context and into one which asks them to enter the public, civic sphere, a role most have not tried.

The Writers' Activity

David Russell's work with activity theory invites a complexity to the writer's community and the paradigm of *the* writing process. If writing was an activity in process theory, post-process theorists brought the activity out into the public. Petraglia (1999) characterizes this public as “an almost impenetrable web of cultural practices, social interactions, power differentials, and discursive conventions governing the production of text, making writing more a phenomenon than a behavior” (p. 54). Thomas Kent (1999) characterizes this phenomenon more poetically as the careful “hermeneutic dance that moves to the music of our situatedness” (p. 9). And now activity theory conceptualizes writing as part of an activity system, both public and private. In response to the post-process theorists, Russell urges composition scholars “not to toss out ‘*the* process approach’ by demarcating a ‘post-process’ era” (“Activity,” 1999, p. 91). Rather, they should understand the plurality of processes (or genre systems) available to writers as they cross into relations of power within organizations such as school and society.

If school was the writer's community, school is now an organization with all the complexity of power and multiple relations the word ‘organization’ suggests. Russell

defines the organization (activity system) or organizations (activity systems) as “goal-directed, historically situated, cooperative human interactions” (“Rethinking,” 1997, p. 53). Writing is an activity that operates with a goal in mind, embedded in a history of practices and expectations, and must account for and participate with other subjects in that activity network. This articulation of the activity of writing allows for scholars and this study to illustrate writing processes as plural and fitting the larger system in which the writing is embedded.

Russell defined the components of activity theory using Engeström’s terminology: “This unit [of analysis] is a functional system consisting of a subject (a person or persons), an object(ive) (an objective or goal or common task), and tools (including signs) that mediate interaction” (p. 53). Reviewing a number of studies to illustrate the application of activity theory, Russell wrote:

We have found that there are plural (and interacting) writing processes—and genre systems—not only within organizations (or, more broadly, activity systems) but among them. As one activity system interacts with others, genres mediate those interactions and the writing processes of participants. As complex organizations (activity systems) interact with other organizations and individuals (consumers, clients, patients, citizens), systems of genres and writing processes evolve, as in Devitt’s study of accountants (“Intertextuality”), Bazerman’s study of patient approvals (“Systems of Genres”), or Van Nostrand’s study of scientific granting agencies. (p. 83)

The application of activity theory to composition ‘processes’ strongly suggests that students (or any one else) learn to write not once but many times. This suggestion of multiple sites of learning has direct implication for this study. If instructors had assumed students come to the capstone course with certain levels or concepts of writing development, much of their assumption is called into question. Activity theory posits that the plurality and dynamic needs of writing processes represents a writer’s

understanding of the subject, object(ive), and tools available within the activity system the writer wishes to enter. And the use of writing genres to meet the goals of the writer must be understood within each local context. Therefore,

this activity theory formulation of the acquisition of writing resists what Street (1984) termed the *myth of autonomous literacy*. Literacy is not learned in and of itself and then applied to contexts (activity systems). It does not exist autonomously divorced from some specific human activity. Literacy is always and everywhere bound up with the activity systems that it changes through its mediation behavior—and that change it. (Russell, “Activity Theory,” p. 56)

A return to the writers in Emig’s study through the lens of activity theory illustrates Lynn, Emig’s participant, to be negotiating her relationship to the teacher (subject) and the teacher’s goals (objective) and the writing instruction (tools) the teacher has provided. The dominant activity system is the institution or school. Understandably then, Lynn does not operate simply within her own activity system, to find her voice and sense of purpose; she operates within a larger activity system of school. She understands and performs according to the activity system in which she operates. It is her instructor that does not understand Lynn’s limited use of writing tools. Activity theory would have broadened Emig’s perspective as well.

In 1986, Lester Faigley rightly suggested that we learn from each school of thought—expressive, cognitive, and social—in the composing process and synthesize the ideas. Quoting Stanley Fish’s reference to linguistic knowledge, Faigley recommended scholars consider that “writing processes are [. . .] ‘contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant’” (p. 663). In a critique of the post-process camp’s overzealous attack on the process movement, Lee-Ann Kastmann Breuch (2002) proposed that teaching composition is about how students write (rather than how we were taught to teach it). This proposition suggests a

return to an examination of the student in situ. My study is the first step in examining the student context, and that is, asking them how they completed the assignment. Connecting the students' processes to a new understanding of writing as activity, this study follows the post-process theorists assumption of writing and teaching to be "public, interpretive, and situated—an indeterminate activity" (p. 120). The indeterminate nature of teaching and writing should be shared by both movements—process and post-process—as they were energized by an examination of what the students were doing when they wrote or approached writing.

If Bartholomae's call for researchers was "to turn their attention again to products, to student writing, since [. . .] a written text, too, can be a compelling model of the 'composing process' once we conceive of a writer within a text and simultaneously, then within a society, a history, and a culture" (p. 627), my study heeds that call as I ask the participants to examine their writing as they explain their process. My study also joins Flower and Hayes's call "to discover how this process of representing the problem works and how it affects the writer's performance" (p. 279). The last call heeded by this study is represented by activity theory is an effort to perceive the writer's performance as an activity in a larger system. One way to try to answer these calls would be to ask students about their planning and generating processes and the tools they find necessary to complete academic assignments.

STUDIES OF TRANSFER

While it might seem that understanding and promoting the 'carrying over' of student learning from one writing course to another disciplinary course (or vice versa) in the academy would be a universal goal in education and therefore well-explored for

many educational contexts, the exploration of evidence *for* and uses *of* transfer of writing knowledge is a relatively new endeavor. Early empirical studies of Thorndike and Woodworth in 1901 investigated the possibility of transfer in very similar educational contexts just over 100 years ago (Taylor, 2009; Haskell, 2001). Perhaps the assumption would carry that the field of composition would be equally as zealous in pursuit of this research, but the field has not. And for good reason.

Transfer is, most simply, “something learned in [one] context [that helps] in another” (Perkins & Salomon, 1989). Over the years, transfer has been described in terms of four principles that share distinct features but conceptualize different realms of activities to researchers. These categories share features and often work together (Schunk, 2008, p. 215). The four clusters of transfer principles are *near* and *far*, *literal* and *figural*, *low road* and *high road*, and *forward reaching* and *backward reaching*. The first two categories, *near/far* and *literal/figural* (Royer, 1986), involve the difference of environments and skills. To illustrate the four principles, I will use a rather simple context of comma skills. One might argue that the application of comma skills involves processes and prior knowledges with increasingly complex levels of understanding, but in order to explicate the discussion I have attempted to streamline the illustration.

Near transfer involves highly similar environments. For example, if specific comma use is taught using a textbook and then exercised using worksheets that repeat similar sentences from the textbook, the instructional design operates on the basis of near transfer. *Far* transfer involves dissimilar environments. For example, if specific comma skills are taught using a textbook but then are expected to be applied to an

essay, the instructional design operates on the basis of (hopeful) *far* transfer. Another distinction between near and far transfer is that near transfer involves skills and far transfer involves procedural or conceptual knowledge (Schunk, p. 212). In the example above, the comma use would need to be understood and applied in a new context with some sentences that don't replicate the same structure as the previous textbook examples. These distinctions of transfer hint at the complexity of assessment matching instructional outcomes and pedagogical design.

Literal transfer involves an intact skill that operates successfully in a new task despite the change in context (Royer, p. 95). To return to the grammar example from above, the successful use of commas on the worksheet that uses sentences resembling the textbook examples would be an example of *literal and near* transfer. The skill and the context of application are almost identical to the first skill and context of instruction. But literal transfer also suggests that the student writer would be able to place commas in the essays using sentences that require that particular use but don't exactly resemble the worksheet samples. *Figural* transfer uses "some segment of our world knowledge for problem-solving, thinking, or learning about a particular problem or issue" (Royer, p. 96). Royer explains the ability to use metaphors or analogies as an indication of figural transfer because an analogy tests the audience's prior general knowledge base. For example, *figural* transfer is used to name the parts of speech, which instructors count on to even begin a traditional lesson in grammar.

Perkins and Salomon (1988) recast the concept of transfer, combining two elements: the automation of the skills and the contexts of the skills, within one model. For Perkins and Salomon, "*low-road* transfer reflects the automatic triggering of well-

practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable similarity to the original learning context” (p.25). For example, the student placing commas on the worksheets after a lesson in class would be *low-road* transfer. *High-road* transfer is the more complicated process. It “depends upon the deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” (p. 25). In this process, the student would abstract the rules about one particular comma use and apply it to other comma situations or be able to develop an understanding of the division of words, phrases, and clauses.

Transfer in Composition

The educational objectives of most first-year composition courses (FYC) implicitly rely on the principle of transfer, either as a gateway or, at the very least, a service to the university. Thus, composition instructors work to varying degrees to help students negotiate their ‘invention of the university’ or entry into the activity system of their chosen discipline. One might suggest that a negotiation of *low-road* transfer—where one writing context is somewhat similar to another and triggers the same writing skills to be used—is the aim in FYC if instructors use the personal essay or other forms of expressivist writing. The assumption is that forms of expressivist writing may be familiar from secondary education will now be used in college to bridge the previous context and then prepare for new writing assignments. And *high-road* transfer—which “depends upon the deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application of another” (Perkins & Salomon, p.25)—is the aim of Writing-in-the-Discipline (WID) instructors when they rely upon the second- or third-year writer’s move from the lessons of FYC to the discourse communities of the academy.

Elizabeth Wardle (2007) bemoaned the lack of time spent defining transfer in composition studies (p. 65) and extended David Smit's (2004) complaint that to date "there are no research studies that concentrate directly on the nature of transfer in writing" (p. 124). While many educational and psychology scholars review a myriad of studies in transfer research in the last 100 years starting with the Thorndike and Woodworth study mentioned earlier, composition scholars are limited when they need a strong review of empirical or longitudinal studies in transfer of writing knowledge.

What is available are nascent studies in composition research from the last two decades which don't specifically name transfer as a research goal. Yet, they can be read with the same results. More importantly for this study, the conclusions about transfer are a mixed bag. Gerald Nelms and Ronda Leathers Dively (2007) reviewed three case studies from the 1980s that reveal students often *don't* make near transfer connections even when the writing contexts are within the same discipline and/or require similar writing tasks.

In 1985, Anne Herrington found that the students in her study failed to make connections between the types of writing they were doing for different courses, even though they were writing within the same discipline. In 1987, Lucille Parkinson McCarthy found that her case study subject Dave, despite similarities among writing assignments in three different courses, interpreted these tasks "as being totally different from each other" and "totally different from anything he'd done before," and thus, failed to apply strategies gained in his composition course to these writing assignments. And in 1989, Stephen Doheny-Farina had a similar experience with his case study subject Anna, who, when writing in both an academic and a non-academic context, perceived the two discourse communities as different and, thus, interpreted the writing tasks as different, when, in fact, they were very similar. (p. 215)

None of the students seemed to engage in near transfer despite the similarities perceived by the instructor and the researcher. Thus, another factor in the situation is not only the instructor's perception of the similarities or differences of the writing tasks

but the students' perceptions as well (Driscoll, 2009; Smit, 2004). My study attempts to extend the work regarding student perceptions by asking them what writing skills, knowledges, and processes they used in other courses and how they completed present writing assignments. The goal for this research was to develop an understanding of the writing tasks based on the students' perceptions and definitions of the writing tasks.

Extending conclusions from previous research on students' writing in different environments, Smit provided an extensive analysis of Barbara Walvoord and Lucille McCarthy's (1990) study of students' writing in four different disciplines because it does "deal with the problem of transfer" (p. 125). His conclusions based on the review of Walvoord and McCarthy's study were, in his words, "commonplace in the literature on transfer" (p.130). He joined McCarthy's conclusion in stating that often "novice writers do not see the relevance of what they have learned before to new tasks" (p. 130). 'Novice' writers seemed to transfer knowledge from one context to another only when they saw similarity between previous learning and the current situation. However, the novice writers (as first-year students) of McCarthy's study were experienced writers. They were novices to the discourse community. The question for this study is to what extent do the experienced writers (as junior/seniors) in the capstone course (a new situation) exhibit a novice status. Perhaps the difficulties writers report are about their understanding of the writing environment rather than the skills or processes they seem to lack. In other words, what is important for the writer is "see[ing] the relevance of what they have learned" rather than specifically what they have or have not learned in writing. Returning to Flower and Hayes's description of

student difficulties, the difficulty may be about the student's skills to assess the rhetorical situation of a new assignment rather than merely writing as a discrete skill.

Similarly, Linda Flower's (1994) work *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing* did not specifically address the issue of transfer as she *framed* the study. Flower discussed her conclusions about the troubled writer in terms of transfer and focused specifically on the writer's interpretation of the writing task. Hence, important to the process of transfer was reflectively naming the "strategic knowledge—on reading a situation, setting appropriate goals, using appropriate strategies, and being aware of one's own options and assumptions" (p. 290). While these last five studies relate to the study of transfer, Smit and Wardle's recent complaint of the lack of transfer research is substantiated by the fact that none of these studies *frames or defines* their work in terms of *transfer*.

The most recent 'transfer' research in composition has been a result of specific questions regarding *what* transfers and *why* from FYC to writing completed during the course of a student's next few years. Each of the following studies has taken a different perspective and moved composition further in understanding how we might best teach students to write. None of the studies is definitive.

What studies in composition transfer seem to define best is when transfer is *not* happening. This finding is substantiated in research of the last 100 years regarding transfer (see Robert Haskell, 2001, pp.12-16). Apparently, both instructors *and* students play a role in the absence or lack of transfer. An interesting note here that complicates any study of transfer is that Nelms and Dively (2007) found a differing description of writing tasks even among the researchers and instructors. Asking

whether the instructors assign “persuasive writing” produced a hesitant “Yes.” Following the tentative agreement, the instructors described persuasive writing in various modes as “justifying an opinion” and “explaining your reason” (p. 227). These differences in terminology for writing tasks are no surprise to anyone who teaches writing or administers writing programs; however, the complication for researching transfer must be noted.

In a study that suggested that transfer can be facilitated by instructors’ pedagogical tools, Mark James’s (2009) research of far transfer in L2 writers asserted that “factors like explicit instruction in a task prompt (e.g., that asks students to provide a definition) or the structure of a task prompt (e.g., that is divided into questions)” (p.78) can prompt transfer. In what appeared to be an earlier warning of expecting too much from this ‘prompting’ that James advises, Ilona Leki’s (2006) discussion of FYC’s “legacy” for L2 writers was that “we cannot, in fact, expect transfer of broader principles because new writing contexts, [across the curriculum] are simply too dissimilar” (p.69). The contexts of writing environments are so different that even if the terms for or the name of the writing task are the same, the student’s interpretation and goals may be different. The result: the student fails to engage in effective transfer.

The findings of Nelms and Dively could be interpreted as extending Leki’s warning about L2 writers to L1 writers and their instructors. Nelms and Dively studied First Year Composition (FYC) and Writing-Intensive (WI) instructors in an effort to understand what contexts promote knowledge transfer to writing intensive courses. They found that transfer was inhibited by the instructors’ use of different terminology—this was true among the FYC instructors and FYC and WI instructors.

Furthermore, the student-instructor relationship figured into a triangulated dance of meaning as students attempted to interpret what instructors meant. While instructors thought that they were asking for skills their students knew, students perceived the terms as unrelated to the point where no transfer of the skill set occurred—even though the contexts were quite similar (p. 227). Surprisingly, transfer was noted in some higher-order writing skills: “an understanding of the relationship between thesis and support; a facility for analyzing various texts; and a familiarity with principles governing source citations” (p. 224). Why transfer happened *here* was not articulated since these data were gathered from a focus group and survey of instructors rather than from students.

Similarly, Anne Beaufort’s (2007) longitudinal case study of a single college writer, Tim, a double major in history and engineering, pointed to the instructor rather than to the student. Beaufort followed Tim through his college years and for two years beyond graduation. She concluded that Tim’s difficulty as an effective writer stemmed from his having to negotiate such various requirements of his disciplinary majors. For Tim, figuring out how to write successfully as a history major was complicated by also having to figure out how to write successfully as an engineer. The two distinct writing environments—with their concomitant rules for effective prose—created a serious hazard for Tim’s success.

This was clearly the case for Tim in all three school contexts—freshman writing, history, and engineering. Writing tasks were mostly assignments, i.e. responses to an authority figure’s need to evaluate the learner’s competence, not rhetorical problems to be solved within the context of a network of discourse community members whose texts existed for multiple social purposes. (p. 151)

The research suggested that the writing assignments asking for knowledge recall to 'evaluate the learner' prompted Tim to inappropriately generalize skills from his first-year course to those in his major. In fact, Beaufort critiqued the instructors by asserting that:

What Tim missed was the differences in genre requirements and critical thinking stances required in the discourse communities represented in these courses. Though intelligent, Tim was not primed by teachers in either discourse community to understand different values and community purposes as they would affect writing goals, content, structure, language choice, rhetorical situations, etc. (p. 68)

Beaufort concluded that in order to engage in far transfer, Tim would have needed more guidance in understanding the rhetorical situation of the writing assignment as well as "numerous opportunities to apply abstract concepts in different social contexts" (p. 152). How many different social contexts one can find embedded in a single disciplinary course is questionable. But her recommendation suggested that transfer was unlikely to happen if the audience and context for writing assignments remained the instructor. Beaufort's finding suggests that a study of writers for whom the public audience and civic purpose of the writing assignment is relatively new in a capstone writing course would also conclude that participants "missed [. . .] the differences in genre requirements and critical thinking required in the discourse communities" (p. 68) of the public sphere without 'priming' by the teachers.

If Beaufort's study implied that the design of the writing assignments and the instructor's lack of guidance inhibited transfer, Wardle's longitudinal case study supported the paucity of writing assignments outside of FYC for students to engage in transfer. Wardle followed seven students from her FYC course as they moved into other courses in the academy. Her students self-reported their expectations and

findings and reported that they perceived value to the writing processes, skills, and strategies of FYC. The students further reported that—among other skills that seemed to transfer for them—they learned to read and research academic articles, organize information, and engage in long-term research projects. However, they did not report accessing those skills in order to perform successfully for writing assignments in their subsequent courses, as the writing assignments were, for the most part, easy, short, and involving summary—lower-order skills they learned in high school.

Transfer was noted by Wardle as students completed particular assignments, but what seemed to trouble Wardle, and other researchers such as Nelms and Dively, was that the students didn't recognize the skills as originating in FYC. Wardle's student completed a lab report that required research and analysis skills similar to her FYC paper. Yet, the transfer happened without the student consciously recognizing the similarities and abstraction necessary to engage in the new task. Wardle associated the success of the student's work with the contextual cues of teacher feedback and peer review embedded in the new writing activity system (pp.79-80). Perhaps this phenomenon of "intentional, mindful abstraction" associated with high-road transfer can be less mindful or conscious and still happen. Obviously, high-road transfer can happen either way and still be present. The other element that appeared necessary to the success of high-road transfer was immediate and present help within the current writing context. One of the goals of this study was to determine whether students used past writing experiences to complete assignments. However, it is not the goal of this study to determine the level of aid teachers provided to facilitate transfer. With a focus on students at the junior/senior year, this study worked to determine how much

the students appeared to transfer on their own. Examining teacher roles would be material for another study.

Another important study for its focus on student perspectives was Bergmann and Zepernick's (2007) examination of transfer to new writing situations. They found students perceived writing in English classes and writing in the disciplines as distinctly different, and therefore, they did not see the *need* to carry the skills from one context to the other. If Wardle's students perceived the value of the FYC skills but not the need to use them, Bergmann and Zepernick's participants perceived neither the value nor the need. The writing of English classes was "personal, subjective, creative, and primarily intended 'not to bore the reader'" (p. 131). In turn, students viewed the writing instruction and commenting on papers in English class as a disruption of a "'natural' act" (p.129). Bergmann and Zepernick's term of English classes is used because their study included FYC and literature courses that taught writing. In addition, their FYC courses were taught by "full-time, tenured or tenure-track literature faculty (only a few of whom showed evidence of significant professional interest in composition pedagogy) and a small number of adjuncts" (p.130). The researchers recognized the effect this may have had on student perceptions of the portability of English writing instruction. By contrast, writing in the disciplines introduced students to a discourse community with specified rules delivered through something of a subject matter expert—the content instructor. Students saw writing conducted in these content areas as "academic or professional" (p.129). Desiring entry into this academic or professional writing community, then, required formal instruction and acceptance. Sadly, the skills that were viewed as transferable from English classes were features of

formatting and grammar. If some formatting and grammar skills are generalizable (James, 2009; Leki, 2006; Benander & Lightner 2005), then low-road transfer happens—but only in situations with similar contexts.

Yet, any academy by its very nature is composed of very different writing environments. And the capstone writing course at the heart of this study is a direct descendant of the interdisciplinary population of the General Education committee. Understanding the role of low-road and high-road transfer then becomes even more crucial for a capstone course. One such study was by Benander and Lightner (2005) who explored question of near and far transfer in general education in order to develop better pedagogical goals. Benander and Lightner reported how instructors changed their teaching practices in order to facilitate transfer as students engaged in different general education courses. Their findings of near and far transfer parallel the results of other studies mentioned here. Students seemed to exhibit and recognize the near transfer of lower-order skills such as grammar and formatting. The results for the higher-order skills of “critical thinking, audience accommodation, and organization over time were much more uneven” (p. 202). As a first study of transfer within the institution, these poor results of far transfer can be expected. As Smit wrote, “You get what you teach for” (p. 134). The opposite might be expected once the committed group of instructors revised their praxis to include Benander and Lightner’s recommendations of explicit expectations, advising for course sequencing, course redesign, and developing students’ metacognitive skills. In addition, the ability of instructors to note far transfer may improve. Whether students are able to note far transfer is a matter for another study.

Are certain students able to recognize similarities and differences among writing tasks and engage in “mindful, deliberate abstraction”? Or is transfer a group action and reaction during which not one but many act as catalysts to a complex writing task? Similar to Wardle’s assertion about contextual cues facilitating transfer, Benander and Lightner’s participants reported that “class discussions and peer review” (p. 203) were helpful. More research needs to be done as to what happens during class and peer sessions that might facilitate transfer.

Furthermore, there needs to be more research regarding students near the end of their academic career as they have presumably developed as writers in the university. This study seeks an understanding of what student writers from various disciplines at Longwood University claim they have learned in composition courses. Students in the capstone writing course reported writing processes, skills, and knowledges they practiced or used in their writing-intensive courses at Longwood. This study is an attempt to provide an understanding of how previous composition experience comes into use in a capstone writing course. If some writing processes, skills, and knowledges transfer, to what extent do they operate in this new context?

Complications with the Study of Transfer

Time—it takes time to develop the cognitive skills associated with “intentional, mindful abstraction.” Is it possible to cultivate and then measure these cognitive skills within the 15 weeks of an academic semester or a research study? More longitudinal studies are in the works (Wardle, 2007; Nelms & Dively, 2007; to name a few).

Another complication is the contention that asking students to reflect “provokes” transfer, thereby skewing the results. Nelms and Dively intimate that the

results indicating transfer may have been facilitated by the researchers' tools. They find the claim of transfer problematic because many of the composition studies in students' rhetorical knowledge and awareness of genre and discourse used student reflection to discover evidence of transfer. According to Nelms and Dively, the metacognitive awareness needed to name the process of transfer may have falsely provoked a 'reading' of transfer. Consequently, their suggestion is that the students' useful writing processes, skills, or strategies may very well have been uniquely constructed within each context without the help of transfer. Whether or not they perceive their processes as transfer or whether reflection influences transfer is not the goal of the study, although it may be a result. This study attempts to understand what students perceive is required by certain writing tasks and what internal and/or external tools they used to complete the writing task(s).

The final complication for a study of transfer within composition studies is not unique to this situation. The human variables involved in the contexts, activities, and tools of writing instruction make conclusions tenuous at best. Smit joins the now familiar chorus suggesting that transfer is at best problematic because "it is largely unpredictable and depends on the learners' background and experience, factors over which teachers have little control" (p. 119). The same can be said for any learning study. In addition to the uncontrollable factors, many composition scholars argue that writing is a situated activity in which local knowledge is crucial (Flower, 1994; Russell, 1997). Thus, the studies regarding transfer in composition mentioned above involved different student populations and local demographics that limit the generalizability of many of the claims. And the respective researchers recognized that.

Are there any ways in which we can study transfer recognizing the complexities of the subject(s) involved? This study represents a return to the student involved. Smit recalls Lucille McCarthy's 1987 conclusions from *A Stranger in a Strange Land* regarding a "number of factors that may interfere with a novice writer's ability to transfer knowledge and skill from one context to another. They include the function the writing serves personally to the writer, the role of the writer in relation to the subject matter, the task at hand, and the teacher" (p. 131). But it is Smit's addition to McCarthy's list that is most useful to this discussion: "To her list I would add one more item: the individual ways that writers interpret the tasks that have been given them in the first place" (p 131).

As such, this study is located within the heart of Smit's additional concern regarding the students' interpretation of writing tasks. After all the teaching and the crafting of writing assignments is done, what is left is how the student then interprets the writing tasks asked of them. To that end, this study examines how students define and approach the writing assignments given to them in a capstone writing course at Longwood University. Further, it seeks to fill the gap in research by identifying the tools that students report using when faced with what they define as familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides an overview of the institutional context of this study. The description of the context situates participants' responses about their writing and the writing assignments required of them in the capstone writing course within the broader framework of Longwood's composition program, the research site of the university, and the researcher's role in the university. More specifically, this chapter includes the following sections:

- a description of the research site, including a brief history and current demographic information;
- a brief history of the site's composition program and description of the capstone writing course, especially its role in FYC and as a culminating course in the site's General Education curriculum;
- a description of the researcher-instructor.

My inclusion of the institutional context, programmatic context, and researcher-instructor context allows me to explore the ideological influences constitutive of the participants' activity systems. These activity systems include the participants' actions as they write and read the assignment sheet within the capstone writing course at Longwood University whose mission statement reflects the goals of developing citizen leaders. I have included my role in this study as a researcher-instructor since I have been involved in promotion and development of the course since it was piloted in 2004.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE

Longwood University is a four-year, regional university located in south-central Virginia, with an enrollment of 4,700 undergraduate students and a few hundred graduate students. In its early history, this public university prepared young women for

careers in education. Indeed, it was the first state-supported teachers' college in the Commonwealth. Although education at both the elementary and secondary levels remains a strong major for students, the university self-identifies as a liberal arts institution and markets itself as a "private university experience with the affordability of a state university" (<http://www.longwood.edu/about.htm>). At the current 2010-2011 undergraduate in-state tuition rate of \$328.50 a credit hour and 70% of the undergraduates in university housing, the claim is relatively sound.

In sum, the 'private university experience' is easy to experience as Longwood's academic buildings are all (still) located within the 60 acre triangle of land the university owns in the center of Farmville, Virginia. The central commons walk through campus has been recently supported by a private donation, so Longwood's students do actually walk to class down a tree-lined commons of fountains and red-brick buildings. A historian and former Professor of English at Longwood University, Rosemary Sprague (1989) wrote in her text *Longwood College: A History* that "over the years one asset continually stressed by [Longwood] under all its earlier names is its 'home-like' atmosphere; actually, until 1944, the Dean of Students was called 'the Head of the Home'" (p. 7). This small, close-knit community experience is underscored by small classes with an average 18:1 student-teacher ratios and 16% of Longwood's classes have 10 or fewer students.

The published teacher-student ratio is average among the three colleges of Arts & Sciences, Business & Economics, and Education & Human Services. Longwood is largely female (69%) and white (88%) population with average SAT scores of 1020-1150 and a GPA of 3.4. Longwood's large female population can be explained by

Longwood's strong Education program, which graduates elementary, middle, and high school teachers. The Education department claims a job retention rate that outlasts the rates for teaching graduates of many other education programs. While Longwood claims a good placement record for Longwood's future teachers, the institution also emphasizes the employability of Longwood's other graduates with an overall placement rate of 90% which Longwood claim is high for the state of Virginia. Furthermore, Longwood requires all undergraduates to professionalize their liberal arts curriculum by completing either a semester-long internship or by engaging in a sustained, faculty-supervised research project. The capstone writing course rounds out the General Education program and meets the mission of the university in producing "citizen leaders."

One could argue that the goal of producing citizen leaders started in Longwood's earliest version of an academic program. A brief review of Longwood's history illustrates this point. In the 1830s, Farmville Female Academy was started as a finishing school by local ministers and then was chartered by the General Assembly in 1839 as the Farmville Female Seminary Association. The school offered "English, Latin, Greek, French, and piano. The tuition fees were \$20 for piano, \$15 for higher English, \$12.50 for lower English, and \$5 for each foreign language" (Shackelford, 1957, p.3). In 1860, with an enrollment of 94 students, the Seminary's curriculum expanded and a president was added so the school could be granted status as a college.

At what was then called Farmville Female College, a student could earn a Mistress of Art degree under her "collegiate department" without having taken English. A typical fall semester course schedule included math, sciences, history and philosophy

(p.5). While the curricula seem to be strong, the educational goals may have been little more than to provide the final brushstrokes to the canvas of femininity. As John Rodrigue writes in a thesis entitled *The Education of Southern Women During the Civil War*, “The education southern young women at the Farmville Female College during the Civil War, while of and by itself is rather esoteric, lends support to the argument that the nation was divided between two societies [. . .] : one had to prevail over the other. The goal of educating women at Farmville was to prepare them for the life of a plantation mistress” (Rodrigue, 1983, p. 41). Twenty years later, Longwood turned the corner from finishing school to professional school.

In 1884, Longwood received a new name and a new mission, the State Female Normal School in Farmville (Tabb, 1929, n. p.). Eighteen years later “[Dr. Jarman, the fourth president of the school, presided over] a small school with a Faculty of thirteen members, offering three years of academic (or high school) work and one year of professional work” (Tabb). A few years later the “Virginia General Assembly renamed [the school] the State Normal School for Women and a national committee chose it as one of twelve leading teacher training institutions in the United States” (Grainger, 1957, p.2). Developing white, female, public school teachers meant that the curriculum needed to include language, math and science. The school catalogue listed the following among its advanced courses: “English, Latin, algebra, trigonometry, analytical geometry, geology, chemistry, physics, zoology, botany, history, arts, philosophy, and the history of education” (Shackelford, p. 10). As Longwood grew, courses steadily reflected a classical liberal training. This typical teacher training curriculum continued on into the early 20th century.

In 1909, Longwood enrolled “647 students with 140 graduating” and was beginning to turn away an increasing number of applicants (Couture as cited in Shackelford, p.5). By 2009, the enrollment was 4800, with nearly 800 students in the graduating class. The mission, too, had changed again—from polishing school for local young women to a co-educational regional liberal arts institution drawing students from various states and countries with a goal of graduating citizen leaders. That explicit claim in the mission—and an accreditor’s need to see a clearer link between marketing claims and curricular reality—led to the development of the course examined in this study.

DESCRIPTION OF LONGWOOD COMPOSITION PROGRAM

“Language is a somewhat delicate test of the vital quality in all lessons.”

--Directions for Oral and Written English in All Classes
of the State Normal School pamphlet
Farmville, Virginia, 1915

The quotation is from the front panel of a small pamphlet developed and disseminated by the Department of English of 1915 at what is now Longwood University. The quotation seems to imply an engaged cross-curricular interest in promoting the use of ‘good English’ both within the Departments of Instruction for the lessons of the professors and also with a nod to the lessons their students-as-future teachers would be preparing. My use of the term ‘good English’ is an intentional association with A.S Hill and Barrett Wendell’s (1903) “good use” which he defines as “the basis of all good style” (p. 18). Wendell’s textbook was used in Longwood’s composition program from the academic terms 1908-1909 until 1911-1912 at which point they switched to Woolley’s *Handbook of Composition* whose text was a

trendsetter according to Albert Kitzhaber (p.199). Woolley's text is also the reference text for the above mentioned across the curriculum pamphlet from 1915 entitled *Directions for Oral and Written English in all Classes of the State Normal School*. This pamphlet appears again in Faculty minutes around 1929 (there's no date of publication or direct evidence of its date of origin) with some revisions. Interestingly enough, the English department as early as 1906 advocated for *all* departments to be stewards of teaching good English. A precedent set by the Scottish realists (Horner, 1993) and later developed in writing-across-curriculum movements in the 1970s (Russell, 1991).

Today, the effort of all departments to be stewards of teaching good English is reflected in courses designated Writing-intensive in Longwood's Writing-across-the-curriculum program. Today, Longwood's composition program stretches beyond the boundaries of the Department of English to involve faculty across the university who teach writing-intensive courses in their disciplines. Such courses typically enroll students who have completed a general education requirement for first-year composition (Goal 2/English 150) and who have yet to reach junior/senior status and thus are eligible to enroll in the program's advanced writing seminar in active citizenship (Goal 14/Capstone writing course). Instructors of writing-intensive courses must require at least 10 pages of formal writing assignments, careful revisions, and explicit instruction in writing practices.

Participants in this study were—for the most part—products of Longwood's composition program. Of the participants surveyed, 71% reported having taken FYC at Longwood as opposed to bringing in dual-enrollment credit or taking a comparable course at a community college. Although Longwood's composition director does

examine students for advanced placement in the program, very few of those students satisfy the testing committee's criteria for such placement. Just under half (45%) reported completing their second writing-intensive course in their major, which means they completed the writing-intensive sequence. And all were enrolled in the capstone writing course which was the site for the study.

First-Year Composition Course

The first course in Longwood's composition curriculum, English 150: Writing and Research, reflects a rhetorical approach to academic inquiry. The course description reads that students will experience "Writing and reading for a variety of academic purposes including in-depth research" (<http://www.longwood.edu/english/16009.htm>). Longwood's English department has had a long-standing tradition of requiring all faculty to teach FYC rather than populating the course with only contingent faculty. The desired goal is to have *tenure-track* and *tenured* faculty teaching FYC because it provides an obvious benefit for admissions counselors. Counselors can tout that faculty status to parents of prospective students who might be concerned that their student will be subjected to auditorium-size classes taught by graduate teaching assistants. However, the benefit to the department accrues when undeclared students experience a positive relationship with faculty in FYC and decide to make English their curricular home.

The Fall 2010 roster for English 150 lists 9 tenured and tenure-track faculty and only 4 contingent faculty (30% of the composition faculty), most of whom are lecturers fulfilling year-to-year contracts. The requirements for lecturers teaching FYC are that they have 18 credits of graduate credit in English which is the minimum accreditation

requirement. The credit in English may be entirely literature. However, of the 26 sections listed with instructors, 9— or nearly 25%—are taught by lecturers and adjunct instructors. Thirty sections of English 150 for the fall 2010 semester are listed in the university's course offerings database as of June 2010. Four of those sections are designated TBA instead of naming a specific instructor. Presumably, adjunct instructors will be hired (or re-hired, in some cases) as students register this summer, further increasing the percentage of contingent faculty for the course. Of course, if enrollments in the fall decrease, the contingent percentage would be lower.

While the 75% average for tenure-track instructors in FYC is better than the national average of 36% for Master's granting departments (Smit, p. 203), that percentage falls short of the department's stated expectation/policy. It does not quite reflect the spirit of the department's bold composition policy. Some would argue that it reflects the 'spirit' and the letter of the department's composition policy because adjuncts are given some political power after a series of successful observations. The seventh line of the policy states that: "Adjunct faculty who have taught English 150 and/or 400 for four semesters may vote in determining composition policy (<http://www.longwood.edu/english/16009.htm>).

While the course is taught exclusively by faculty—tenure-line or not—in the Department of English and Modern Languages and could be perceived as owned by the department, the course represents a cornerstone of the University's program in general education. Specifically, after completing the course, according to its goal statement, students will have "[T]he ability to write and speak logically, clearly, precisely, and the ability, through accurate reading and listening, to acquire, organize, present, and

document information and ideas.” Further, the course introduces students to various discourse communities within the university, intending to develop sound writing and research practices. To that end, the course’s objectives describe a rhetorical approach by indicating that—upon completing the course—students will:

- Understand and adapt to rhetorical and contextual differences in tasks involving writing, reading, speaking, and listening
- Engage in academic inquiry using and evaluating a variety of sources, incorporating and documenting source material appropriately, and avoiding plagiarism
- Develop flexible processes for engaging in academic writing
- Develop knowledge of conventions for different kinds of texts and demonstrate substantial control of the conventions of Edited American English
- Reflect on and make judgments about their own texts and writing processes (<http://www.longwood.edu/gened/goal2.html>)

FYC faculty receive guidance not only from the course goals and general education objectives; they also follow policies established by a departmental composition committee that must be approved by a majority of the voting-eligible department faculty. Among those policies:

- “at least 4000 words including revisions” must be required during the semester;
- instructors should use “texts written for a range of different purposes and audiences [. . . using] a variety of strategies in approaching academic writing tasks; and
- students need to reflect on their own texts and writing strategies.”

The rhetorical approach of this course can be seen as representative of the continual effort to keep pace with current theoretical grounding in composition. But it can also be representative of a much earlier shift from expressivist notions to rhetorical

approaches that characterize many university composition programs in the U.S. beginning as early as the turn of the century. In 1916, the year after the quote about language being measure of “quality in all lessons,” there seemed to be a move to define English as communication that had purpose other than personal expression. The Department of English Language subtitled with “Grammar, Composition, Rhetoric, and Spelling” stated on their catalogue page that students were to learn English for *specific purposes, rather than self-expression* (italics mine, Farmville College Course Catalogue 1916-7). This ‘progressive’ move away from expressivist pedagogy is explained by the pre-professional mission of a state normal school.

Longwood’s Writing-Intensive Program

Once students complete the general education requirement for FYC, they are likely to enroll in a writing-intensive course within their chosen discipline. These writing-intensive (WI) courses are taught by both contingent and tenure-line faculty in departments that represent each of Longwood’s three colleges, Arts & Sciences, Business & Economics, and Education & Human Services.

Similar to writing-across-the-curriculum policies of many institutions reviewed by Christine Farris and Raymond Smith (2000), Longwood’s University’s writing-intensive policy works to continue of composition instruction started in the first-year course, English 150: Writing and Research, by requiring the students to take two designated writing-intensive courses in their major with the grade of “C-“ or better. In order to ensure uniformity of experience with Longwood writing instruction, the institution does not “usually” allow students to transfer credits for the Writing-intensive courses. Having *upper* division, writing-intensive courses also places Longwood in the

majority of established WAC programs that Thaiss and Porter include in their 2010 study of WAC/WID programs in the United States (p. 561). Furthermore, Longwood's course guidelines for writing-intensive designation listed below bear a "striking similarity" to those found by Farris and Smith at other institutions (p. 3). One similarity is the limited class size of 25 or less. Another requirement is specific instruction for writing in the disciplines as well as required process of revision. Another resemblance is in the variety of writing tasks assigned, and the reference to support services for further writing instruction.

Longwood's Writing-Intensive Policy is:

1. Writing-intensive courses should require at least 10 pages of formal writing from each student, typically distributed over three or more papers so students have an opportunity to apply faculty feedback to future written work. (This does not include essay examinations.)
2. Instructors in writing-intensive courses are encouraged to require informal writing (reading journals, brief in-class writings, pre-writing for formal papers) to lead students to explore and articulate course content. Students could use this informal writing to develop ideas for formal papers.
3. Students in writing-intensive courses should be assigned and instructed in specific forms and processes of writing used in professions related to the course discipline.
4. Instructors in writing-intensive courses should give explicit instruction in how to complete the required writing assignments. This explicit instruction must include giving detailed written assignment sheets and a scoring guide showing the explicit criteria, including grading scale, used to score the assignment. If possible, this information should be attached to the course syllabus. Other explicit instruction might include discussing procedures for gathering and organizing information, providing models of appropriate forms, assigning and responding to drafts, and encouraging revision and editing. Instructors must return graded work before the next paper is due, noting areas of strength and weakness on the scoring guide along with the overall grade.

5. Students who have problems with their writing assignments should be encouraged to seek assistance at the Writing Center as early in their writing process as possible.
6. The demonstrated ability to communicate content knowledge effectively through writing must be a factor in the grading for a writing-intensive course. Students must earn a grade of “C-” or better in the course in order to apply it toward their writing-intensive course requirement. A statement to this effect must be included on the syllabus.
(<http://www.longwood.edu/catalog/2001/AcademicRequirements.htm>)

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the pedagogical approach and practice of each writing-intensive course within the program. But some composition scholars caution that any explanation of a writing-intensive policy must also recognize that such courses have the potential to risk further marginalizing composition. They add that supervising and assessing WI curricula can also be problematic (Townsend, 2001, p. 237-9; White, 1994, p. 161-164). What makes for a successful writing-intensive/WAC program is progressive administrative leadership, on-going faculty development, and strong assessment practices (Thaiss & Porter, 2010; McLeod, et al., 2001). Certainly, Longwood is in crowded company as an institution whose assessment practices are slowly gaining strength and may in turn inform its writing-intensive praxis. My exploration of the goals of the writing-intensive program is to discover the composition experience most participants in the study bring to the capstone writing course.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CAPSTONE WRITING COURSE

General education curricula across the U.S. have been revised to focus on student learning outcomes and ways to appropriately and effectively assess those outcomes. The result means that many universities have traded in large, lecture hall-style pedagogies for more active learning strategies in small classrooms with lower

enrollments taught by tenure-line faculty (Erlich, 2007; Glynn, et al, 2005; Benander & Lightner, 2005; Eder, 2004; Schneider, 2003). Longwood, too, has enacted some of these same changes.

No longer are universities containing their entire menu of general education courses within the first two years of a student's academic career. Increasingly, liberal learning programs or general education curricula are being replaced by "an ambitious array of interdisciplinary instructional goals" (Glynn, et al. 2005) woven throughout each of four years of students' coursework.

At Longwood, the 'ambitious array' now involves 14 goals beginning with a first-year seminar designed to introduce students to critical thinking and analysis needed for college success and ending with a senior year internship. Longwood had 15 goals until the 2010 budget crisis when Longwood eliminated Goal 12 which requires "upper-level study in the humanities or the social sciences, of specialized knowledge and skills relevant to the student's broad course of study." Longwood's General Education program now has 14 goals. In between the experiences of the first-year seminar and the senior internship, the on-going goals

engage you [the student] not only in various fields of study, but provide the chance for you [the student] to use different skills to research and resolve different types of questions. All of the goals share some common characteristics. Among them are an emphasis on critical thinking, written and oral presentation skills, effective use of information, and approaching problems from diverse perspectives.

[\(www.longwood.edu/gened/\)](http://www.longwood.edu/gened/)

To ensure that general education goals are the fabric of all four years, the last 4 of the 14 goals are met in junior and senior courses with 300- and 400-level designations. Unique among these 4 goals is Goal 14, which brings all junior- and senior-level

students of the university community back to the English department to “synthesize and critically analyze . . . issues of citizen leadership” (www.longwood.edu/gened/). At this writing, there have been only two other courses offered under a separate listing titled GNED 495: Special Topics which allow students to fulfill Goal 14. Otherwise ALL Longwood graduates take the capstone writing course.

In the spring of 2001, Longwood University’s multi-year general education review revised its composition program. The existing two-semester sequence of traditional freshman composition courses was split into a three-credit freshman and a three-credit senior component. Re-defining the new freshman course was relatively easy: It would prepare students with the rhetorical skills to enter the range of academic discourse communities that they would encounter in their academic programs. The capstone writing course would be positioned strategically at the end of the student’s academic career and would focus on writing outside of the academy.

Defining the capstone writing course required more creativity. There was broad agreement that establishing a general education writing course near the end of students’ academic programs was a good idea, for a number of reasons. Practically, a senior-year composition course “caught” the growing number of transfer and dual-enrollment students who bypassed Longwood’s freshman writing courses. Further, the course’s planners felt that the capstone composition course gave students an opportunity to practice civic engagement skills while supporting their transition to the world beyond the university. More idealistically, the director of composition sought to achieve the institutional mission of developing citizen-leaders prepared to contribute to the common good of society. This motive also had its pragmatic aspects, as the regional

accrediting organization had recommended that the mission be more explicitly built into the curriculum. Perhaps more significant, pedagogically, was that students were more likely to be developmentally prepared to address the complexities of writing in the public sphere as seniors than they were as freshmen and to appreciate the importance of effective writing (Haswell 1991, Light 2000).

Finally, a more experimental reason shaped the course's development in this way: Pulling newly-developed student-specialists out of their disciplinary silos and combining them in diverse groups would allow them to see how they might draw upon each others' expertise to address complex problems in their own communities. Soon enough, they would be working and living among people whose disciplinary training differed from their own. The homogeneity of their senior-level majors' classes was unlikely to be replicated either in the workplace or in their neighborhoods; it made sense to deliberately orient students to the varieties of disciplinary expertise, values, and perspectives represented in most complex organizations and communities.

Exactly how this would all work was not at all defined when the policy was approved, but it would be three years before freshmen students were eligible to take the senior course. Several conditions, however, were established from the beginning and slowly came to fruition with varying degrees of success.

- Themes shared by all sections on a year-by-year basis were supported by campus-wide events and conversation.
- Faculty development programs encouraged and prepared instructors across the curriculum to teach the course if they desired.
- Most importantly, students were asked to shift their frame of reference away from the typical academic purposes (from writing *about* curricular information) and toward writing as a means of acting on the civic world,

exercising literacy skills as acts of responsible citizenship (“writing in order to” *do* something beyond the curriculum).

- Teachers faced the corresponding need to transform their own classroom persona.

They would need to engage “best practices” and to move beyond Longwood’s own curricular expertise and into the realm of demonstrating what expert learners do when they don’t know an answer. Longwood instructors were reminded that McLeod and Maimon (2000) “[proposed] a profound change in pedagogy and curriculum [for WAC], one based not on the ‘delivery of information’ but on theories of learning that propose active engagement with ideas and content knowledge” (p. 578). In this sense, the capstone writing course was a continuation of the idea that instructors deliver course objectives best when they teach process as well as content (Beaufort, 2007; Carter, Miller, Penrose, 1998; Petraglia, 1995).

Since spring 2004, when the course was offered for the first time, the work to find instructors willing to step outside their pedagogical comfort zones has been on-going. As of 2010, only a few sections of the capstone course have been staffed outside of the English Department—from faculty in Communication Studies, Business Administration, and an inter-disciplinary team approach from Sociology, Environmental Sciences, Geography, and a Reference Librarian. Within the English department, staffing has not been as carefully articulated as with the first year composition course. No official policy or guideline exists indicating who should or must—or who may not—teach the course.

Currently, only four tenured/tenure-track professors have taught sections of the capstone writing course. There is no departmental policy restricting the instructors’

pool to tenure-track faculty. Instead, it has been largely staffed by lecturers and adjunct instructors. Yet, a number of the contingent faculty for this advanced writing seminar have completed graduate coursework in composition. Three of the seven contingent faculty are ABD in composition or rhetoric. As with any other general education course, the capstone writing course competes with other general education courses as part of the load the university expects out of the English department. As an 'advanced writing seminar' in 'active citizenship,' the capstone writing course has been a difficult course to attract instructors willing to take a risk. A final complication has been how to articulate the value and utility of the course to juniors and seniors who find themselves back in an English class again and this time writing about civic issues rather than about essays or literature.

From the start, instructors spent considerable time on the first day explaining the title of the course: "Active Citizenship: An Advanced Writing Seminar." Students heard that they were to engage in communities outside of the academy, trying on the cloak of citizenry and acting on rhetorical opportunities in 'real time.' This would be their time to experience speaking up within a civic issue outside the academy, organizing a new body of knowledge, and writing in order to gain or influence a public, civic audience they sought to join or influence.

Currently, the course operates in most sections as a writing seminar about civic engagement. Instructors ask students to practice reading and analyzing public documents before engaging an issue of public significance on their own. Students often conduct a rhetorical analyses of a public documents—essentially engaging in the kind of academic writing that David Russell (1997) identifies as a "school" genre—but soon

gain enough familiarity with the precepts of rhetorical situations (Aristotle, 1991; Bitzer, 1968) to research on-going problems of concern in communities about which they truly care. Contending with the complexities that Bitzer (1968), Vatz (1972), Consigny (1974), and lately Grant-Davie (1997) suggest when trying to locate a rhetorical situation, students might investigate the exigencies of the situation and the rhetors (themselves included), selected points of entry (and in some cases re-selected and re-selected), and then develop rhetorical, textual, or oral performances in order to gain entry, be heard, and perhaps influence an audience.

The pamphlet “Directions for Oral and Written English in All Classes of the State Normal School” referenced in the opening of this section describing “language [as] a somewhat delicate test of the vital quality in all lessons” was published again around 1929. In another effort to direct the use of good English, prominent figures in the English department consistently reiterated in faculty-wide meetings a line that was also reprinted in the catalogue from 1906 until 1963: “The teachers in all departments co-operate with the teachers of English in encouraging good habits in speech and writing.” It would seem that Longwood’s latest revision to Longwood’s composition program is the embodiment of this earlier foundational goal as the capstone writing course works to complement the writing-intensive courses in the many different disciplines across the academy.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER-INSTRUCTOR

The idea for this study began in 2004 when I was asked to teach the general education capstone writing course just described. As an adjunct instructor, I joined another compositionist, the new children’s literature tenure-track hire, and the Director

of Composition, wondering where the experts in the ‘field’ were. I was to learn two things: first, staffing an advanced writing seminar on civic leadership was going to be a hard sell any where, not just within this literature-heavy department; and second, student might prove to be the more difficult to persuade when they thought they were finished with English class and now found themselves within the department walls, again.

As an instructor whose vita included teaching seventh and eight grade Language Arts and 11th grade British Literature to gifted Math and Science students, I was accustomed to having to persuade students of the value of what I was asking them to do, of “selling” most of what I taught. What intrigued me most in those days (and still does) is not only that I got paid for reading, writing, and leading discussion, but also that student learning took all forms. Those various forms of how students learned, were, in fact, the thread that held most of the content together. In other words, I could memorize their textbook or be a content expert in Chapter 5 providing much enrichment, but if I didn’t understand the *way* they learned the material, I was nothing more than a puppet on a stage. At best, I was a very good actor. So, my training in being the expert in *learning*—not necessarily the expert in *content*—started early.

Six years later, when I applied to Longwood University to be an adjunct instructor in the Department of English, I did so wanting to focus on the *processes* of teaching writing rather than on the revelations that came from explicating stories from classic literature. I had stayed at home part time with my children for the previous four years when I accepted the position and began teaching FYC, a writing pedagogy course for future elementary school teachers, and the capstone composition course.

Watching the first students in the capstone writing course struggle with seemingly simple writing tasks drew my attention. When they wanted to address a social civic issue with an elected official, for example, they didn't know where to begin. How do I write to him? Where do I find her address and her title? Their questions remained simple. Too simple, I thought.

Then I began to ask questions of my own.

Why don't they know how to locate civic officials? Why are they using in-text citation in a letter to the mayor? Why do they conduct research for distinctly non-academic issues with academic databases? Why can't they transform what they know and the skills they gained in their major to fit this new situation?

As I worked to both answer their questions and develop relevant teaching materials—even researching and writing alongside my students on issues of concern to me in my life—I also sought out a community of colleagues with whom I could share my concerns and test new ideas. Those conversations and classroom experiences led to several published papers and conference presentations and, ultimately, to this study. The notions of whether students do transfer specific skills in composition, and how and when, continue to drive my professional curiosity—both within the classroom and over coffee with fellow writing teachers. The following chapter describes the research methods of survey and interviewing used to collect data about students writing skills, processes, and knowledges in the capstone writing course.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter explains the research methods employed to answer the research questions about participants' writing in the capstone writing course. The chapter is divided into two sections of survey methods and interview methods. The respective sections explain the collection of the survey data and interview data, and the process of analysis used to develop the findings from the survey and interview data.

OVERVIEW

The premise of this study was to discover the participants' use of writing skills, processes and knowledges for a specific writing assignment in a capstone writing course in Longwood University's General Education program. Three research questions were designed to address the premise of the study. Those questions were: 1) What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report having used or been required to use in their writing-intensive courses at Longwood University? 2) How do students define the writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes required in a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University? and 3) What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report using in completing a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?

The research methods of survey and individual interviews were chosen in an effort to gather information from the participants directly. The survey was designed to report the writing skills, knowledges, and process participants brought into the course. The interviews were designed to explore what participants used to complete an

assignment. Institutional Research Board approval was gained through two institutions to run the study. Since the study was run at Longwood University, IRB approval was sought and granted at Longwood. Since the advisor for the study was based at Old Dominion University, IRB approval was sought and granted at ODU.

The first method of data collection was the use of a group-administered electronic survey in 8 of the 20 sections of the capstone course offered in the spring semester of 2010. The survey was used to collect the frequencies with which participants report the use of skills, knowledges, and processes prior to their capstone writing course at Longwood University. Using a survey to collect data from the target population afforded two descriptions: One, to describe what writing skills, knowledges, and processes participants recalled or claimed to have used in their writing-intensive courses; in other words, what processes participants were willing to claim that they bring forward from previous instruction. Two, the study describes the rate of frequency that any particular skills, knowledges, and processes were named by participants. The survey data was collected, counted, and charted by online survey software. Analysis was based on the highest and lowest number of responses in each category “never,” “rarely,” “occasionally,” “frequently” in order to make an informed description of the targeted population and their composition skills (Fortado, 1990).

The second method of data collection was interviews with survey participants. The assumption made in this study was that the participants’ own explanations of their composition skills, knowledges, and processes were necessary to best discover the participants’ constructed processes as they approached and completed a writing assignment. Individual interviews were completed with 13 participants selected by their

individual instructor. Participants were asked for explanations as to writing skills, knowledges, and processes they used in the completion of a self-selected work which they brought to the interview from the capstone writing course. To analyze data about participants' current writing skills, knowledges, and processes used in the capstone writing seminar, I read and coded the interview transcripts. I coded the responses twice. For the first coding, I used an open coding process in order to "open up the [transcripts] and expose the thoughts therein" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I followed this method from grounded theory to discover the participants' processes and understandings. For the second coding, I used units of analysis from the research questions regarding any writing skills, processes, and knowledges participants claimed to use in the completion of the assignment (Foss & Waters, 2007). Their responses were batched according to themes that emerged regarding the tools they used for the completion of the assignment.

SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS

This section will discuss the purpose, type, and design of the survey as a research instrument. The section will end with a description of the collection and analysis of the survey data.

Purpose

The survey was designed in order to "quantitatively describe the targeted aspects of the study population" (Fortado, 1990). The first part of the survey was designed to collect data about the participant population by asking for year of study, the number of composition courses completed in our program, and the participant's major. The second part of the survey was designed to describe the writing skills, knowledges,

and processes participants reported using in their writing-intensive courses before the capstone writing course. The data showed a range of frequency with which the participants reported using the skills listed in the survey. The limitations of self-reported data have been well developed by a number of scholars; however, Gonyea (2005) supports the pervasive use of self-reported data in higher education provided surveys adhere to his four recommendations for good design. These recommendations include clearly worded questions, recall of recent experience, limitations on time of procedure, and clear options for response (p. 84). Following Gonyea's recommendations for good use of a survey instrument, I checked the clarity of the survey questions with a pilot survey, surveyed participants' recent behavior rather than distant past, assured the participants the survey would take just 10 minutes of their time to answer 10 questions, and extended the survey data with follow-up interviews asking participants about the writing processes, skills, and knowledges used to complete a writing assignment from the capstone writing course.

Type

Computer-Delivered Survey

I delivered a group administered online survey with a face-to-face introduction. In each class using the first 10 minutes of class time, I explained the purpose of the data and solicited participation. An online survey was used for a number of reasons. One reason was to increase the rate of participant response (Chou, 1997) and the speed of return on those results (Fowler, 2002). I decided to introduce the survey and place participants in front of the computer to give them access to the survey immediately; I thought that they would be more likely to complete the survey than if they were

directed to complete it on their own time (see discussion of the rate of return for online evaluations of 200 web-based courses with Hmieleski). While Hmieleski and others (Murphy, 2004) have come to agree that factors such as participant motivation and training can increase the rate of return, the rate of the return for these online surveys would have been problematic because I was not their regular teacher and there was no intrinsic reward for completing or remembering to complete the survey.

The second reason an online survey was used was for ease of data tabulation (Fowler, 2002; Chou, 1997). The online survey instrument allowed me to collect responses with a click of a button rather than gathering slips of paper and completing hours of data entry. Examining chunks and categorizing data was also facilitated by the online survey instrument.

One disadvantage of the online survey was the re-scheduling of classroom space. All solicited classes regularly met in traditional classrooms, and the location had to be changed so that each class met in a computer lab and was able to complete the survey immediately. That disadvantage affected primarily the instructors as they might have experienced a need to re-design classroom instruction.

Convenience Sampling

Only participants enrolled in English 400, the general education capstone writing course, have been used for the study as they represent the target population (MacNealy, 1999) for this research on transfer from writing-intensive courses to the capstone writing course. To gather data on this population, it was not necessary to survey the entire population (Fowler, 2002, p. 13-14). In fact, sampling the entire population of English 400 would have no greater degree of accuracy than if I randomly

sampled only 10% assuming that any 10% had the same characteristics as the entire population (Fowler, p. 34-37). Ultimately, my decision about sample size followed Fowler's advice about sample size for surveys: "The sample size decision, however, like most other design decisions, must be made on a case-by-case basis, with the researchers considering the variety of goals to be achieved by a particular study and taking into account numerous other aspects of the research design" (p. 35). My research goal with the survey was to collect data about the broad trends in writing skills, knowledges, and processes that participants employed in writing-intensive courses. Therefore, I chose to collect a sample of the general education capstone course population by surveying multiple sections.

I used two methods to reduce the sample size. One method was chosen due to efficiency, the other method related to possible population differences. The first reason for reduction of the sample was ease of distribution. I could efficiently handle survey distribution if I solicited only those instructors with a large number of sections in their course load from the complete list of those teaching during the spring semester 2010. By visiting the same instructor's classroom 3 times, I had the potential to collect 60-63 surveys. In order to pilot test the survey and check the accuracy of results within a smaller percentage of the population to a larger population, I collected data in two batches. The first batch had 39 respondents which is nearly 10% of the 397 enrolled in the course. The second batch had 148 respondents which is 37% of the population.

The second method for reducing the sample size was related to the potential for different characteristics in the capstone writing course population. I eliminated my own sections from the sample due to the possibility of bias. Another section was eliminated

because it was designated as honors. Because honors students are required to follow the honors curriculum, it is highly likely that they are engaged in differentiated instruction. Participants enrolled in the Cormier Honors College at Longwood University are required to take 8 honors classes, 3 of which are in their major, possibly including their Writing-Intensive courses

(http://longwood.edu/assets/honors/Cormier_Honors_College_Participant_Handbook.pdf). Thus, I decided to exclude my 3 sections and the 2 honors sections of the capstone writing course.

All survey distribution was completed among the 8 sections as of March 5, 2010, eight weeks into the semester.

Pre-testing of Survey

I did not to pre-test the language of the survey with an *individual* participant as Fowler (2002) suggests. One participant's interpretation of the language was not an accurate justification for changing the wording according to that one person's response. I decided to run a group pre-test of the survey by using the first three sections of the course to test the questions. The only question participants repeatedly needed help with was #2: "Number of semesters at Longwood?" A number of participants asked if that answer was to include the present semester or not. I answered each question individually and then aloud to the group. I excluded this pilot run of the survey from the data analyzed. Before the next administration of the survey, I changed the language of that question to include the succeeding statement. "Do not include this semester."

None of the participants reported questions about Part 2 of the survey which covers the writing processes, skills, and knowledges of composition from their writing-intensive courses.

Format

The survey was limited to 9 questions for brevity (see Appendix 2). However, some questions had 4-13 separate elements requiring an answer. I realize this may have compromised the rate of response due to so many items on the screen (Toepoel, V., Das, M., & Van Soest, A., 2009); however, the rate of response was strong and perhaps influenced by other factors in the design and implementation of the survey. A green background was selected for the online survey simply for variation from the sterility of black and white, and the formatting of space and text was pre-designed by the survey company.

Content

The first 3 questions of the survey asked for demographics pertaining to the research study. The survey asked for the participant's major, number of semesters at Longwood, and number of composition courses taken at Longwood (English 150, Writing-intensive 1, and Writing-intensive 2).

The skills, knowledges, and processes part of the survey asked participants to report the "frequency with which [they] practiced or employed [the reported] skills to complete the assignments in [their] writing-intensive classes only. These skills could [have been] used either in class or outside of class time" (see Figure 1).

4. Part 2: Skills and Processes Below is a list of skills and processes a teacher or a student might employ in a writing intensive course. As you respond to the columns, indicate the frequency with which you practiced or employed these skills to complete assignments in your WRITING INTENSIVE CLASSES only. These skills or activities could be used either in class or outside of class time.

Figure 1 Survey Part 2

The purpose in asking whether they used the skills inside or outside of class time was to discover if the participants had employed the skills at all. My interest was in the participants' reported experience (or perception) of whether the skills were used and somehow internalized, rather than focusing on the instructor side of the learning experience. Hence, I asked what the students used rather than if the skills were taught. In sum, the purpose of the survey was to determine whether and to what extent the participants brought writing skills, knowledges, and processes from another experience. I asked for those skills to be reported regarding their writing-intensive classes based on the assumption that those courses were explicitly required by the General Education curriculum to use writing processes in their assignments. As such, it would be the participants' most recent writing instruction.

The list of skills from the survey was based on the list that Nelms and Dively (2007) distributed to first-year composition instructors in their study of transfer (see Appendix 3). Nelms and Dively's purpose in their research study was to discover the skills and processes instructors had covered in first-year composition, so that the researchers could develop an understanding of what participants may or may not have transferred. As such, the language of the skills list reflected the discourse community of composition specialists. Since my purpose was to survey participants' skills, processes,

and knowledges, I adjusted the language and the organization of the list to suit the participants' community of practice as well as my own research agenda.

I re-arranged the list into batched categories so that the skills might follow some order of process for participants. The categories in this order were:

- Preparing to Write,
- the Process of Writing,
- Arrangement of Ideas,
- Rhetorical Choices,
- Proofreading,
- and Formatting.

I am not assuming that participants engage in all categories listed or even that they experience the processes in the chronological order of this list when they write.

However, the batching of the list followed a sense of process a participant might engage, however rigid or hierarchical it may seem. For example, many studies suggest that participants engage in proofreading recursively while they are preparing to write or engaged in the process of drafting (Emig, 1971; Shaughnessy, 1979; Sommers, 1984).

I recognize as well that it may be ludicrous to suggest that a writer follows any codifiable steps or processes (Kent, 1999). My thinking was that allowing participants to respond about their processes with the option to answer in terms of frequency allowed them to illustrate a process without being locked into a hierarchical or bifurcated process.

Furthermore, the batching of skills under categories wasn't meant to suggest that participants only engage in particular skills within the batch. For example, I

grouped “interpreting assignment, narrowing topics, formulating main ideas, evaluating model participant writing, and evaluating published writing as “Preparing to Write.” These individual skills could happen at any time. In the end, the batching of similar skills (regardless of where they happen in a participant’s process) allows participants to see skills, knowledges, and process as possibly connected to a broader experience and to complete the survey as an organized set of questions rather than 37 questions listed individually. That experience of ‘brevity’ is necessary to motivate participant completion.

In addition to grouping the skills, I deleted some skills from Nelms and Dively’s list because they seemed to speak to instructors’ knowledge and understanding of composition terminology rather than the participants’ understanding of their process. For example, deleted categories were “formal heuristics” and “collaborative invention.” Participants would have likely had questions about those terms, lengthening the amount of time to complete the survey and defeating my design for keeping the survey brief.

Language of the Questions

The survey questions were a revision of Nelms and Dively’s (2007) survey. Permission was granted for the use and modification of the survey by Gerald Nelms and Rhonda Dively and the editors of the *Writing Program Administrators Journal* who published Nelms and Dively’s manuscript (See Appendix 5). Nelms and Dively administered their survey to composition instructors in order to determine “some sense of what is actually being emphasized in composition courses” (emphasis mine, p. 219). Changes in language were made so that participants could better understand the terminology of the writing skills, knowledges, and processes of composition. For

example, “collaborative invention” was re-interpreted to “group conferencing.”

Although group conferencing may not have been what Nelms and Dively meant by the term collaborative invention, the term was changed to a concept with which participants were more likely to be familiar.

Question Order

Demographic questions about major, number of semesters completed, and number of writing-intensive courses were placed first in order to locate the ease of answering first before the crucial questions were answered. One question asking about the completion of a specific number of writing-intensive courses might have posed difficulty in the specificity of the recall, so participants were asked to access their transcripts in Banner (Longwood University’s online institutional record database) while taking the survey.

Arrangement of Questions

Writing skills, knowledges, and processes questions were grouped in categories of similar skills; for example, all “formatting” questions were grouped together, all questions regarding “preparing to write” were grouped together. This was done so that data could be analyzed not only by separate skills but also the frequency with which certain groups of strategies appeared.

Scales for Answers

A likert scale “Never,” “Rarely,” “Occasionally,” and “Frequently” was used to record the rate of frequency with which participants recalled using writing processes, skills, and knowledge (see Table 1).

5. The process of writing					
	never	rarely	occasionally	frequently	Response Count
individual conferences w/teacher	8.8% (13)	46.6% (63)	35.8% (53)	8.8% (13)	148

Table 1 Likert Scale for Survey

In order to increase the likelihood that options on the likert scale were chosen deliberately rather than participants simply selecting the first option, “frequently” was placed farthest away from the question (see Table 1) so that participants would need to read the full row of responses if, in fact, “frequently” needed to be chosen.

Motivating Respondents

In order to increase the likelihood of response and ensure the uniformity of administration of the survey, I visited each classroom to seek participation in the survey. As a group-administered survey in a classroom setting, the survey was likely to get a high rate of response (Fowler, 2002).

My other methods of motivating respondents were attending each class dressed professionally to create a credible image and naming my role as a researcher collecting data (MacNealy, 1999). In order to further increase the rate of participation, I explained the purpose and the utility of the survey as an aid to better understand and improve writing instruction at Longwood University. Other factors explained in order to increase the rate of response among participants were ease of completing an online survey, brevity of the task within the survey, anonymity of the participants, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION

I have survey data from 8 of 20 sections (148/397 participants or 37% of the total population) of the capstone writing course. Out of 7 possible instructors (including myself) who taught multiple sections, I solicited 6. Every instructor I solicited but one (5/6) responded favorably to my request to survey their participants. Of the 168 participants enrolled in the 8 surveyed sections of the capstone writing course, I have survey responses from 148, for an 88% rate of return within the sample size. My population numbers are based on the enrollment numbers from the university enrollment lists. Factors which affected the rate of return were: some participants were absent the day of delivery, some participants did not qualify to take the survey because they had not completed any writing-intensive courses at the time of the survey, and some participants had already withdrawn or dropped the course by this time in the semester (which may also explain their absence, but would further reduce the number present).

As each section responded in the survey, I went to [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to ensure responses had been recorded. Once all data had been entered by the participants, I downloaded the results.

SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

The survey results were tabulated and batched by the online survey software company SurveyMonkey. The software company displayed the results online in charts that highlighted the Likert scale options or multiple choice options that participants responded to in each question. The graphic display created by Survey Monkey

highlights the response with the highest response percentage and the highest response count.

Since the company provided the tabulation, the analysis phase of the data collection involved reviewing the highest and lowest response rates for the questions in the survey. I looked at individual items of the questions and also the categories which garnered the highest and lowest responses.

I looked at the individual items because I wanted to know which specific writing skills, processes, and knowledges were reported most often. My assumption was that students would be more familiar with these skills, processes, knowledges if they reported using them most often. I also examined the responses for the range of writing skills, processes, and knowledges that appeared in the data. This information would suggest the breadth of skills represented in a selection of capstone writing courses. Whether the writing skills, processes, and knowledges were “rarely,” “occasionally,” or “frequently” used were not as important since my analysis was about whether the skill was used or practiced at all. I recognize that even if a writing skill was reported “never” used, the participant could still have that skill in their repertoire or be unable to accurately label their skill, process, or knowledge; however, the goal of the survey was to capture a representation of the writing skills, processes, and knowledges students perceived they had used, rather than “had.” Furthermore, I recognize that there may be writing skills, processes, and knowledges the participants have in their repertoire that were not on the survey.

INTERVIEW RESEARCH METHODS

This section discusses the purpose, type, and design of the interview as a research instrument. The section ends with a description of the collection and analysis of the interview data.

Purpose

The purpose of the interview phase of this study was to discover the writing skills, knowledges, and processes participants use to complete a specific assignment in their writing capstone course. While the survey part of the research could be criticized for de-contextualizing the writing skills, knowledges, and processes participants were asked to recall, the interview part of the study helped to re-contextualize the writing processes, skills, and knowledges participants use for writing in their capstone writing course. By asking each participant to select a piece of writing from the capstone writing course, the intention was to have the participant contextualize the writing they completed and the writing skills, processes, and knowledges that they found useful. This study involved writing in a specific site, a capstone writing course at Longwood University. Because the targeted study involves a specific population, interviews were completed at Longwood using only the participants of the survey.

Type

Following the assumption that writing skills and processes are understood as a situated activity within settings, by actors, using various tools (Wardle, 2004; Russell, 1998; Flower, 1994), using interviews as a research method in my study was critical in order to record and understand the students' experience in writing for an assignment. Since there was nothing taboo or controversial about the subject of the interviews, an

open-ended approach to the interview allowed for the participants to explain their processes, skills, and knowledges in writing which can be unique to individuals. To that end, I used a “semi-structured, interactive interview” (Corbin and Morse, 2003). Some questions emanated from the interview situation in the form of “ethnomethodology” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 92). Thus, I did not intend to enact a level of neutrality or invisibility while discussing writing with the participants as I hoped the conversational style of the interview would allow me to develop questions particular to the participants’ unique answers. In addition, I hoped that the interactive and conversational nature of the interview would allow participants to develop their explanations as unique to their experience.

The research culled from the interview benefits from a shared level of interpretation and engagement in the moment of discussion during the interview (Fortado, 1990; Fetterman, 1989). As a teacher of composition and an instructor of the course, being familiar with the participants’ range of texts and abilities in the course aided in the analysis of the participants’ text for particular developmental features.

The interview began with an introduction to explain the study and establish rapport (see Appendix 4). To begin the research part of the interview, I developed open-ended interview questions. However, most questions extended from the participant’s responses as he/she explained the completion processes of the assignment.

Sample questions were:

- What piece of writing did you decide to bring to the interview?
- How would you describe this writing?
- What did the assignment or situation ask for? How did you know?

- What helped you write this piece?
- What part of this (text) was easy to write? Why was it easy?
- What caused more difficulty? Why do you think that was difficult or what made it difficult?

The transcripts with a complete list of the interview questions and the participant responses are available by emailing the researcher (lettnerusthg@longwood.edu).

INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION

I used computer audio software to capture the interview material. I transcribed each interview immediately after the event. Hearing the interview and writing the transcript so soon after the interview allowed me to critique my interview skills. As the interviews progressed, I refined the process of asking clearer questions that did not overwhelm the participant and yet were more open-ended. In addition, I was more conscious of my agenda in the interview and the use of clear follow-up questions.

INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed the interview data in two ways during two separate time frames and produced two different perspectives on the interview data. The first analysis happened *during* and *immediately after* the transcription of the interviews. At this point, each individual transcript was coded for emerging patterns and themes without the explicit research questions in mind. Coding without the research questions was an effort to allow the participants' perspective to speak louder than my interpretation of the data. Understandably, coding data was a recursive, dynamic, learning experience (Blakeslee and Fleischer, 2007, pp. 176-177; Foss & Waters, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a writing researcher I wanted to examine writing from the perspective of those doing the writing. After all, I had designed the research questions from my perspective to capture

their responses. My goal was to capture their perspective not just answers to my questions. My process followed “Open Coding,” (Strauss & Corbin, p.101-105) a method from grounded theory. Open coding afforded a window on participants’ perspective on writing for assignments in the capstone writing course, and how they completed the assignments. Furthermore, this examination produced category names using the participants’ terminology.

The second round of coding happened after all the transcribing was complete. The second coding was based on the research questions I was asking in the study (Meloy, 1994). To begin the notation process and record my findings, I wrote notes in the margin according to units of analysis based on the research questions (Foss & Waters, 2007). This examination produced codings that noted the writing skills, processes, and knowledges participants reported using for the capstone writing course assignments and what they found useful. However, this coding seemed to hide the participants’ terms for their writing production. If the premise of the study was to find what participants reported, it became apparent that the codings should follow the participants’ response. What follows in this description of analysis is a blending of the two methods of coding. I have formatted the explanation by the explanatory schema I used in the analysis—Familiar Tasks, Tools for Familiar Tasks, Familiar as Unfamiliar, Tools for Unfamiliar Tasks, Moment of Erasure.

Explanation of Coding

After the interview transcription and initial coding was complete, it was apparent that participants did not describe their assignments using the terms ‘skills, knowledges, and processes’—as my research questions were worded—rather they

described the writing assignment in terms that suggested whether the task was familiar or unfamiliar, easy or difficult. In addition, they described what they needed to complete the assignment not in terms of skills, knowledges or processes—those were my terms—they described it in terms of tools or aids.

These coding sessions produced a refinement rather than a complete revision of my research. My research questions about the participants in the capstone writing course were:

- How do participants define the writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes required in a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?
- What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do participants report using in completing a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?

The terms of Familiar Tasks, Unfamiliar Tasks, and the Tools emerged as the category names during my first coding sessions of the interview data.

Second coding was based on the research questions I was asking in the study (Meloy, 1994). I wrote notes in the transcript margins according to units of analysis based on the research questions (Foss & Waters, 2007). For example, when I found participants' responses that indicated their description of the writing tasks in their own words, I wrote the skill or process they described. When Michael, a participant, explained his compare/contrast essay assignment:

We read the book, An Ordinary Man by Paul Rusesabagina and then when we saw the movie Munyurangabo, both [texts] were similar in certain aspects, and we were asked to write an essay comparing the two, to pick a certain theme that tied them together even though they were made by different people, we wanted to see if there was some type of similarity in how we could tie them together in comparison/contrast essay. (Michael, Chemistry major, p. 1)

I wrote “description compare/contrast essay” in the margin. After reviewing all the interviews and coding the data according to the research question, I still had large categories of data.

With the interviews coded both ways—with participants’ categories and the research question categories, I marked the interviews according to participant and I cut each chunk of data into strips (Foss & Waters, 2007). With the participants’ responses in strips according to codes, I began to find categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) according to similarities and differences among the codes. These categories were—Familiar Tasks, Unfamiliar Tasks, Tools for Familiar Tasks, and Tools for Unfamiliar Tasks.

Familiar Tasks

Unlike the other categories of analysis, the coding for Familiar Tasks was done with the terms of the research question. I coded this batch with the heading Familiar Tasks because of the ease with which participants described the task. But I divided the batch into categories of writing skills, processes, and knowledges. The categories beneath Familiar Tasks were the actual tasks they described easily or as easy. For example, some familiar tasks were summarizing, citation, and compare/contrast essays.

Unfamiliar Tasks

Looking for what emerged in the data, “Unfamiliar Tasks” responses had sortable categories. The categories below helped me to define the participants’ perception of what was unfamiliar.

I noticed four categories:

1. “Unknown:” participants described the writing task as a complete unknown or conundrum. The terms used were: “something they’ve never done

before” or “completely new.” Initially, there seemed to be enough in the participants’ perception of the task to note a separate category; however, in the end, quantity did not confirm a thread. Participant response and evidence of process confirmed a thread. Hence, there were two subsequent uses for this category. First, it was collapsed with “different” and “difficult” once I reviewed the reasons for the description. Second, within this category emerged a phenomenon I called the “Moment of Erasure.” Strauss and Corbin describe a phenomenon as “an abstract representation of an event, object, or action/interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data” (p. 103). I chose the word erasure because of its connotations with classroom blackboards (however dated that reference may be), and I chose it because the participants describe their experience as if any reference to past or present understanding of a procedure is gone. “I had no idea what to do.” The “moment of erasure” appeared when students described not knowing what to do when faced with a task they perceived as unfamiliar. The “moment of erasure” was then coded by its features and two “characteristics” (p. 103) emerged. One characteristic of the “moment of erasure” was that participants described an inability to know what to do for the assigned writing task. The second characteristic of the “moment of erasure” was a complete reliance on external tools such as teacher’s instruction, sample writing, or peer’s aid.

2. “Different vs Unfamiliar:” some participants defined a writing task as different than what they were used to writing either in English class or within their major but not as completely new and unfamiliar.
3. “Difficult vs Unfamiliar:” participants defined the task as hard or difficult yet not necessarily unfamiliar.
4. “Error in Unfamiliar:” participants explained why they did something wrong during an unfamiliar task.

In the end, the Unfamiliar Tasks were re-read and there emerged three themes.

The first theme was that participants described certain writing tasks exclusively as “completely new.” So, I coded the batch for writing tasks that were described as completely new. The second theme that emerged was that the rest of the Unfamiliar Tasks were actually Familiar Tasks. The participants had described certain writing tasks as unfamiliar when in fact they were made up of familiar writing tasks. For

example, a research paper in the capstone writing course was identified as unfamiliar because the “sections of the assignment” were different than what the participant was used to. These responses were coded “Familiar as Unfamiliar.”

Within the batch of Familiar as Unfamiliar, I coded the responses for the reasons the participants defined the tasks as Unfamiliar. Participants explained that writing tasks were unfamiliar for four identifiable reasons. One reason was that they did not know how to develop the assignment or invent the content. Another reason the writing task seemed unfamiliar was that the assignment was arranged in different parts or sections than participants were used to. Another reason the writing tasks was unfamiliar was that participants did not know how to “write like this.” And finally they reported that the writing task was unfamiliar because the audience was new to them.

Upon re-examining the reasons participants gave for the writing tasks being perceived as unfamiliar, I saw these reasons as the elements of the Rhetorical Canon. When participants perceived the writing task as unfamiliar because they did not know how to develop the assignment or invent the content, this was an issue of Invention. When participants perceived the writing task as unfamiliar because the assignment was arranged in different parts or sections than they were used to, this was Arrangement. When participants perceived the writing task as unfamiliar because they did not know how to “write like this,” it was Style. When participants perceived the writing task as unfamiliar because the audience was new to them, it was Delivery.

Tools

My first run at coding was done without the terms of the research question. The second coding was done with the research questions in mind. Again, I realized that the

second coding hid the themes that had emerged in my initial reading of the transcripts chronologically. I had found that participants named specific tools for the completion of tasks in the capstone writing course. Those tools were named with specificity and showed up in a number of participants' experiences. Furthermore, the tools were connected to familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks participants were completing. I further sorted their reported experience by differences among the tools. I realized that some tools originated from within a repertoire of strategies they were able to recall from within. I called these tools: *internal tools*. The source of internal tools included past instruction and personal interest in the subject from which participants generated content for the writing. The other batch of tools originated externally from the participants' immediate grasp. I called these tools: *external tools*. The external tools were categorized by direct instruction by teacher and mentor, indirect instruction by teacher course design, assignments, and textbook.

The term *tools* is not intended to imply an objectified set of concrete implements that do not necessitate modification or adaptation to each writing experience or environment. Rather the term tools is borrowed from activity theory's explanation of the network of actions "consisting of a subject (a person or persons), an object(ive) (an objective or goal or common task), and tools (including signs) that mediate interaction" (Russell, "Rethinking," p. 53). The tool represents an application of varied activities that constitute the negotiation of the writing tasks required in each setting. Another reason for the use of the term *tool* was the participants described the completion of writing tasks in terms of *what* helped them. What helped them was skills

participants already knew and teacher's or peer's direct aid. The participants appeared to objectify the aid in terms of tools.

Accuracy

Although Creswell (2003) asserts that validation of findings in qualitative stages does not carry the same connotations as it does with quantitative research, he does recognize the importance of “determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (p. 195-196). In this stage of the study, I attempted to strengthen the accuracy of the results by completing three activities: 1) I chose only interview participants from the sections of the capstone writing seminar that completed the survey; 2) I sent the transcript to each participant for review. Participants were able to revise the transcript to reflect what they intended to say if they found misrepresentation; and 3) I examined the interview transcript for themes found in the survey's frequencies of responses.

CHAPTER 5

DATA FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter displays the data from the survey and the interviews and analyzes the findings within that data. In the first part of this chapter, the survey is discussed. In the second part of the chapter, the interviews are discussed.

OVERVIEW

The survey participants reflected the interdisciplinary population of junior/seniors at the end of their composition experience at Longwood University. The participants reported using writing skills, knowledges and processes with noticeable regularity. Whether their assignments or instructors are explicitly requiring or providing explicit instruction in these skills is beyond the means of these data to predict or illustrate. What the survey seems to suggest is that the writing skills are used with frequent regularity. In contrast to a common critique of writing-intensive courses, the writing skills, processes, and knowledges exercised by students in the survey do not illustrate a paucity of skills nor does there seem to be a small representation of writing which is often the case with writing-intensive courses (Farris and Smith, 2000; White, 1989). In fact, the frequency with which 33 out of the 37 items were reported being used suggests that the writing-intensive classes engaged at least the first four listed policies of Longwood University's Writing-Intensive program.

This survey suggests that participants are engaging in writing activities. Reporting the actual number and variety of those assignments is beyond the scope of the survey. If participants report "frequently" working on the arrangement of their ideas or the formatting and proofreading of academic work, this survey does not reveal

do not know to what extent they are successful at this skill or process and specifically how often they use the skill. However, we might assume that if participants are reporting the use of the skill, they see it as beneficial enough to engage it in order to complete assignments.

Participants of the capstone writing course were interviewed in order to gain a description of the writing skills, processes, and knowledges used in completing particular assignments for the capstone writing course. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to code the data and describe the patterns that emerged in the data. I used an open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of examining the data for patterns that emerged without explicitly looking in terms of the research questions. From this perspective, participants described writing assignments in terms that suggested writing tasks were familiar or unfamiliar, rather than exclusively in expected terms of writing skills, processes, and knowledges.

Their descriptions of familiar writing tasks were quick, clear, and concise descriptions of what the assignment required and what actions they took to complete the writing task. They reported using what I termed 'internal tools' such as prior instruction and learning when completing familiar writing tasks. In contrast, participants reported using what I termed 'external tools' such as direct teacher or peer instruction exclusively to complete unfamiliar writing tasks to the exclusion of prior learning or instruction.

I developed the term 'Moment of Erasure' to describe the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) when participants reported not knowing what to do to complete a writing task they described as unfamiliar but which would have been appropriately

addressed with a familiar skill. Another characteristic of this moment was the participant's complete reliance on external tools. Finally, one participant's responses were different from all other participants; she did not describe most tasks as unfamiliar or difficult. Instead, she relied on a rhetorical approach to the writing assignments and her documents in terms of changing content and arrangement according to audience. My conclusions are that questions of transfer may be inadequate to interrogate the participants' perception of the writing tasks and internal or external tools needed to complete them. Using the lens of activity theory, my analysis reveals that participants recognize the characteristics (familiar/unfamiliar) of the outcome or objective (writing task) within the new activity system (of the capstone writing course in public discourse) and are using the appropriate tools to complete the writing task.

SURVEY DATA FINDINGS

Demographics

The survey was designed to collect information about the participants' majors, year of study, and number of composition courses taken at Longwood University. The data were collected to represent who was in the capstone writing course and ensure that they had taken their college composition courses at the research site, Longwood University. Within 8 sections of the capstone writing course, the survey was completed by 148 students representing 23 different majors (see Figure 2).

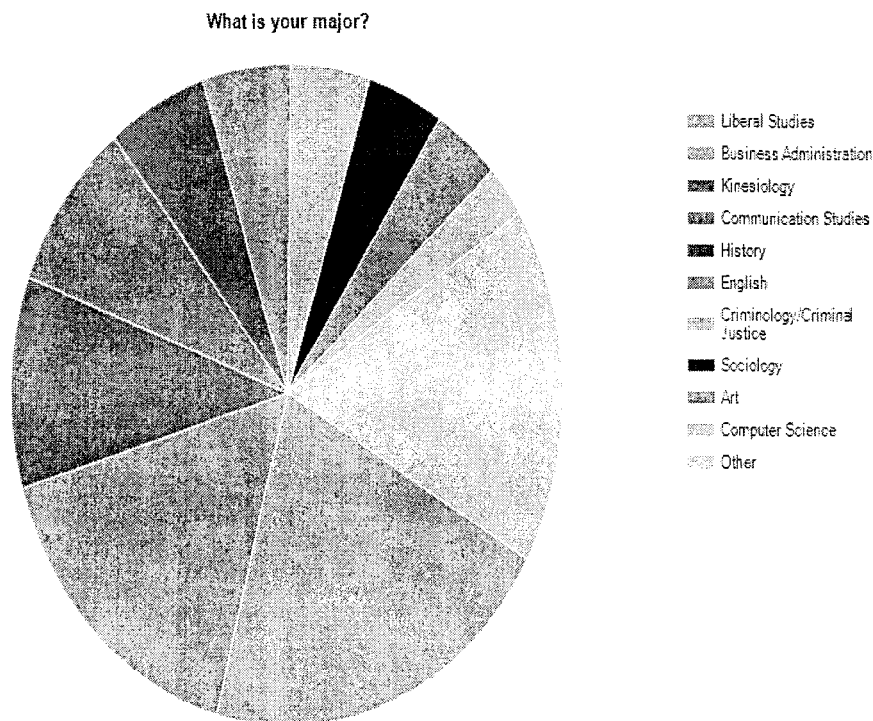


Figure 2 Majors in Survey

The largest groups were Liberal Studies (education majors) at 21.6% (32/148) and Business Administration at 16.9% (25/148). The largest majority of respondents, 31% (48/148), reported being at Longwood University 5 semesters (Table 2 below). Those with fewer than 5 semesters combined to make 11.5% of the 148 responding. This finding about the course population's history at Longwood University is in keeping with current enrollment data in which it is reported that Longwood averages 15% each year in transfer students (Longwood's 2009 FactSheet —accessed on the homepage —reported 180 transfers for 4,000 undergraduates or 12% of the undergraduate population).

2. Number of semesters at Longwood University?			Response Percent	Response Count
1	<input type="checkbox"/>		2.0%	3
2	<input type="checkbox"/>		5.4%	8
3	<input type="checkbox"/>		4.1%	6
4	<input type="checkbox"/>		4.1%	6
5	<input type="checkbox"/>		31.1%	46
6	<input type="checkbox"/>		24.3%	36
7	<input type="checkbox"/>		14.2%	21
8	<input type="checkbox"/>		12.2%	18
8+	<input type="checkbox"/>		4.7%	7
<i>answered question</i>				148

Table 2 Semesters at Longwood

A majority of survey participants (71.6%) had taken English 150, Longwood's first year composition course (see Table 3 below).

3. Which composition courses have you taken at Longwood? (If you are not sure about the Writing Intensive courses, you can pull up your Degree Evaluation in Banner.)			Response Percent	Response Count
English 150	<input type="checkbox"/>		71.6%	106
Writing Intensive 1	<input type="checkbox"/>		67.6%	100
Writing Intensive 2	<input type="checkbox"/>		45.3%	67
<i>answered question</i>				148

Table 3 Composition Courses Completed

Fewer than half had completed *both* required Writing Intensive courses in their major. Since 45.3% (67/148) of the participants responded that they had taken Writing Intensive 2, it is reasonable to assume that they had taken Writing Intensive 1, unless they misunderstood what the numbers meant. A larger majority, 67.6% (100/148), had completed Writing Intensive 1.

Writing Skills, Processes, and Knowledges

This section reports the overall number of skills, processes, and knowledges reported used and the highest rated specific items in the survey that participants report using or practicing.

Overall Frequency

Participants reported using many of the writing skills, processes, and knowledges. Out of the 37 items listed in the survey, over half (23 items/62%) were reported as used “frequently” (see Table 4 below). Only one of those skills, “transitions,” was equally reported in the “occasionally” and “frequently” column with 57 responses (37.5%) of the survey participants.

4. Part 2: Skills and Processes Below is a list of skills and processes a teacher or a student might employ in a writing intensive course. As you respond to the columns, indicate the frequency with which you practiced or employed these skills to complete assignments in your WRITING INTENSIVE CLASSES only. These skills or activities could be used either in class or outside of class time. Preparing to write					
	never	rarely	occasionally	frequently	Response Count
interpreting assignment	2.0% (3)	8.1% (12)	37.8% (56)	52.0% (77)	148
narrowing topics	0.7% (1)	12.8% (19)	40.5% (60)	45.9% (68)	148
formulating main ideas	0.0% (0)	4.1% (6)	29.7% (44)	66.2% (98)	148
evaluating model student writing	8.1% (12)	34.5% (51)	41.2% (61)	16.2% (24)	148
evaluating published writing	6.1% (9)	23.6% (35)	33.8% (50)	36.5% (54)	148
5. The process of writing					
individual conferences w/teacher	8.8% (13)	46.6% (69)	35.8% (53)	8.8% (13)	148
group conferences w/ teacher	30.4% (45)	45.3% (67)	19.6% (29)	4.7% (7)	148
written peer response workshops	21.6% (32)	37.2% (55)	27.0% (40)	14.2% (21)	148
oral peer response workshops	25.7% (38)	40.5% (60)	24.3% (36)	9.5% (14)	148
any other pre-writing activities	9.5% (14)	29.1% (43)	41.2% (61)	20.3% (30)	148
6. arrangement of ideas--did you work on these parts of your writing either in class or outside of class?					
paraphrasing	3.4% (5)	18.9% (28)	45.3% (67)	32.4% (48)	148
summarizing	0.0% (0)	9.5% (14)	47.3% (70)	43.2% (64)	148
synthesizing	6.1% (9)	24.3% (36)	51.4% (76)	18.2% (27)	148
analyzing	0.7% (1)	6.1% (9)	38.5% (57)	54.7% (81)	148
comparing/contrasting	0.7% (1)	8.1% (12)	45.3% (67)	45.9% (68)	148
defining concepts/terms	1.4% (2)	12.8% (19)	39.2% (58)	46.6% (69)	148
structuring arguments	2.0% (3)	14.9% (22)	38.5% (57)	44.6% (66)	148
supporting claims	0.7% (1)	12.2% (18)	35.8% (53)	51.4% (76)	148
paragraphing	2.0% (3)	12.2% (18)	42.6% (63)	43.2% (64)	148
introductions	2.0% (3)	10.8% (16)	32.4% (48)	54.7% (81)	148
conclusions	2.7% (4)	12.2% (18)	29.7% (44)	55.4% (82)	148
organization	1.4% (2)	8.1% (12)	37.2% (55)	53.4% (79)	148
transitions	4.1% (6)	18.9% (28)	38.5% (57)	38.5% (57)	148
7. rhetorical choices					

analyzing audience for your writing	8.8% (13)	26.4% (39)	39.9% (59)	25.0% (37)	148
strengthening the credibility of the writer/speaker	8.1% (12)	19.6% (29)	41.2% (61)	31.1% (46)	148
developing sympathy or feeling with the reader	10.8% (16)	31.8% (47)	39.9% (59)	17.6% (26)	148
developing the logic or rational argument of your text	3.4% (5)	15.5% (23)	46.6% (69)	34.5% (51)	148
planning or revising for document design	9.5% (14)	15.5% (23)	33.8% (50)	41.2% (61)	148
8. proofreading					
increasing vocabulary	6.1% (9)	18.9% (28)	41.2% (61)	33.8% (50)	148
spelling	2.7% (4)	11.5% (17)	26.4% (39)	59.5% (88)	148
using grammar source material	6.1% (9)	12.8% (19)	36.5% (54)	44.6% (66)	148
proofreading for errors	2.0% (3)	4.1% (6)	29.7% (44)	64.2% (95)	148
punctuation rules	4.7% (7)	13.5% (20)	36.5% (54)	45.3% (67)	148
9. formatting					
incorporating sources	0.7% (1)	5.4% (8)	20.9% (31)	73.0% (108)	148
avoiding plagiarism	0.7% (1)	2.0% (3)	6.1% (9)	91.2% (135)	148
internal citations	2.0% (3)	7.5% (11)	19.0% (28)	71.4% (105)	147
works-cited/references pages	1.4% (2)	3.4% (5)	12.8% (19)	82.4% (122)	148

Table 4 “Occasionally” & “Frequently”

Yet, it is possible to see the surveyed items as reported in even higher numbers than when solely looking at one column. Because the survey was self-administered and frequencies were self-reported, it is possible to conflate the ratings of “occasionally” and “frequently” because the number of events that quantifies or measures the difference between the two were never specified by the researcher in the survey design. The participants decided individually whether an item was used with ‘occasional’ regularity or ‘frequent’ regularity. With that perspective in mind, the number of items

reported in high use is 33 (89%) out of a possible 37 writing skills, processes, and knowledges.

Highest Usage of Individual Items

Participants reported employing “avoiding plagiarism” at 91.2% (135/148), the highest percentage of *all* the items in the entire survey. In descending order of items rated “frequently” used was “Works Cited/References pages” 82.4% (122/148), “Incorporating Sources” 73% (108/148), and work on “Internal Citations” 71.4% (105/148) (see Figure 5.5 below). The next skill for “frequently” used was “Formulating Main Ideas” at 66.2% (98/148). “Proofreading for errors” was 64.2% (95/148) and “Spelling” was reported at 59.5% (88/148). The use or practice with “conclusions,” “introductions,” and “analyzing” were also chosen as frequently exercised over other skills, processes, and knowledges (see Table 5 below).

	never	rarely	occasionally	frequently	Response Count
avoiding plagiarism	0.7% (1)	2.0% (3)	6.1% (9)	91.2% (135)	148
works-cited:references pages	1.4% (2)	3.4% (5)	12.8% (19)	82.4% (122)	148
incorporating sources	0.7% (1)	5.4% (8)	20.9% (31)	73.0% (108)	148
internal citations	2.0% (3)	7.5% (11)	19.0% (28)	71.4% (105)	147
formulating main ideas	0.0% (0)	4.1% (6)	29.7% (44)	66.2% (98)	148
proofreading for errors	2.0% (3)	4.1% (6)	29.7% (44)	64.2% (95)	148
spelling	2.7% (4)	11.5% (17)	26.4% (39)	59.5% (88)	148
conclusions	2.7% (4)	12.2% (18)	29.7% (44)	55.4% (82)	148
introductions	2.0% (3)	10.8% (16)	32.4% (48)	54.7% (81)	148
analyzing	0.7% (1)	6.1% (9)	38.5% (57)	54.7% (81)	148

Table 5 Ten Items by Decreasing “Frequently” Rating

Again, the list of items in regular use could be represented by a larger graphic figure if the items chosen “occasionally” were included as well.

Never

In the lowest level of use are the items which had the highest percentage of participants choosing “never” (see Table 6 below).

	never	rarely	occasionally	frequently	Response Count
group conferences w/ teacher	30.4% (45)	45.3% (67)	19.6% (29)	4.7% (7)	148
oral peer response workshops	25.7% (38)	40.5% (60)	24.3% (36)	9.5% (14)	148
written peer response workshops	21.6% (32)	37.2% (55)	27.0% (40)	14.2% (21)	148
developing sympathy or feeling with the reader	10.8% (16)	31.8% (47)	39.9% (59)	17.6% (26)	148
planning or revising for document design	9.5% (14)	15.5% (23)	33.8% (50)	41.2% (61)	148
analyzing audience for your writing	8.8% (13)	26.4% (39)	39.9% (59)	25.0% (37)	148
strengthening the credibility of the writer/speaker	8.1% (12)	19.6% (29)	41.2% (61)	31.1% (46)	148

Table 6 Items by Decreasing “Never” Rating

The items were (in descending order) a series of collaborative processes: “group conferences with teacher” 30.4% (45/148), “oral peer response workshops” 25.7% (38/148), and “written peer response workshops” 21.6% (32/148).

SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents an analysis of the demographics findings and the reported usage of writing skills, processes, and knowledges and argues that the course population is an interdisciplinary mix of junior-year, senior-year students true to the

original intent of the general education learning objective of providing a “common educational experience.” Further, participants report that the writing skills, processes, and knowledges are used or practiced with frequent regularity in their writing-intensive courses. In fact, since 33 out of the 37 writing skills, processes, and knowledges listed in the survey are reported being used with occasional to frequent regularity, an analysis suggests that the first four listed policies of Longwood University’s Writing Intensive program are in practice.

Demographics Analysis

True to the original General Education proposal submitted by the General Education Committee on January 13, 2001, the capstone writing course serves as an interdisciplinary experience for Longwood’s students. With 23 majors represented among 148 respondents, the course population fulfills the committee’s recommendation that the learning objectives be integrated through a “shared experience” of “interdisciplinary courses.” Longwood has designated a writing capstone course as this shared experience. The goal which specifically addresses this shared experience states that students are to have “[t]he ability to synthesize and critically analyze through written discourse and a *common educational experience* information pertaining to issues of citizen leadership” (Emphasis mine, <http://www.longwood.edu/gened/goal14.html>). This course meets the goal of a shared experience while students bring their disciplinary knowledge to the course content of citizen leadership.

Although students might circumvent this designation of interdisciplinarity by self-selecting certain instructors and changing the populations of certain sections of the

course, demographics from the pilot survey and the survey of my sections suggest this is not happening. In the pilot survey, 19 majors were reported with just 39 respondents between two sections of the course. In Survey III, there were fewer majors with only 9 majors reported and 25 respondents in two sections. Still, this course is the *only* upper-level course with such a diverse disciplinary population. In fact, I would argue that the students have not seen this disciplinary diversity since English 150, Longwood University's first-year composition course. With a 15% transfer rate and a reported 30% of the survey population *not* taking English 150 at Longwood, many students have not see their university peers in the same room (and with the fracturing of dining services into a Sushi Bar, a Panini Grill, the salad bar, the pizza den, and a bagel store, I would guess that the dining hall is not the community experience it once evoked). In sum, the demographics illustrate that students are not self-segregating by registering for certain instructors and that Longwood has achieved a course with General Education's Goal 14 designation of "a common educational experience" for its graduating students.

When the demographics are examined for the largest groups, the numbers reflect the broader campus categories. Business and Education have the largest number of majors at Longwood University. Parallel to that information, the largest concentration of majors in the survey were Liberal Studies (education majors) at 21.6% (32/148) and Business Administration at 16.9% (25/148).

Following the original and current prerequisite of the capstone course of students needing 75 credits or more to enroll in the course, the survey indicates that most of the students were at least second-semester juniors. The largest group of students reported being at Longwood University for 5 semesters (31.1%), which

presumably makes them second-semester juniors. With 86.5% (128/148) reporting to be at Longwood 5 semesters or more, participants are well into their disciplinary content courses. Presumably, participants bring that content to the capstone writing course.

Those with fewer than 5 semesters combined to make 11.5% (23/148) of those surveyed. If the requirement to enroll in the class is 75 credits, 11.5% of the students in the course are very likely transfers from other institutions. Many of those 11.5% of the capstone writing course are likely transfer students because each year Longwood averages 15% in transfers. However, some transfer students would be non-respondents in the survey since if the student had not taken *any* writing-intensive courses at Longwood, that students would have been disqualified from taking the survey.

In sum, a majority of survey participants report having experienced composition at Longwood University. With 71.6% and 67.6% having taken Longwood's first-year composition course and their first writing-intensive course, a majority of the respondents have their composition experience grounded in the university system. This experience with the established program suggests that the skills, processes, and knowledges students report using come from or are at least exercised within the study site's writing program.

Skills, Processes, and Knowledges Analysis

In keeping with recent scholarship on transfer in composition courses (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; James, 2009; Nelms & Dively, 2007), writing skills that participants seem to carry forward can be categorized as lower-order skills. Nelms and Dively's study found that participants were able to demonstrate "a familiarity with

principles governing source citations” (p. 224). This was one of three skills that appeared to transfer in the Nelms and Dively study, so it may be no surprise that the principles of source citation appear on this survey as an item participants report using frequently. Completing a “Works-cited/references page” (82.4%), “incorporating sources” (73%), and “internal citations” (71.4%) were the in the top four frequently used items participants responded to in the survey. However, it is a skill that does not *need* abstraction from one course to another; it merely needs to be *carried*. In other words, it is an example of *low-road transfer* (Salomon & Perkins, 1988). Presumably, a student could learn APA once and apply it as needed. However, I acknowledge that many students learn and re-learn these skills every year as if they’ve never learned it before. Based on the findings of this dissertation, I would suggest they are experiencing a “moment of erasure” (see analysis of interviews later in this chapter). Furthermore, formatting a Works Cited or References page can be achieved with software programs such as EasyBib.com, CitationMachine.com or any composition reference book.

Nevertheless, Longwood participants are writing. Furthermore, they report using skills, processes, and knowledges in previous composition course work with noticeable regularity. Whether their assignments or instructors are explicitly requiring or providing explicit instruction in these skills is beyond the scope of this study to predict or claim. What the survey does seem to suggest is that the skills were used in previous courses. In contrast to a common critique of writing-intensive courses, the writing skills, processes and knowledges reported by participants in the survey do not suggest a paucity of skills nor does there seem to be a small representation of writing

(Farris and Smith, 2000; White, 1989). In fact, the frequency with which 33 out of the 37 skills are reported being used suggests that the writing intensive classes are engaging in at least the first four listed policies of Longwood University's Writing Intensive program (<http://www.longwood.edu/catalog/2001/AcademicRequirements.htm>).

For example, the first guideline in the policy states:

- Writing-intensive courses should require at least 10 pages of *formal writing* from each student, typically distributed over three or more papers so students have an opportunity to *apply faculty feedback to future written work*. (This does not include essay examinations.)

The requirement of formal writing suggests that students would construct their texts to fit academic genres requiring a number of skills, processes and knowledges reported used frequently such as “introductions,” “conclusions,” “transitions” which “analyze” and “support claims” and structure arguments.” Students would also revise and arrange their work to avoid plagiarism. Those skills were all rated frequently used by survey participants.

The second policy guideline for Longwood's WAC policy states that:

- Instructors in writing-intensive courses are encouraged to require informal writing (reading journals, brief in-class writings, pre-writing for formal papers) to lead students to explore and articulate course content. Students could use this informal writing to *develop ideas for formal papers*.

Participants report “interpreting assignments,” “narrowing topics” and “formulating main ideas” frequently. These activities suit the work of developing ideas for formal papers and the process required in the second policy guideline.

The third WAC policy states:

- “Students in writing-intensive courses should be assigned and instructed in *specific forms and processes of writing* used in professions related to the course discipline.”

If participants report “structuring arguments” and engaging in some of the rhetorical choices such as “analyzing audience” and “planning and revising for document design,” this activity might suggest that they are writing in specific forms and using process to revise and refine the writing to fit the genre conventions required in assignments.

While the formal papers for writing-intensive courses may be standard academic genres such as research papers, the “forms and processes of writing used in professions related to the course discipline” might suggest public audiences or genres with broader audiences.

And finally, the fourth WAC policy states:

- Instructors in writing-intensive courses should give explicit instruction in how to complete the required writing assignments. This explicit instruction must include *giving detailed written assignment sheets* and a scoring guide showing the explicit criteria, including grading scale, used to score the assignment. If possible, this information should be attached to the course syllabus. Other explicit instruction might include *discussing procedures for gathering and organizing information, providing models of appropriate forms, assigning and responding to drafts, and encouraging revision and editing*. Instructors must return graded work before the next paper is due, noting areas of strength and weakness on the scoring guide along with the overall grade.

Participants reported “interpreting assignments,” “narrowing topics” and “formulating main ideas” as used frequently. This might imply that the fourth guideline in the policy is being enacted or engaged in student writing through writing-intensive courses.

The number of skills that are listed in the policy that resemble the skills, processes, and knowledges that students report using suggest that the participants have skills at their disposal from previous composition work. Therefore, the writing skills are presumably present to be used in another situation, the capstone writing course.

Finally, the results of these survey data suggest that students are engaging in writing

assignments, though the actual number and variety may be debatable. For example, if they report frequently working on the arrangement of their ideas or the formatting and proofreading of academic work, the extent to which they are successful at this skill or process cannot be assumed from the data. However, it can be assumed that if the participants are reporting the use of a skill, they see it as beneficial enough to use to complete assigned documents.

When participants reported ‘never’ using a skill, there can be a number of ways to interpret the reporting. In one sense of the word ‘never,’ participants reported never using a particular skill because the assignment in their writing-intensive classes did not call for the skill to be used. In another sense, the particular skill was never used because the student interpreted the assignment as not needing the skill (when in fact it did). And finally, the students may have interpreted the option of “never” as writing skills, processes, and knowledges that did not need remediation or help. In other words, a student might think: I did not ‘practice’ avoiding plagiarism; I already know how to do that. In sum, “never” can mean not *using* the writing skill, processes, or knowledge in the writing-intensive classes, but it does not mean the participants do not have the skill, process, or knowledge in their repertoire.

The data regarding what is never used or practiced is rich for another area of study, some of which has been done by Wardle (2007) who suggested that students are not being required to exercise particular writing skills from FYC within their major. Bergmann and Zepernick’s (2007) study suggested that students do not perceive the composition skills they have previously learned as being useful and therefore applicable to their discipline-based assignments. For the purposes of this dissertation study, skills

that participants reported using were of the greatest interest because presumably they may be the ones participants can access for their capstone writing course.

INTERVIEW DATA FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The interview data finding and analysis section discusses the findings and analysis together. This section of the chapter is divided into three parts. In part one, demographics of the interview population are analyzed as a description of the participants. The second part reports and analyzes what the participants identified as familiar writing tasks and what they reported as useful in completing familiar tasks. The last part of this section reports and analyzes what participants identified as unfamiliar writing tasks and why, and what they claimed as useful in completing assignments for the capstone writing course.

Description of the Participants

Thirteen participants were interviewed by the researcher-instructor (as described in Chapter 4). There were 9 female and 4 males from various sections of the capstone writing course (see Table 7 below). Participants reported disciplinary majors that represented each of the University's colleges and that were distributed in ways that approximated the distribution of majors across the University. That is, with 5 Education majors, the interview data reflected the fact that the majority of our participants at Longwood University are, in fact, Education majors. There were 6 from the College of Education and Human Services, 2 from the College of Business & Economics, and 7 from the College of Arts and Sciences, and 1 from the newly formed Nursing program, which has its own curriculum.

13 Participants All participants have been given pseudonyms.	Major
	College of Business & Economics
Helen	Business Management
Kevin	Business Management & Marketing
	College of Arts & Sciences
Jennifer	Biology
Ann	Biology
Kristen	Liberal Studies, History minor
Mary	English major, Rhetoric & PW Minor
Ivan	History major, Secondary Education
Michael	Chemistry
Barry	History, Secondary Education
	College of Education & Human Services
Emma	Liberal Studies
Carrie	Liberal Studies
Jan	Communication Sciences and Disorders
Kristen	Liberal Studies, History minor
Ivan	History, Secondary Education
Barry	History, Secondary Education
Cindy	Nursing program

Table 7 Interview Participants and Majors

I am counting three participants twice. Ivan and Barry are double majors, History and Secondary Education, representing, in effect, experience with two separate colleges: The Cook-Cole College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Business & Economics. Unlike Liberal Studies which is designed for elementary education certification and requires participants to take a cross-disciplinary curriculum of courses, secondary education requires that participants major in a specific field (understandably) as well as take courses in education. Kristen is unusual in that she's a Liberal Studies

student and a History minor. She said she decided to minor in history because she was “interested.”

The interviews were conducted to discover how participants of the capstone writing course defined and described the writing assignments and their written documents in the capstone writing course. The interviews were also conducted to discover how they completed the assignments. Each individual semi-structured interactive interview was recorded using computer audio software in my office, lasted from 30 minutes to an hour, and was transcribed shortly after each interview. After each interview was transcribed, I sent the copy to each participant for their review. A list of interview questions is appended to this study.

Types of Writing Named

The interviews produced a discussion of a variety of documents. They are listed below in no particular order.

- Issue Research Report
- Proposal
- Resume & Cover Letter
- Letter to elected official
- Compare/Contrast Essay
- Evaluation/Response Essay
- Online Book Review

In addition to the self-selected documents participants brought to the interview, participants also named assignments or tasks for other classes in college and secondary institutions. Thus, the participants’ discussions of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks were rich in variety and complexity. These discussions regarding the familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks included participants identifying wide-ranging processes and genres from both academic and professional/public writing situations.

In the following sections, these discussions are summarized and have been divided into sections of Familiar Writing Tasks and Unfamiliar Writing Tasks. This division seems appropriate because certain writing tasks were explained quickly and easily with features that involved the tools used to complete the writing tasks. Unfamiliar Writing Tasks were described used terms such as: “difficult,” “hard,” and “completely new.” They were uncertain as to how to complete the unfamiliar writing tasks.

Familiar Writing Tasks

Some participants expressed relative ease with certain writing tasks that they accomplished for the documents they brought to the interview and within assignments for other courses. Without a reference to difficulty or unfamiliarity with what was being asked of them in the assignment, participants’ explanations of the writing task in the assignment implied a level of familiarity. The familiar writing tasks named in the interview were: citation, paragraph length, proofreading, incorporating research, drafting thesis statements, creating a hook, and organizing ideas by bulleting and outlining, writing a summary, a theme, a letter, response and reflection, compare/contrast essays, memos, science reports, and considering audience.

A scan of the interview transcripts revealed that seven items named by participants in the interviews (see bolding below) matched the survey items ranked for frequent use (see Table 8 below).

Familiar Tasks	Survey Responses
Research papers	
Summary	47.3% (70/148)
Reflection/response	
Letters	
Compare/contrast	45.9% (68/148)
Essays	
Memos	
Science Reports	
Considering audience	39.9% (59/148)
Writing a theme	
Citation	71.4% (105/148)
Paragraph length	
Incorporating research	73% (108/148)
Proofreading	64.2% (95/148)
Drafting a thesis statement	
Creating a hook	
Organizing ideas	53.4% (79/148)

Table 8 Familiar Writing Tasks Named in the Interview and Survey

This finding suggests that participants are able to read the rhetorical situation (Flower & Hayes) of the writing assignment as well as call forth the tools (Russell, ‘Rethinking’) used to negotiate the broader activity system of the capstone writing course and the public sphere. However, many of the familiar writing tasks such as citation, summary, and proofreading can be more easily generalized if the rhetorical situation matches those of school genres (Russell, 1991). And in fact, when these skills, processes, and knowledges were recalled in the interview as familiar by the participants, they were in response to writing assignments that relied on common school genres such as summarizing a text or completing a research paper.

The survey results for summarizing suggest that students were asked to practice this writing task in past writing-intensive courses and the writing task was familiar. Summary was rated in the survey most often as occasionally used (the “frequent”

category was a close second with 43.2%). Summary was also named in the description of Familiar Writing Tasks. In other words, particular writing skills, processes, and knowledges do seem to be used in a new situation (another course), but only when the participant perceives the writing task as familiar or similar to a previous context. This finding is supported by other studies which suggest that perception of the writing task and context may inform participants' use of a writing skill (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; James, 2009; Wardle, 2007). Furthermore, the participants appear to be engaging low-road transfer (Salomon & Perkins, 1988) because the context is perceived as similar and the participants are applying a previously learned skill as a "well-practiced routine" (p.25).

Participants rarely hesitated when they described the features of a Familiar Writing Task. In addition, there was an absence of a description of 'difficulty' or 'difference,' in contrast to their description of unfamiliar writing tasks. Often, participants attributed the origin of the familiar writing tasks to their discipline or from a process learned in high school or even middle school. The following section illustrates the participants' perception of familiar writing tasks that remained familiar.

Compare/Contrast

The skills required to accomplish a compare/contrast paper were described easily. Two of the participants from the same instructor's section discussed a compare/contrast assignment and were readily able to both name the skill and describe their approach to the document's production.

[This paper is] a compare/contrast paper on Munyurangabo and An Ordinary Man. [. . .] I basically look at the attitudes before and during and after, and compared and contrasted them. An Ordinary Man, I'm sure you're familiar with, it had all these tensions that boiled over to the characters. And after [the

genocide], I looked at Munyurangabo, tensions were still high. They were kind of rebuilding. I looked at the differences and similarities. (Kevin, Business Management & Marketing major, p.1)

Kevin names the writing task of comparing/contrasting and explains the components of the task without hesitation or implied difficulty. Another participant, Michael, who took the course with the same instructor, also explained the assignment with ease.

We read the book, [...] and we were asked to write an essay comparing the two, to pick a certain theme that tied them together even though they were made by different people. We wanted to see if there was some type of similarity in how we could tie them together in a comparison/contrast essay (Michael, Chemistry major, p. 1).

This ease of explanation could be seen later in the discussion of tools as both participants described how they approached and organized the writing of the assignment.

Summarizing

Another writing task that appears to be familiar to the participants was summarizing. Ivan discussed an assignment that asked him to summarize, evaluate, and respond to a film. Ivan succinctly described the task of summarizing even though he had produced his document three weeks before the interview.

HL-R: *OK, what does, [the assignment sheet] mean to you? What did summary mean, in your own words?*

Ivan: *I would just say a summary of the important parts, a little bit of background, just so, I know when we do most writings we are supposed to assume the reader doesn't know anything about the topic that you are writing about. This one is a little bit different. I kind of just assumed that whoever is going to be reading this didn't know anything about King Korn, I would give them a little background about the documentary, what they found, and then, I can't, it's been a long time actually..[pause],*

HL-R: *That's OK, I guess I'm not actually necessarily thinking in terms of just this assignment, but how you interpreted it, what a summary means to you, and you've already started that within the context of this assignment.*

Ivan: Yeah, summary of their argument, summary of their evidence, and then summary of just the movie in general, I think. (Ivan, History major, Secondary Education certificate, pp.1-2)

While one could read the “I think” at the end of Ivan’s last line to signal insecurity, I attribute that bit of hedging to his Chinese-American background. Ivan’s description in the interview came quickly and easily as if it was a familiar writing task to him.

Citation

Participants also demonstrated familiarity with citation. I am including a range of skills, processes, and knowledges the participants discussed under this title—formatting a list of sources, parenthetical citation, and the inclusion of sources in a document. In each case, the participant was able to name the item easily, even being able to explain their errors in citation as an effect of relying on what was familiar rather than adapting to a new requirement.

One example of the reported familiarity was Emma’s claim that research papers were “self-explanatory.”

HL-R: Are there certain types of writing that you feel more confident in doing? You’ve mentioned topics. Could you think about genres or types?

Emma: I would say research papers, or research papers on any topic because it’s research—it’s not wrong. If you find good facts, good data, and support it. I feel like that’s pretty self-explanatory. May be. (Emma, Liberal Studies major, pp. 3-4)

Emma indicated that she is confident incorporating facts into a research paper, even though she appears to ignore the complexity of building strong support for a claim and neglects to qualify the sources for those facts.

Michael, chemistry major, described formatting errors as lack of attention to detail rather than ignorance. In fact, he explained his errors as an incorrect reliance on what’s familiar--his disciplinary conventions.

Michael: *Well, she wanted me to put my name in the left margin and the title is not supposed to be in bold print. And when I did my Works Cited page, I numbered my sources. And she told me not to number them.*

H L-R: *OK. Why did you number your sources?*

Michael: *I do it in chemistry. I guess, it doesn't matter [in chemistry] what format you use as long as your work is cited. I just basically did what I would do for that class.*

H L-R: *Do you guys call it a Works Cited or does it matter? Do you guys call it whatever?*

Michael: *It doesn't matter. Well, I guess we call it References, for the most part in chemistry. But I should have taken more time to format [this paper] better. (Michael, Chemistry major, p.3)*

Michael explains that the particulars of citation do not matter in his discipline—which may be particular to a certain instructor's attention or a consistent perception across the major.

In another interview, Kristen indicated that she felt confident in her ability to incorporate sources but defined her display of citation skills as a product of the situation within each class. If the instructor is not “really big on it” then you do not have to follow previous instruction or a published guideline, she said.

H L-R: *How did you know how [. . .] to take the source from one to put it in another?*

Kristen: *Well, not necessarily citation, because he didn't really make us do citation, I guess he's not really big on it, because as long as you've shown it in your Works Cited, he's not big on the parenthetical, because he says, if it [the sentence says] Jeff Lindsay, he can look back and find your source. (Kristen, Liberal Studies major & History minor, p.2)*

Kristen's decision to cite properly was relative to the instructor's position on citation. Therefore, her 'errors' in citing sources are actually a familiarity with the skill in order to ignore proper formatting.

Tools for Familiar Writing Tasks

This section reports what participants identified as helpful in completing writing tasks they felt were familiar. My research question was: “What skills, processes, and

knowledges did participants report using in completing assignments in their capstone writing course?” To review, their responses defined the coding and the themes. Rather than defining their responses in terms of writing skills, processes, and knowledges, I used the participants’ terms. Participants named a variety of aids such as previous instruction, their own interest in the topic and people. These aids were named tools (Beaufort; Flower & Hayes; Rogers & Rymer; Russell, “Rethinking”). The tools were classified as having two sources, Internal or External (see Figure 3 below).

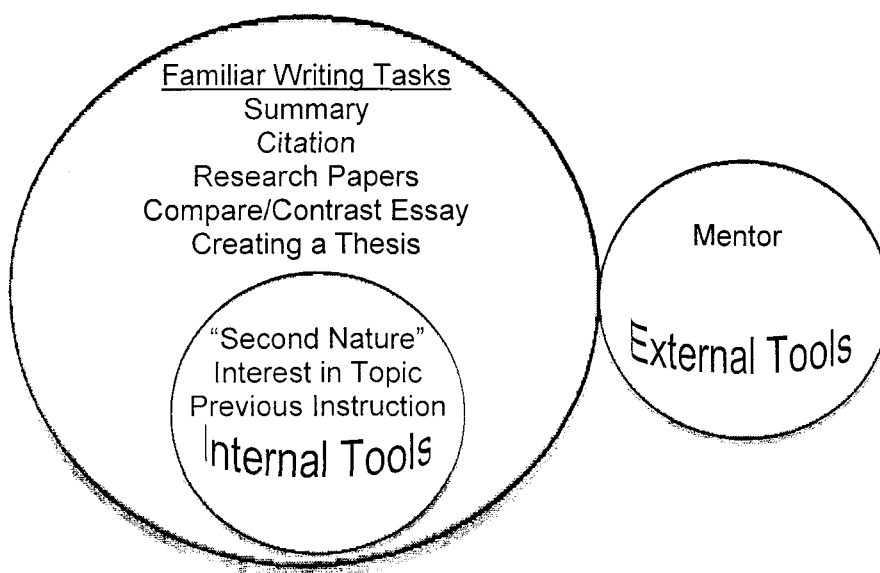


Figure 3 Familiar Writing Tasks and Tools

The Internal Tools came from within their skill-base or knowledge seemingly without external aids. The External tools originated from help they received from instructors or friends, either in class or outside of class. The data indicates that participants used Internal Tools primarily for writing tasks they reported as familiar. These Internal Tools appear to exist for participants as a type of intuitive knowledge that was familiar, readily available in their composing repertoire, and that were largely

invisible to them. This invisibility recalls the possibility of the messy, recursive nature of writing generally accepted by composition scholars or simply an inability to articulate their process meta-reflectively which is another skill separate from writing.

A second pattern that emerged from the interview data was that participants easily and repeatedly named previous instruction when asked how they learned or accomplished the familiar writing task. In fact, “previous instruction” was most often mentioned among all participants, across all disciplines, in response to the question about what tools they found useful in completing familiar writing tasks. Furthermore, they reported not expecting instruction in tasks that were familiar. This might suggest a resistance to instruction when the task is perceived as familiar regardless of the fact that the instruction guides them to a modification of that writing task.

For these participants, ‘knowing *how* to write’ is intimately connected to *what* they write. The implication is that these participants feel comfortable in this community discourse the university is requiring at this point (Bartholomae). In collusion with Bartholomae, I would argue that the participants’ perceived interest in the subject *affords* them the experience (to their benefit or not) of writing well and writing productively. When the examination of this phenomenon is reversed, the participants’ struggle to write may have less to do with their actual skills and more to do with their lack of interest in the subject or perceived lack of content knowledge.

This section is divided into two parts, Internal Tools and External Tools. Internal Tools are those writing skills, processes, and knowledges the student uses without an external aid such as the current instructor’s lesson, an assignment sheet,

textbook, or peer review. External Tools encompasses the participants' use of aids that originate outside of their present skill or knowledge base.

Internal Tools

As participants described the documents brought with them to the interview, their comments about how they produced the documents and the types of resources or tools they used to produce the documents seemed to fall into two categories. The first of those categories is identified here as Internal Tools.

Second nature. Kevin, a management and marketing major, said the skill in question was "second nature." He and others never explained their work in terms of processes, skills, or knowledges; instead, they reported their ability to produce text as one more closely linked to intuition or their own interest in the document's subject matter.

Kevin's explanation was the only one to include both previous instruction and intuition as helpful. Writing about a theme was a familiar skill, but one that he was no longer aware of calling forth.

H L-R: *When you then were writing about a theme, did you think about ever having done that before, or what was that like? Like, how did you know what a theme was?*

Kevin: *Previous classes and just throughout school, it's kind of second nature now, don't really think about it.* Kevin, Business Management & Marketing major, p. 2.

When it came time to develop a compare/contrast paper, Kevin also explained that he sat down and just wrote it.

Kevin: *[When I first started doing this paper,] I just asked a simple question: What are the biggest differences?*

H L-R: *This is just you at home, doing the assignment, what are the differences?*

Kevin: *[yes] Just sitting at home, I basically looked at the broadest possible questions, then narrowed it down to where I wanted to go. And what I thought I could get the most material out of and where I thought I could get the most interest, where the most interest was, and what I thought about the two works.*

H L-R: *What did you, did you write that down on paper these things, did you do it in your head?*

Kevin: *I was just thinking, I was brainstorming in my head.*

H L-R: *And how'd you go from head to computer?*

Kevin: *Hmm. I basically, like I said, I just wrote out a series of questions that I wanted to answer, then I answered them, I guess.*

H L-R: *You opened up a word document and then you're writing stuff out and then you go back in and fill?*

Kevin: *Or I'll take 2 or 3 questions and start answering them on a blank document, and then I go back and revise it.*

H L-R: *Where did the questions come from?*

Kevin: *I made them up. Things I thought about that I thought was important, from the syllabus, the assignment sheet. (Kevin, Business Management & Marketing, p.1)*

Even though Kevin describes the syllabus and the assignment sheet as secondary aids, the primary tool in the work of this assignment appears to be self-initiated and internal.

While Kevin reported on this internal tool use as more self-initiated (although guided by an instructor's instructional documents), Ivan described his ability as "intuitive." While he attributed the development of these skills to "aggregate of everything literary," the actual drafting he describes as "intuitive."

Ivan: *[The way I write is] not very specific, but I just wanted to say that it's an aggregate of everything literary that I've read and been taught before, sometimes I do what I see, [I have] no clue, I don't know how everyone else writes a paper but it's sadly done in my head. It doesn't, I'm not going to say it doesn't help, but it doesn't help for me to write it down and see it on the page first. I just want to hear it in my mind with what it sounds like in my mind, and then I write it down and think 'What can I write after that?'*

[. . .]

H L-R: *Are you thinking about the professor when you are writing this? Or are you thinking about what you are wanting to hear that sounds right, intuitively?*

Ivan: *Both. A lot of it is what sounds right, intuitively. (Ivan, History & Sec Ed, p.4)*

Ivan's process is "intuitive." At this point, the process for participants completing writing tasks that are familiar is almost embedded in their internal skills. The internal skills can be seen as an "aggregate" of skills or a combination when the participants are pressed to describe the origin. Regardless of the press, the writing skills, processes and knowledges are initially described without direct or strong reference to origin or external help.

Interest. Another pattern that emerged from these data is the combination of participants' level of ease in writing when they are interested in the topic. They report being able to generate content without a reference to skills or reflecting on process—they just do it.

***H L-R:** What do you feel pretty confident in writing in general, in any class that you're asked to do something? What do you feel less nervous about?*

***Emma:** Writing about teaching and participants, stuff like that, because it's what I'm passionate about, what I'm interested in. It's what I'm majoring in. That's why this targeted that, because it makes me a little more comfortable with, so I could be confident, because this is what I'm passionate about. If it was an issue about government, I'd be lost. That's not really what I'm interested in. I know about it but I'm not really passionate about it. It is important, but I wouldn't feel like I would have done as good a job. (Emma, Liberal Studies major, p. 3)*

Emma's experience of interest as a factor in content development mimics Kevin's experience as he writes commercials, an interest connected to his major of Business Management and Marketing and an avocation of his, as well. In fact, his explanation of writing is: "I'll just type it."

***H L-R:** And how does [writing commercials] happen [for you]?*

***Kevin:** Again, it just writes itself.*

***H L-R:** You are writing, and it just starts coming out. Are you actually writing with a pen?*

***Kevin:** I'll just type it. And usually, if I get one or two points of interest, interest for me is a key thing. I have to feel connected in some way, and that's when my mind just takes off. Kevin, Business Management & Marketing, p.5*

Similarly, another participant described her ability to write well—“to be more detailed, and use pretty, little, nice writing, like alliteration [. . .] those higher techniques” (Kristen, p, 5)—if she was interested and knowledgeable in what she was writing. In this situation, the ability to develop polished writing precedes from interest and content knowledge.

Previous instruction. Previous instruction was the most often mentioned source of help with familiar writing tasks. Participants named other college courses in their discipline, FYC, high school courses—English and History, and middle school. Even instruction received in elementary school was cited by one participant, although participants identified very different contributors to their writing when they spoke of elementary, middle, and high school and when they spoke of writing in the university. The processes and skills that participants identified as those they learned in high school and middle school were categorized as generalized writing skills. More specialized knowledges—such as writing memos and lab reports—were identified as learned in college.

Often, participants identified “previous instruction” quite readily. The source for parenthetical citation was “high school” (Jennifer, Biology major p.2). Learning summarizing came from college (Carrie, Liberal Studies major, p. 4) and even earlier.

HL-R: [. . .] *do you remember where you learned how to summarize?*

Ann: *Way back, probably in middle school, we were taught to summarize. It kind of goes back to when we first learned not to plagiarize, and it went hand-in-hand with summarizing. Yeah, probably back in middle school, if I had to guess, when we were reading and writing a lot. (Ann, Biology major, p.1)*

Ann's reliance on middle school and Carrie's belief in her FYC instructor's guidance suggest a strongly embedded skill base with regard to summary. (Notice, too, that when this skill was unfamiliar they relied on the external tools of direct instruction.)

Learning how to write essays was another familiar skill participants reported accomplishing with previous high school instruction (Jan, Communication Sciences & Disorders major, p.2). Mary extends Jan's generalized knowledge of writing essays as coming from English classes to include grammar and the arrangement of content.

***HL-R:** Are there any ways in which . . . your English classes prepared you to do this?*

***Mary:** Probably only the sense of knowing how to write in general, but like grammar. Otherwise, I've never really done anything like this.*

***H L-R:** OK, what do you mean 'writing in general'?*

***Mary:** Knowing introduction or conclusion, body paragraphs, start a new paragraphs. [phone call interrupts.]*

***H L-R:** So, writing in general, what were you saying, about writing sentences or something for you? Or body paragraphs.*

***Mary:** Knowing like the order to do things, an introduction and conclusion. (Mary, English major, Rhetoric & Professional Writing minor, p.2)*

Two participants claimed to access skills for writing from elementary school. Kristen indicated that using sources and combining sentences were skills gained when she was in upper grades in elementary school.

***H L-R:** When was the first time you [incorporated sources]? Are you talking a way long ago? Or just this semester?*

***Kristen:** I don't know, forever. I've been writing papers since elementary school. I don't know. They all kind of blend together after a while. When I first started doing it, I just used quotes because quotes were easier than reading it and having to figure out what they were saying [. . .]*

***H L-R:** What would you say were some of the skills you learned in elementary school that show up in this paper, or earlier, like a long time ago? What are old skills?*

***Kristen:** Well, I guess in 5th and 6th grade, that was elementary for me, you start to learn [conjunctions], like 'however' and 'therefore.' Because they tell you your writing is boring, so they help you make it sound better. So a lot of times I read and I feel like I don't have enough [conjunctions]. That's probably the*

only thing that stands out in my writing. I'm a big [conjunction] person.
(Kristen, Liberal Studies major History minor, pp. 2-3)

She admitted that the places of instruction in which she wrote papers “all blend together.” This difficulty in identifying a specific location for early writing instruction might imply that Kristen has internalized those skills and brings them forth as she needs to for various writing tasks without an awareness of how they were first taught and then how they are used.

In contrast, Michael first identified his process of drafting a compare/contrast essay as an internalized skill, without reference to external lessons or instruction. However, later in the interview he explained that the process did not come from him but from another English class he took in community college as a first year composition course (p.3). Nevertheless, he clearly identified this writing task as a familiar skill with a clear and straightforward process.

H L-R: *OK. So, how did you go about writing this [compare/contrast essay]?*

Michael: *I went about, first off, I just did a lot of brainstorming, wrote a lot of thoughts out on paper--*

H L-R: *--actually writing or do you type?*

Michael: *I do a lot of handwriting first, and putting down a lot of thoughts out there. Then I noticed that something that's important to me is the role of the father, and I noticed the role of the father was in the book that we read and the movie that we saw. And then I went on that one.*

H L-R: *So, you've got some notes you've taken: handwritten, long hand, and then what?*

Michael: *I try to organize them in an outline. And then--*

H L-R: *So, is that another piece of paper?*

Michael: *Yes. And then I try, in my outline, I try to write full sentences and paragraphs in my outline, so where the paper sort of writes itself, really. And then I go back and type it up.*

H L-R: *Are you changing things as you're typing from your outline? Or,*

Michael: *I try to be as close to the outline as possible. I try to like change things when I actually do the proofread, as I have it on the computer screen.*

(Michael, Chemistry major, p.1)

This brief exchange with Michael suggests that outlining and drafting are internalized or learned skills that travel with him to other courses. Later, he explains that he uses these same skills/processes for humanities courses such as “English, psychology and philosophy” (p.3). However, he explains that his use of outlining and drafting is rhetorical because in Chemistry, “we do formal lab reports and I kind of don’t go by that method [of outlining] for lab reports. When we do our lab write ups, it’s usually after we’ve done the experiments and it’s just mainly just writing up the procedures” (p.2). Michael has identified this process of outlining and drafting as originating in an English class but which he modifies depending on the writing context—what is classified here as a rhetorical application of a specific skill.

HL-R: *Going back to this one, where did you learn to make notes, write an outline, go to the computer? When did you start that?*

Michael: *I believe it was just this semester. I think it’s a lot of trial and error. It was pretty hard for me to collect my thoughts. The way I would normally do it is I would normally just go to the computer and type my thoughts, and type from there. And I found by going back it was hard for me to come up with a length, the required length. And it was also hard for me to have things flow, like cohesively.*

HL-R: *So, are you saying that you tried doing it the other way and it didn’t work? You turned something in and the grade wasn’t good or this is what I’m going to do by myself? How did you know it wasn’t working?*

Michael: *Well, it worked; however, it seemed to be a lot more effort than I really wanted to put into a paper. I spent a lot of excess time and energy trying to come up with it. It seemed to be faster when I was more organized. I believe that sometimes taking the time to go through the extra steps will save you time overall.*

HL-R: *OK. Do you remember where you learned that? That I’m going to take a few extra steps to organize?*

Michael: *Not really. Throughout my entire life, it implies different things for me. I just like to, if I find a really good lesson in life, it could be from someone telling me and it makes sense. It could be from trial and error, and it could be just an observation from different people, but I try to take, if it is good information, I try to apply it to somewhere else. I figure if it applies to myself, why not apply it to essays or English? (p.2)*

Other participants explained that their writing skills developed in other courses related to their discipline. Whether the skill was about learning the format for science reports in Sociology or Microbiology or memos in a Business class, the participants explained what they learned in their major and how they applied the writing skills to their writing assignments in the major clearly.

External Tools

The participants named certain aids to the completion of a familiar writing task as coming specifically from somewhere else. Understandably, external tools were the least often mentioned as an aid for familiar writing tasks. If the student perceived the task as familiar, why would they seek outside help? When they did seek help, the tool named was a mentor. It is important to mention that the present instructor was **never** mentioned as a tool for completing a familiar skill. Participants did mention reviewing the assignment sheet for considerations of arrangement and style, but did not review it for how to complete or start the assignment.

Sought mentor. This category is named mentor because the person is outside of the classroom and seems to act as a writing coach or sounding board for the writer. Two participants named friends and family members as helpful in completing the writing task they discussed in our interview.

Ann, a Biology major, named her mother as a significant influence on her writing process in college even though the advice originated during high school and middle school. Here, Ann described her drafting and revising processes.

Ann: My mom was maybe the first person that said something about this. I would get frustrated writing. [. . .] And she would just say, Well, go take a break and come back to it. [. . .] They did say that in school, too. But I'm pretty sure my mom was the first person who told me to do that. And I said OK,

that makes sense. That's why you can't procrastinate because you can't take time away from your work, so usually when someone assigns something, I at least try to start it early, or at least think about starting it. So, then I can keep coming back to it several times before it's due. And I feel confident turning it in, knowing that this is the best I can do. I've been working on this every day for a week. So, I know it's as good as it's going to get. (Ann, Biology major, p.11-12)

Ann's comments indicate that she generalized this process from high school to her work in college to take time to craft her words. Another participant used a combination of her friend's review, her own ability, and an online source for the skill of citation.

Emma: For this, I went to MyBib.com, cited [the sources] as much as I could, and then made sure it was in the right format [the instructor] wanted. I even had my roommate look it over. 'Hey, is this what APA is supposed to look like? Does this look good to you?' And she's like 'Yeah.' So I was pretty confident. It was probably the easiest part. And I typed it in the computer! (Emma, Liberal Studies, p.6)

Participants rarely named mentors as helping with familiar writing tasks. More often, they recalled previous instruction as helpful when tackling writing tasks that they report as known or familiar.

Unfamiliar Writing Tasks

Within the interviews, there emerged broad common threads. Using the participants' language as a thread, there were three commonalities. Participants claimed to have "never done this [writing task] before," or the writing task was "different" or "difficult." More often, the unfamiliar writing task was something that they "were not use to doing" (Mary, p.1) as opposed to 'never having done it.'

While "difficult" might not imply unfamiliarity, I have placed the thread of 'difficult' in the category of unfamiliar writing task because the participants illustrated a level of uncertainty or struggle that was not apparent when they discussed writing tasks that were familiar to them. For example, a compare/contrast paper was a familiar

task for some participants, but the paper was assigned with complete freedom with regard to topic choice. That freedom to choose the essay's topic constituted for some of the participants a task that they called 'difficult'

These threads of 'never done it,' 'different,' and 'difficult' were not mutually exclusive. There were times when participants labeled a task as different and difficult or never done before and therefore different, but the transcripts revealed that participants primarily identified their selected task in one category.

Unfamiliar as Familiar

Reviewing the transcribed excerpts in the unfamiliar category, it was clear that the participants had all labeled these unfamiliar tasks as completely new, difficult, or different. But the excerpts also shared another feature. The tasks the participants discussed were actually all *familiar* writing tasks (see Table 9 below).

<i>Unfamiliar Writing Tasks</i>	<i>Familiar Writing Tasks</i>
Letters to officials.....	Letters
Cover letter to resume	Letters
Compare/contrast essays	Compare/Contrast
Issue Research Report.....	Research Paper
Proposal.....	Research and Persuasion
Evaluation/Response.....	Evaluation and Response
Inserting quotes from oral source.....	Inserting Quotes from Research

Table 9 Unfamiliar as Familiar

When the unfamiliar writing tasks were re-coded by genre rather than description of difficulty or newness, the participants' discussion all involved writing tasks that they had completed before for other courses, or contained elements of writing tasks that they had completed prior to this assignment. In fact, each of the genres was reported as familiar writing tasks at some point during the interviews suggesting that

these writing tasks were not entirely unfamiliar. Many of these genres were all familiar school-based genres (Russell)—letters, compare/contrast essays, research papers, evaluation/response, and inserting research.

What became apparent was that these familiar genres were now difficult or different for the writer and thus I categorized them as Familiar as Unfamiliar in order to reflect this more complicated relationship. I organized the excerpts according to genre and then labeled the reason the participant found the genre new, different, or difficult.

Four categories became apparent among the genres. The categories developed around reasons participants gave for their difficulty with the genre or description of difference as: freedom to choose a topic, formatting, flowery language or elaboration, and considerations of audience (see Figure 4 below). It became apparent that these categories were the rhetorical canon--Invention, Arrangement, Style, and Delivery.

It was the participants' descriptions of what was unfamiliar about the writing task which allowed for categories from the rhetorical canon to emerge. For example, one participant described a compare/contrast essay as difficult because he had to choose the topic (Michael, p.1).

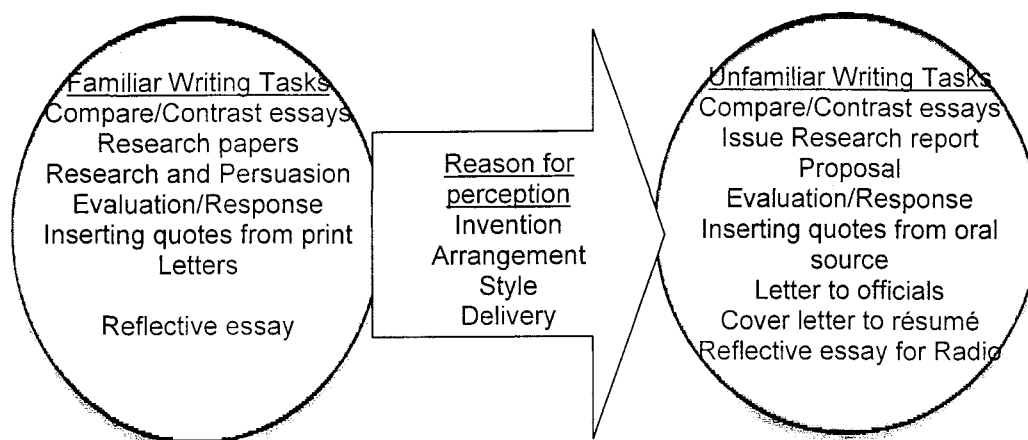


Figure 4 Familiar Becomes Unfamiliar

This difficulty can be characterized as an issue of invention for which *topoi* could be useful. The categories related to the rhetorical canon will be discussed further in the next section.

I expected participants to label certain writing tasks as familiar. I did not expect the participants to label as unfamiliar what might be perceived as familiar by me, or the instructor, or what showed up as “frequently used” in the survey. A letter to a public official was labeled as completely “new” because the student reported never having done it before. Yet, participants claimed parts of the skills or whole processes or knowledges—such as letter writing—as familiar. Therefore, if participants do not perceive certain familiar writing skills, processes, and knowledges as applicable—when in fact, they should be, then it is as if those skills, processes, and knowledges don’t exist.

Significant to this study is the finding that participants largely use external tools to complete unfamiliar writing assignments. The participants reported using external tools

of Direct Instruction and Indirect Instruction. In the Direct Instruction group were Instructor Direction, In-Class Discussion of a Writing Sample, and Mentor. In the Indirect Instruction group were Posted Writing Sample, Textbook, Sequence of Assignments, and the Assignment Sheet. This seems to suggest a lack of high-road transfer. In other words, participants did not work to consider whether the writing assignment was constitutive of familiar writing tasks that needed adaptation or contextualization. They perceived the task as unfamiliar and relied on external tools to complete the assignment. Hence, transfer did *not* operate here when participants in this study:

- perceive the writing tasks as unfamiliar
- are unable to abstract familiar skills within the ‘unfamiliar’ writing task
- experience a “moment of erasure”
- rely on ‘external’ tools to complete the assignment.

Perhaps, the lens of transfer through which their activity is viewed is incomplete.

Hence, the lens of activity theory may afford a more robust explanation of the situation into which a writer enters to engage a new writing objective.

Taken from an activity theory perspective, the participants’ perception of the writing task as unfamiliar and their selection of external tools may be right for the new situation. Perhaps to suggest that participants engage in high-road transfer assumes a belief in the *myth of autonomous literacy* (Street as cited in Russell). As Russell states:

Literacy is not learned in and of itself and then applied to contexts (activity systems). It does not exist autonomously divorced from some specific human activity. Literacy is always and everywhere bound up with the activity systems that it changes through its mediation behavior—and that change it. (Russell, “Activity Theory,” p. 56)

What the participants are attempting to acquire is proficiency in a writing task they perceive as “completely new.” Therefore, it is as if they have never written this type of text before. Divorced from the context in which the tool or the objective operates, then the activity system is new and they need help. This phenomenon suggests that participants’ recognition of need for a change in the tools to meet the new writing task is the activity of a writer who has accurately assessed the rhetorical situation, to return to Flower & Hayes’s terminology. Therefore, the plural and dynamic needs of an unfamiliar writing task inform the participants’ choice of new tools to fit the new situation which the writer wishes to enter. This is not to say that instructors must teach to every new writing task, but these findings suggest instructors should be cognizant if writers perceive the writing tasks to be unfamiliar, the writer will rely more heavily on external tools.

The next sections report the findings about participants’ perceptions of unfamiliar writing tasks according to the categories of the rhetorical canon.

Invention. Participants expressed some difficulty with a familiar task if they were required to invent the topic or precede with some freedom. Although the genres of compare/contrast essay and a reflective essay are familiar school writings and the participants reported previously having an easy time developing the writing once they had their idea, participants reported difficulty if the topic choice was left up to them. Here Michael speaks of his compare/contrast essay of a film and a book. “Well, it was kind of a tough thing to do, because she never gave us any topics to choose; we came up with our own” (p.1). Kevin, with the same instructor and the same assignment, also described this part similarly although he states that he was ready to do the writing:

“Yes, I felt very prepared. It’s just that actually picking to choose what to talk about was the hardest part. Picking a topic and making my mind up about how I wanted to go, and what direction” (p.2). Here Carrie names a reflective essay as similar to previous work but definitely different because of the freedom to invent a topic.

Carrie: Our current assignment for English 400 is a reflective essay where we are asked to pick a topic we feel strongly about with the possibility of putting it on national radio. We’ve done papers similar to that in other classes but we’ve always had the topic picked for us. And, you know, about integrating arts in the classroom, if you give me that topic, I can give you my opinion about it, but when I have the freedom to pick the topic, I’m really unsure.

These writing tasks, while familiar, have a level of difficulty which makes the writing a new challenge. It is a challenge participants reportedly do not have experience with.

One participant’s example illustrates that culture can influence the ability to develop a topic. Ivan’s mother’s Mandarin-Chinese upbringing influenced her not to express overtly negative or positive responses to situations. Ivan, in turn, explains that he has difficulty developing a heuristic for response.

Ivan: [pause] [The reason I have a hard time writing a response] might just be how I was raised, I think. I know it seems like Americans often have very strong opinions and they’re always, their culture is to have opinions about something and they are free to speak their minds and what not. I think and I don’t want to say this wrong, because you might have a Chinese professor come over and say this is wrong, but it’s my own background, and it might be my mother because she never had anything negative to say about anyone, nothing negative, even when someone was, you know, pretty much using her, she would feel disappointed about the situation rather than the person doing it. You know, ‘How could I let myself in this situation?’ rather than about the person doing this. So, that sort of background, I never heard any sort of really bad criticism of anything, from my mom, and I was raised by my mom as well. So whether that’s part of my culture as well or that sort of my mom’s own personality. I honestly think that has a large part to do with it.. (Ivan, History & Sec. Ed., pp. 5-6)

Ivan’s indecision about the origin of his difficulty with response is not betrayed in the transcript; he spends most of the passage describing the context and content of his

mother's behavior. Ivan's situation of the home environment influences his repertoire of writing skills.

Another example of difficulty with invention is seeing the genre as familiar but not knowing at all what to put in it. While writing tasks may involve features or elements that are familiar to participants, the assignment presents a level of difference or difficulty to the point of being unfamiliar. Here Jan isn't sure what to put in a cover letter.

Jan: I knew how to write a letter, so I knew all of that format but I wasn't sure what to put in it.

H L-R: OK, where'd you learn how to write a letter?

Jan: In high school. I don't remember. (p. 2)

Jan's sense of familiarity with the genre is expressed in an inability to recall when she learned how to write letters. But the insecurity in difference of the content and ultimately purpose of a cover letter erases her recall of a skill set when it comes to developing "what to put in it." For many of the participants, the inability to access a heuristic for a topic creates a level of difficulty in the writing task.

Arrangement. Formatting and arranging the content of a familiar writing task contributed to a level of difficulty for the participants. In describing a research paper completed for the capstone writing course, Emma sees familiar parts of the assignment such as research which she stated earlier she is very confident with "because it's research—it's not wrong. If you find good facts, good data, and support it, it's self-explanatory" (p.3) and writing essays, especially about subjects she is interested in like "teaching and participants" (p.3). Although her description of research is generalized, she reports confidence in completing the given research task. However, she is aware enough to see that not all research papers are the same and this one had a "tricky"

arrangement. She explains that the Issue Research Report was “kind of tricky” (p.1) because she had to blend what she wanted to say with the requirements. At the end of the interview, she explains that this paper is completely new.

Emma: [The Issue Research Report] is set up differently, this is a report, I guess. And I've never done a report like this. It's a sit down, single-spaced paper [. . .]. To me, this felt different. I wasn't as confident, I guess. Like with an English paper, if you gave it to me, I can write it up real quick and fine tweak it. But this, I felt, was a whole lot more research, like I've never done a paper like this, never. This class was totally new to me. It wasn't on lesson plans. It's not focused on my major. (Emma, Liberal Studies, p.5)

This expression of newness translates to insecurity and a description of the task as if it's completely unfamiliar, yet her earlier explanations of research and writing wouldn't suggest this experience.

For Emma the task was a research paper that required her to focus in a different way; it asked her solve an issue in writing when she is used to “doing” something to solve an issue.

Emma: I think the hardest—I guess that's the next question—was the Solutions section. Because for me it was still hard to grasp that we were fixing an issue with your writing. For me, I want to fix it physically, like I want to go out and do it. This is actually been very hard for me because I'm a very hands-on person. I want to be involved in it. And this has been a step back from that, meaning we'll just be writing about it and you're trying to use your words to fix it. And I feel like that as not as helpful, I guess. But this I feel has helped me to see that may be you can fix it in the issues we are writing. So I guess it's hard, this project as a whole, the information I found was easy, but the writing the whole thing, when I need to solve this, has been difficult.

H L-R: Have you ever written to solve things before?

Emma: No. (Emma, Liberal Studies, p.3)

Emma differentiates between finding research that is familiar and the rest of the research paper, but the purpose in discussing a solution makes the writing very difficult. Her claim of not ever writing “to solve things” suggests an inability or unwillingness to

make connections to other similar situations. It is safe to assume she wrote *something* to solve an issue or a problem.

Another example of arrangement revising the student's conception of writing is the example of never having done a genre before. Part of the context for the unfamiliarity the student explains is the context of the class and her assumptions about English.

***Kristen:** English 400 throws me for a loop 'cause the whole English in college here has been, books and writing papers on books, and articles and writing papers on articles. So, to just pick a topic and do this [proposal] is very different, just because it's not something we've ever done in English class. (Kristen, Liberal Studies, p.5)*

Kristen says she's "heard the word proposal before because she was pre-law" (p.5), but she's never done a proposal before and doesn't know how to write it. Yet, her explanation of why the writing is difficult isn't the writing itself, it's the context of the course in which the assignment is embedded. Here, I would suggest that the contextual cues can be a crucial disruption of participants' ability to conceptualize the completion of a writing task.

When the purpose of a familiar writing task changed, the writing task became difficult and unfamiliar. Jan describes a cover letter to a future employer, the purpose of which is to explain why she should be hired. "And then, the second paragraph would be all about me, what I can give them if they hired me. But yeah, this part was kind of hard, because I had never done anything like that, and I wasn't really sure" (p.2). Although she explains that she learned letter writing in high school, the purpose changes the content to the extent that she feels like it's something she's never done and

can't do. When in fact, she later explains letter writing and reflection as skills she's easily mastered and recalls when required.

Jennifer's description of the writing task seems at first to fall into two categories of 'never having completed it' and 'different'. However, she revises her declaration of newness and claims that the assignment is similar to previous assignments; it's just that the arrangement made the writing task seem different.

HL-R: *Have you ever done an Issue Research Report before?*

Jennifer: *No, this is my first time.*

HL-R: *Is this format or this type of paper similar to other things that you've written before? Would you say that it's similar to or shares qualities?*

Jennifer: *I guess I take that back. I did do something like this in high school on Affirmative Action. So I did look at the issue and write about that, so it was kind of a research issue report. But it wasn't set up like this. It wasn't broken into sections. I basically got to decide the outline versus being given an example and having to follow that.*

HL-R: *Did your other paper go paragraph by paragraph with no subheadings?*

Jennifer: *Right, right. (Jennifer, Biology, p.5)*

While the use of headings may seem as though it's a minor arrangement feature, formatting contributes to the student's perception that this paper is so different as to be somewhat unfamiliar.

Style. Stylistic features such as elaboration or writing with emotion garnered the label of difference. These comparisons were made between the writing in the capstone writing course and courses in their major. Jennifer, a Biology major, explains that having written science articles helps her to read and understand the ways that science is written in her field. I asked if there were ways that science writing helped her to write in the capstone writing course.

Jennifer: *I definitely think it's an adjustment within the style. With science writing, it's always quick and to the point, like just give the facts. And for this paper, the Issue Report, it's pretty much the same thing. You were supposed to give the facts, but it's not as cut and dry. (Jennifer, Biology, p.2)*

Jennifer recognizes the *difference* in writing tasks without expressing difficulty or uniqueness. In fact, her explanation alludes to the subtle shift between science reporting and the Issue Research Report of this course because the paper was “not as cut and dry [sic].”

Participants also reported the stylistic shifts of shorter sentences as one that makes an assignment different.

HL-R: So, the new assignment, the reflective essay for the radio, does it share some of the same skills as the other assignments?

Carrie: It does. Storytelling for one. The host, Mary, [a regional NPR reporter] she loves storytelling, so we were told it's key to have it in there. But something I didn't think of before is she likes very short statements. I try to incorporate semi-colons, varied sentence structure, but she just wants short, which I would consider fragments. So that will be different to do. (Carrie, Liberal Studies, p. 6)

Carrie doesn't seem to make the connection of shorter sentences working for an oral essay and takes direction to make that change.

Delivery. A shift in audience seems to take participants from “something they don't have to think about” as in familiar writing tasks to an unknown or unfamiliar writing task. Carrie's continued explanation of the essay which was to be submitted to National Public Radio's Civic Soapbox changed a personal reflective essay to something she's “really unsure of how to even start” (p.6). Her comment suggests issues with invention and then later arrangement; however, the nature of the shift in audience suggest those issues are a result of the change in delivery. She begins by explaining that being told what to write is familiar.

Carrie: Right, when we are integrating the arts and we're already told, over and over, it's so important to have it in our classroom, yeah, it's really good to write about but when I'm not given a topic and I have to say, oh, how am I going to please all of my audience, if they don't agree with me? So, I'm really

unsure of how to even start my paper, how I go about it. (Carrie, Liberal Studies, p.6)

Some of Carrie's lack of confidence is about argumentation skills, but also returns to the issue of addressing audience.

Barry describes the same assignment for National Public Radio as a familiar genre but "tricky" due to the change in audience.

HL-R: *Back to the personal narrative that you've written before, did that help you write this?*

Barry: *This was really tricky because I was trying to write about my experience as well as appeal to an audience. I think this is one of the first things I've written where I've actually thought about audience, because I've never really done that in any of my other classes. It's normally just 'What do you think?' So that's where I'm still working on this, and it's kind of giving me a hard time just trying to make it flow. (Barry, History & Sec. Ed., p.4)*

Barry's expression of the newness of this writing task as well as the difficulty is attributed to the introduction of audience as a new consideration. In fact, he admits that previous genres never required him to consider audience before. Earlier in the interview, Barry described his consideration of audience as he writes for his major as insulated. "[F]or history papers, it's Analysis and sometimes what we think and our views on history and you don't really have to worry about other people" (p.2). This rhetorical shift denotes a profound difference in how participants perceive the writing task.

Cindy reports that even a familiar genre like a letter is completely unfamiliar because she has "never had to write a professional letter" (p. 6). The specificity of an audience and differentiation of style makes this writing task new.

HL-R: *But did anything in your previous classes or previous writing instruction [prepare you to write this letter to a Superintendent of a School Division]?*

Cindy: I don't think we really wrote letters to people. We wrote essays but it's totally like, we did this or tell me or a reaction paper. It's never like writing to the teacher. I never had to write to a professor. Well, I mean it's to him but, um

H L-R: You've never written to a professor-

Cindy: And written formally too. I mean we write emails.

H L-R: But you've never written to a specific audience, specifically to the teacher.

Cindy: Exactly. And it's the professional part of it. Anyone can write to their grandma. Grandma's not go to care, You can write whatever. (Cindy, Nursing Program, p. 8)

Cindy expresses the same uncertainty with her skills that Carrie did with the reflective essay for National Public Radio. She notes the differences between other school genres and this assignment as well as differences among other letters and their audiences. But she notes that anyone can write to a familiar person. It is when you write to an unknown audience that genre becomes something completely new. The shift in audience and topic choice are inextricably bound to make this genre something she describes as “tough,” and it shakes her confidence in completing it. This effect of audience makes the familiar writing task of a reflective essay as something unfamiliar.

Tools for Unfamiliar Writing Tasks

This section reports what participants used to complete the writing tasks they perceived as unfamiliar. Their responses helped to answer my third research question: “What skills, processes, and knowledges did participants report using in completing assignments in their capstone writing course?” Unlike the responses about aids to complete familiar writing tasks, participants named a vast repertoire of tools in completing assignments that involved writing tasks they perceived as unfamiliar.

In asking them to describe how they completed the unfamiliar writing tasks, their responses fell largely into two categories—internal tools and external tools. The largest category was External Tools. Most participants named direct instructor

instruction, followed by instructor discussion of student writing in the classroom as the most helpful. (see Figure 5 below) .

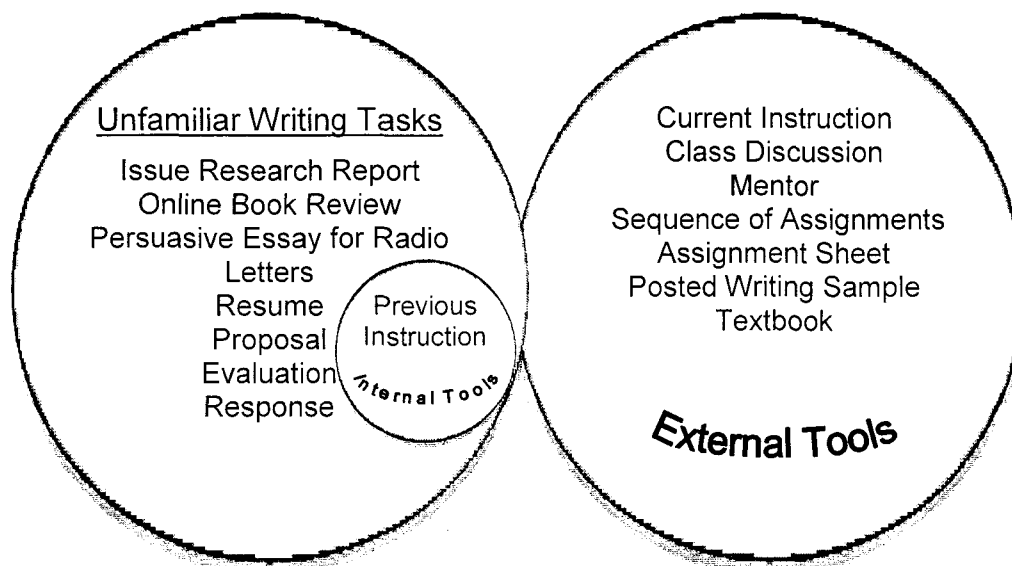


Figure 5 Unfamiliar Writing Tasks and Tools

This section of the chapter is divided into two parts, Internal Tools and External Tools. Internal Tools were those knowledges, skills, and processes the student used without an external aid such as the current instructor's lesson, the assignment sheet, or even a friend's review. External Tools are the participants' use of aids that originates outside of the participants' present skill or knowledge base.

Internal tools. Internal tools were the skills that participants claimed to use from their own skill base due to prior knowledge or instruction. The participants in my study **never** mentioned previous instruction as an aid to starting, writing, or completing **unfamiliar** writing tasks. That is to say, if the student perceived the writing task as unfamiliar, they never mentioned the use or transformation of previous instruction. My analysis of this phenomenon using the lens of activity theory suggests that the students

have assessed the rhetorical situation of the writing task and begun to search for new tools. They cited external tools as the aid for completion and understanding of the assignment. If previous instruction was mentioned it was in connection with a familiar writing skill—usually a generalized writing skill—embedded in the larger unfamiliar writing task. In addition, the participants **never** mentioned the internal tools of interest or intuition to guide them in designing or drafting their response to an unfamiliar writing skill. This finding is the opposite for familiar writing tasks.

An example of the use of internal tools for the familiar writing task embedded in an unfamiliar writing task is a participants' generalized avoidance of first-person in research. As Cindy said about an Issue Research Report which to her is unfamiliar, "I usually always avoid [using] the word 'I'" (Cindy, p. 5). In another example, Ann mentioned adding descriptors and adjectives to a book review that was submitted online. While the delivery of the writing required Ann to consider audience in new ways and made the book review genre, which she had done since elementary school, a new experience, the inclusion of vivid imagery was a skill she claimed to import from upper elementary school, polished and transformed in high school English. In discussing her online book review of *Columbine*, she explains her use of syntax and description.

Ann: Kind of just like, it gives you a punch because some say, you are reading this book it about school shooting, but it's like, oh, they could have killed more, kind of makes you want to read more. Like, really, what were they planning? I thought that was kind of a strategy to put that behind the semi-colon. Instead of just saying, 'they could have killed more, but they didn't.' [laughs] because that's boring [laughs].

HL-R: Do you know where you learned to do that punch idea, to do that?

Ann: Um, probably in high school, probably didn't learn that until 11th or 12th grade.[. . .]

HL-R: Where did you learn [how to put details and descriptors in sentences]?-

Ann: Where? When?

H L-R: When, and it doesn't have to be a certain day.

Ann: Like how to use descriptors? Probably in 6th grade, early middle school, when we started really learning how to write papers, the adjectives, and verbs, and nouns, agreements, and all this stuff, and why it's important to use descriptors so people can imagine what you're trying to say so and see it rather than see it in black and white. (Ann, Biology, p.4)

Ann's skills of description have not changed from high school or previous instruction, but it is an embedded skill within an assignment she has not accomplished before.

External tools. The participants named certain aids in the completion of an unfamiliar writing task as coming specifically from somewhere else. External tools were the most often mentioned as an aid and had a number of types of tools in this category. These labels were not meant to be mutually exclusive. Some participants named multiple external tools in the aid of completing the assignments that involved unfamiliar writing tasks. However, most participants named one tool more specifically and descriptively or first in their explanation of what helped.

The external tools discussed in this section are multiple and I have grouped them in terms of Direct Instruction and Indirect Instruction. In the Direct Instruction group are Instructor Direction, In-Class Discussion of a Writing Sample, and Mentor. In the Indirect Instruction group are Posted Writing Sample, Textbook, Sequence of Assignments, and the Assignment Sheet.

Direct instruction: Instructor Direction. Participants reported either oral or written direction from the instructor was helpful in completing assignments that involved unfamiliar writing tasks for the capstone writing course.

In composing a letter to a public official whom she wishes to persuade about improving ELL instruction in his district, Cindy cites the instructor's directions for arranging the content and the style of the writing:

HL-R: [. . .] *What made you start with 'well, now [in the second paragraph] I'm going to start talking about US participants' proficiency versus Bolivia'? You're doing a lot of numbers.*

Cindy: *I guess, because [the instructor] also said [during classroom instruction that] in a letter, a letter needs to be quick, to the point, get your point across because no one wants to read a 5 page letter. Letters need to be just so that you can get a response. So that it hits you hard, so if you want to be, you can be like, oh, well, OK, tell me more now. I want to make it quick and fast. (Cindy, Nursing program, p.6)*

Cindy's rhetorical choices in order to garner her reader's reaction is explained in terms of what the instructor wants, not generated from her own thinking.

For another participant, a visiting instructor's direction helped with developing content in terms of the radio audience for the assignment.

Mary: *I ended it with some rhetorical questions, because I had not originally done that. But then we had the class with Susan [the visiting reporter from NPR], and she was kind of like, just state questions, don't tell them what to think. So, I went back and made everything questions. (Mary, Biology, p.2)*

It seems that direct instruction in the classroom literally directs the writer to make whole scale changes without any revision by this student writer for the reader.

Furthermore, if there is re-consideration by the student writer it is a question of which instruction direction to take rather than any access to internal tools. In the following example, Mary disregarded the visiting NPR reporter, Susan's directions to ignore audience and followed the instructor's previous guidance.

HL-R: *And then would you say, what taught you to write for audience was—I guess I'm going to ask you. What taught you to write for audience in this class was---*

Mary: *Professor X.*

HL-R: *OK, the instructor. Would you say Susan did too?*

Mary: Not really, because I have down in my notes that she said not to consider audience. To write for yourself. She talked about that in our class, not to consider audience. [Mary finds her notes and reads]. Yeah, it says, "Present who you are and what you think without worrying about how audience will receive the message." (Mary, Biology, p.3)

While appealing to audience might seem a conceptual skill that requires rhetorical application, Mary credits her instructor with teaching her how to appeal to an audience as if it is a direct application of a skill rather than a rhetorical application of a heuristic.

The skill of evaluation appears new to one participant and she implies that understanding the rhetorical concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos were not clear until the instructor invited discussion of student concepts.

H L-R: So, being taught the terms and applying them to things around you helped you, as well as participants bringing in their examples and talking about them, helped to show the evaluation of the terms. Did that help you write it? Did you think about those as different skills, that talking about it is one thing but writing it is another thing?

Carrie: Yeah, coming in with the examples in the class helped me the most, because I was still unsure. I was still second-guessing myself. But when participants bring in examples from Facebook, something that all students can relate to, then you can actually see that. (Carrie, Liberal Studies, p. 3)

Completing a newsletter was initially easy for this participant as Emma implies that the software formatting her dad sent helped her write the new genre. However, it was the instructor's written feedback that helped her understand the arrangement and style to revise it.

Emma: I had done a fake newsletter and had cut and pasted on the computer a really rough draft of the idea. So when she gave it back, she had little things circled like, who is the mediator of change, and stuff like that. I was able to look at what she circled and kind of fix what I had. I made sure I included the mediator of change, who my target audience was, what the formattings are, what are the core values.

H L-R: Were you able to think about these things, the mediator of change and the core values and stuff before as you were putting it in there before she saw or it or was it her prompt that—

Emma: I kind of was, but I guess I didn't make it come across like I wanted it to, but I kind of thought I did. But then, when I read the rough draft when I was re-doing it, I was like, ew, I didn't want to do that. So I guess her prompting did help a lot, because then I knew exactly what she wanted and what to do. (Emma, Liberal Studies, p.5)

The phrase “then I knew exactly what she wanted and what to do” is often a signal for the absence of abstraction. However, it seems to underscore the student’s reliance on external tools to complete the work of an unfamiliar writing task. At the very least, this example suggest that the context for writing for an unfamiliar task is a complex set of activities for which the writer selects from a variety of tools.

Direct instruction: In-Class discussion of a writing sample. Participants reported that in-class discussion of student writing samples helped them complete the writing for unfamiliar writing tasks. This discussion happened primarily with student writing placed on the overhead projection screen in class and the instructor taking the lead on the discussion of the writing.

Barry credits the process of class discussion with helping him revise a Facebook page addressing school violence according to audience.

Barry: Yeah, when I wrote the Facebook group and brought that to class and Ms. X was like, do you think other college kids are going to read through that?

HL-R: Was that happening at your desk or up on the overhead and the whole class was listening?

Barry: Yeah, it was up on the overhead, on a print out. I made the group on the internet and I made a page print out of what I'd written and threw it up on the overhead. And some of the kids were like, I would go along with it because in the initial paragraph he talks about our rights and it's kind of a big deal to me. Which from being a history major, universities are always the hub of any type of social change. That's the initial place that things take place. So, I kind of went the historical route which wasn't the correct route to go for our age group because our age group is more affected by that call to arms right off the bat, by saying this is what is in danger, this is what the issue is. So having some of the students say, I don't have any connection to this whatsoever because you don't have that call to arms, right off the bat, made me realize I had to re-work some stuff; it kind of opened my perspective on the way I appeal to certain audiences.

(Barry, History & Sec. Ed., p.2)

Barry's development of content in what might be a familiar writing task—creating a Facebook page—has now become unfamiliar because of the change in audience. In this example, he has accessed familiar writing skills based in his major rather than considering what might be new to this writing task.

The negotiation of a completely new task—a proposal—was all based on in-class instruction. Kristen describes *all* the parts of the proposal as coming from the instructor's discussion.

Kristen: *He showed a part of [the proposal] in class, and when people asked questions, he directed us toward an example that he had done. And I just remembered that part of it. Most of it's the correct format. It's just the beginning that I didn't do correctly.*

H L-R: *OK. How did you know to do the rest of this? In other words, how did you know what an introduction in a proposal meant?*

Kristen: *Umm.*

H L-R: *How did you figure that out or how did you know?*

Kristen: *I guess we learned what a proposal is through the explanation of his, he kind of taught us what a proposal is by showing us his example, and what was its purpose and what it was intended to do. And then an introduction is something you learn in elementary school, nowadays, an introduction, body, conclusion. (Kristen, Liberal Studies major, History minor, p. 1)*

Kristen's explanation of the proposal genre involves some generalized notion of writing from elementary school but she appears unable to engage in the translation of those skills on her own to ask how the introduction of a proposal might be different from or similar to the introduction format she learned in elementary school. This example illustrates complete reliance on the instructor's direction.

Direct instruction: Mentor. Mentors are the names I gave to friends and family members that acted as a writing coach or sounding board for the participant in the completion of their writing assignment.

To complete the drafting of a résumé which Jan reports she had never done before, she first gets help from a friend.

Well, I did [the résumé] first. I hadn't really, I didn't really know what to do because it was my first one. I had help from a friend because she had written one. And then I sat down with my teacher and she just went over what I should change and what was good about it. (Jan, Communication Sciences & Disorders major p.1).

Her reliance on external aids comes from a combination of the friend and then later the teacher in a one-on-one conference to discover not only what to revise but also what was effective.

Barry describes friends and family as a sounding board and even draws inspiration from a popular movie for his reflective radio essay for NPR.

H L-R: *Would you say then that you were practicing with your friends and your parents when you were talking to them about the entrance and how they felt about?*

Barry: *Well, I was definitely trying to use them as a trial balloon. So, talking to them and throwing out some ideas, because prior to them even getting that I had no idea how I was going to write this paper, so I was thinking about different aspects and different ways, trying to grab people's attention and bring out some emotion. And I just kind of had this epiphany when I was sitting there with my pencil and I think a couple lines from You Got Mail popped in my head. (Barry, History & Sec. Ed., p.6)*

Barry's claim that he has no idea how to start this paper is transformed by his use of friends, family, and film.

Indirect instruction: Sequence of assignments. Some participants mentioned that order of their assignments was helpful in generating the next assignment. Others mentioned that the sequencing or staging of the writing process was helpful.

Kristen could see that the course was organized so that writing assignments built upon one another.

Kristen: Yes, we started with an annotated bibliography, and then we did a letter, and a memo, and something else, and then a proposal, and then we'll do an annotated proposal [to illustrate to the instructor the writing techniques we used in our writing]. It's been the same topic, which is kind of nice because normally you have to do a whole bunch of research over and over and over again. It was nice, and I think you get more comfortable with it. It's easier to use once you repeat it a whole bunch. (Kristen, Liberal Studies, History minor, p. 3)

This sequencing allows a novice writer to develop a comfort with her content expertise as she was asked to complete unfamiliar writing tasks.

In the next example, the sequence of assignments was more a sequencing of the steps in writing, made more visible. Emma reports that to put the Issue Research Report together took a combination of student sample writing, the rubric, drafting, peer revision, and class discussion of participants' questions.

Emma: Professor M posted a sample of a good issue report. I opened that up and referred to that, to see a real live version of what she wants from a real student. And then I went by the rubric as well and exactly what she wants, like how to lay it out, and then we came in with the rough draft. And this is the final but I didn't have any of this indented or anything. She grouped us into 2 groups and we did peer revision. That helped a lot. And she also answered questions about the content and the format as well. That really helped me do the final project.

H L-R: Do you remember having certain questions about the content or questions that others asked that you wanted to know?

Emma: Basically, for me, I wanted to do it right. So my questions were 'How exactly can I lay this out?' I had all the information; like I knew the information was good and correct.

H L-R: How did you know the information was good and correct?

Emma: Because I answered what the rubric told me to. Because she gave us a list of what she is looking for, so I made sure that my information I gave followed at least one of those questions. I just didn't know how to throw it into a paper. So I guess that was only the question I had. And concerns, I guess, was exactly what exactly, because she said she wanted the meat and potatoes, she didn't want the bologna or you know, she didn't want any--

H L-R: --no icing, no cake--

Emma: Right, she wanted it plain. So it was kind of tricky weaving out what I wanted to say to get my point across with what the issue is, but I guess, with her help and the peer revision, I feel I was able to successfully do it. (Emma, Biology, p. 1)

Emma experiences the same level of comfort with writing in unfamiliar territory that Kristen does as the sequence allows the participants to rely on external tools.

Indirect Instruction: Posted writing sample. Participants reported using the posted examples from the instructor. In some cases, the posted sample was from an online model of writing that matched the assignment, such as the essays that were accepted for on-air reading from previous weeks. Or the sample was a previous student's work.

Helen explains that what she was asked to do in the essay for the radio is 'different' than what she has been asked to do previously, and therefore, she needs external tools and uses the models.

H L-R: *Why'd you put [a story] first [in the radio essay]?*

Helen: *Because I feel like you have to capture someone's attention and you're going to capture it more with a story and then leading into statistics vs starting with statistics.*

H L-R: *Have you ever done that before--capture the reader's attention?*

Helen: *Kind of, sort of, not really. I got the idea more from the essays we listened to. Because they started out with stories and then went into facts, and that caught my attention better than the ones that just started out with facts, because I find that boring. But in a lot of business writings all we do is just: 'here's the details, here's the memo, this is what we went over today.' It's definitely a different type of writing because we don't add story. We don't add artistic [proofs]. It's pretty much just inartistic; here's the facts. (Helen, Business Management, p.2)*

Helen describes her rhetorical moves in terms of Aristotelian proofs, yet knowing the terms is not enough to generate the writing. Instead she claims the sample essays gave her the idea to start with a story. Furthermore, she names the writing in business class as a dominant frame which she must move out from under.

Ann uses a number of tools to help her generate a book review that would be posted online: in the order which Ann names them, it is the instructor's requirements as

well as her earlier advice to go online to review the posted samples, and Ann's skills in essay format, taking notes and outlining all help Ann complete the assignment. But it is the other people's book reviews that help her generate content.

Ann: Well, she told us 150 words, and I just went on Amazon and I saw most people had, you know like, um, 3 or 4 paragraphs, like good paragraphs. And I just broke it up into maybe an introduction, 2 bodies, and a conclusion. So, that's how I did that. And of course, I did the bulleted thing for an introduction, and then whatever.

HL-R: So, if I hear this right, you heard the requirements, went on to Amazon, looked at other people's reviews, saw their format. Did you look at what they had written in the paragraphs?

Ann: Yes, I kind of just wanted to see if they were very vague about the book or if it was detailed things, maybe if someone had not read the book would they know what the review was talking about, would it get the message across to people if they have not read it, would it make them want to read it? Stuff like that, and I just went back to my notes that I took from each chapter, like I said, and kind of bulleted it, and I kind of just highlighted and checked off the important stuff. Then on a separate piece of paper jotted down what I needed to put in it and in what order, and then I kind of, I usually do the body first when I write, and then maybe the intro and the conclusion. That's a little tactic I use, because it's always hard to start out because you have so much racing through your mind, so I just put the meat of the paper down and then intro and the conclusion.

HL-R: So then, [your writing] doesn't really follow [the assignment sheet], it follows the review online, their 250 word limit, and you posted it. (Ann, Biology, p. 5)

Ann's organization skills for writing essays are a familiar skill used in a new context although it is unclear if the five-paragraph format is really necessary or appropriate for this online venue. In developing the content of the online book review, it is the sample that helps. In fact, Ann's book review follows the Amazon guideline more than the instructor's assignment sheet as she reveals by the end of this interchange. Again, this illustrates the combination of cues that help the writer generate content are often not happening internally but by external means.

Similarly, Jennifer uses a posted sample of the Issue Research Report to generate content. Her use of tools is multiple, but when it comes to writing, Jennifer pulls up the sample and examines each section.

***Jennifer:** Some of the headings came from the example she gave us and some of them were my modification of the example and some of them I had to change completely because it didn't really fit with my topic, but I definitely used the example and tried to stay as close as possible to the example as I could.*

***H L-R:** Where did you get the example? Was it given in class or posted in here [Blackboard]?*

***Jennifer:** It was posted in BB and she went over it in class.*

***H L-R:** Did you look at it more than just in class?*

***Jennifer:** Yeah, I pulled it up when I was formatting the different sections of my paper and looking at what needed to be under each—she specifically said the format of the paper wasn't exactly right so just use it as a guideline. So I didn't strongly investigate it but I definitely used it as a background to help me to set the paper up as I did. (Jennifer, Biology major, p. 5)*

Jennifer had previously described this as a research paper that was completely new and different although she was confident with research. Still, the external tool of a sample becomes important for arrangement and generation of content.

Cindy mentions the necessity to review the posted examples of an Opinion/Editorial essay for the assignment she finds so “scary”. She claims the importance of the assignment sheet for her writing, but mentions the review of the samples first.

***Cindy:** [. . .] I had never written one and I was trying to think—I had read a bunch of them, my professor had posted a couple and I read through all of them. I was like, because some of them are funny, some of them are serious, and I didn't know what I was going to do.*

***H L-R:** So you used the model. Did the assignment sheet help you write it?*

***Cindy:** Yes, I love assignment sheets. I love them. (Ann, Nursing program, p. 4)*

‘Not knowing what to do’ she turns to external tools altogether to guide her understanding and development of the writing task.

Indirect Instruction: Assignment sheet. For some participants, the assignment sheet was treated as a document that was one of the “things I thought about that I thought was important” (Kevin, p.1) or something that was “always read over first [to see] exactly what she would want me to do” (Jan, p. 3). Cindy goes as far as highlighting certain sections of the assignment sheet and professes her “love” for assignment sheets (p. 4). In fact, Jan states, “Without that [handout for the cover sheet], I don’t think I would have known what I was doing” (p. 2). The common thread through these examples is that participants are involved in writing in unfamiliar ways. While each of these participants is completing an assignment that involves familiar skills of essays, cover letters, or persuasive writing, the assignment sheet is a tool that they turn to as a dominant form of guidance.

Indirect & Direct Instruction: Multiple sources. Many participants mentioned a series of tools they used in completing assignments over the course of the interview. There weren’t any specific combinations or priority to any tools, but one combination was mentioned in only one interview: the assignment sheet with the textbook. Only one student mentioned the course text book as something they thought about that was important or considered in their writing. And she mentioned the textbook twice in the interview. Here she explains that she put some of the concepts to good use.

Cindy: *We were reading Thank You for Arguing, which that book is about techniques to argue and techniques to persuade. I thought of them while I was writing it, I didn’t have my book out and look at specific things. I took notes in class, but I just sort of remembered, like maybe if I’m against this, I should just write negatively about what I’m against and really positive on everything that’s opposite to what I’m against. (Cindy, Nursing program, p.8)*

This may speak more to the textbook than about the other participants, but it is part of the external tools participants refer to when completing unfamiliar writing tasks.

While most participants had a more developed explanation of one tool over another which implied a priority, some did explain that their writing came from a culmination of experiences they had difficulty explicating as separate items. Barry explains that his writing represents “everything I’ve learned [. . .] So, different kinds of writing styles I try to incorporate and learn from my mistakes is the biggest aspect I go through as I write” (p. 4). Barry’s access and use of writing skills, knowledges, and processes appear to be a complex set of activities.

Moment of Erasure

Throughout the transcripts, there were moments when participants explained their processes to approaching an assignment as an inability to even start the writing or identify what was required. I have called this phenomenon “moments of erasure.” The moments are marked by two identifying characteristics: 1) a description by the participants of the writing tasks as unfamiliar (when in fact it is composed of but not entirely made up of writing tasks they have done before) and 2) an apparent inability to tackle the writing task without external tools. The ‘moment’ is as if prior instruction or prior experience is erased. This moment is not the same as writer’s block (Rose, 1985) or writer’s apprehension (Daly, Vangelisti, & Witte, 1988); the participants do complete the assignments in a timely fashion and do not report procrastinating because they can not or will not complete the assignment. This ‘moment of erasure’ is about the participants’ inability to access or transform prior instruction to perceive the assignment as related to prior writing assignments or writing tasks, and therefore achievable without external tools.

In this first example, one of the identifying features of the moment of erasure is that the participant describes the writing task as unfamiliar, when in fact it is composed of a writing task she has completed before. Cindy, the participant, did not see letters to a public official as similar enough to anything she had written before, when in fact she claimed that she had written letters and e-mails to people before. A change in audience and style for the letter to public officials translated to the statement: “No, never written a letter [. . .] This is the first time I’ve been writing all this” (p.8). She continued by explaining that she had done some letter writing, but this was different.

Cindy: I don’t think we really wrote letters to people [in other classes]. We wrote essays but it’s totally like, we did this or tell me or a reaction paper. It’s never like writing to the teacher. I never had to write to a professor. Well, I mean it’s to him but, um--

H L-R: You’ve never written to a professor-

Cindy: And written formally too. I mean we write emails.

H L-R: But you’ve never written to a specific audience, specifically to the teacher.

Cindy: Exactly. And it’s the professional part of it. Anyone can write to their grandma. Grandma’s not going to care, you can write whatever. (Cindy, Nursing program, p.8)

To a certain extent, Cindy’s statement exhibits an understanding of the change in content and style according to audience, a sophisticated rhetorical move on her part. However, what is noteworthy for this study is that she conceptualizes the assignment as something completely *new* and therefore *unconnected* to past writing assignments. This is the first feature of the “moment of erasure.” She admitted that she has written before but doesn’t perceive the past experience as connected or useful to bring into this situation.

The second feature of the moment of erasure soon follows as she described being able to write the letter with the help of the assignment sheet (p.6-7), the

instructor's scaffolded assignments (p.6), and the lessons from their textbook, *Thank You for Arguing* (p.8). Her description of the letter's content and rationale for the inclusion of each part was justified by specific directions from each of these external tools. She never mentioned her own adaptations or applications of past writing experience.

Likewise, another participant did not see cover letters as similar to anything she had done before, yet it is relatively safe to assume she has written personal letters and emails. It might be a stretch to assume that she has written a business or professional letter that employs more formal language.

HL-R: *How about the cover letter? Was this similar to anything you've ever done before?*

Jan: *Not really, because I had never made one before. (Jan, Communication Sciences and Disorders, p. 1)*

Jan's initial reply of "Not really" suggests that the letter is some variation of something she has written before. Later she states that the cover letter is somewhat familiar to her because she "knew how to write a letter, so I knew all of that format" (p.2). However, the ending of her reply revises her statement to suggest that since she has "never made [a cover letter] before," this letter will be different. And in fact, she states that she "wasn't sure what to put in it" (p.2). Further research into this moment may make for a thicker analysis of her statement as to what she saw as similar or different. Yet, what remains crucial in this moment is that she compartmentalized letter writing and saw the cover letter as "not really" the same as others. This "not really" suggests more of a gap, a fissure, an 'erasure' of past writing instruction or writing experience in order to describe the similarities and differences between this cover letter and other letters. Again, further research would create a stronger assertion that there is a gap in

instruction. But what remains in this analysis is a notation of the gap, the lack of connection between prior writing experiences to be able to start the letter without a complete reliance on external cues or tools.

Furthermore, the second identifying feature of the moment of erasure is suggested by Jan's complete reliance on external tools to complete the assignment. She reported that she "really didn't know what to do except for when I read the directions. [. . .] She also gave us a handout that explains how to write our cover letter. And without that, I don't think I would have known what I was doing" (pp. 1-2). The moment of erasure lasts longer than a moment and does not allow for the recall of any writing skills beyond sentence building.

Another student Cindy exhibited the two identifying features of the 'moment of erasure' with an Opinion/Editorial that was assigned in the capstone writing course. The first feature is that she defined the writing task as completely unfamiliar, despite having read posted samples of editorials.

HL-R: *So, this is an Op-ed piece. Have you ever written an Op-Ed piece before?*

Cindy: *No, this was kind of scary.*

HL-R: *Was it?*

Cindy: *Yeah, because I had never written one and I was trying to think—I had read a bunch of them, my professor had posted a couple and I read through all of them. I was like, because some of them are funny, some of them are serious, and I didn't know what I was going to do. (Cindy, Nursing program, p.4)*

It is as if reading a sample of the writing that is required and reviewing the features of a sample piece of writing does not connect to being able approach the writing assignment. The moment of erasure comes in this gap. Furthermore, one might assume Cindy has performed skills of responding, persuading, and summarizing in academic

work, but she was unable or unwilling to participate in any recall of skills that would fit the present task. In fact, the whole task is ‘scary.’

The second feature of the moment of erasure comes when Cindy, like Jan, relied completely on external tools to help identify what is necessary to complete the Op-Ed piece.

HL-R: *So you used the model. Did the assignment sheet help you write it?*

Ana: *Yes, I love assignment sheets. I love them.*

HL-R: *Is this your highlighting [on the assignment sheet]?*

Ana: *Yes, I wanted to make sure I had ethos, so I wanted to make sure I established my credibility. I wanted to make sure since this was a big audience that I was talking to with the data. We’ve been reading Thank you for Arguing and that kind of teaches you how to argue. And so, on this paper, I guess I focused more on Americans. I tried to be patriotic, because I know that it has to be persuasive. (Cindy, Nursing program, p.4)*

One final case illustrates this phenomenon of erasure in particular because the writing task involved an academic genre, the research paper. Yet, because the research paper was a report of a public issue, rather than an academic issue (as if that is a binary), the participant saw the writing task as unfamiliar. Emma was asked to do an Issue Research Report for the capstone writing course (see Appendix 6 for the full assignment sheet). With an eye toward the investigation of a public civic issue, the assignments asks for participants to “prove that the issue [they] are researching is most likely to develop into a *real* rhetorical situation.” But for Emma, this task is “set up differently. This is a report, I guess” (p.6). One might assume that as a Liberal Studies major, Emma was familiar with research in many different courses.

And in fact, I discussed Emma’s comfort with research (p. 3) earlier in this Findings chapter. I suggested then that her notion of research was “not wrong” (p.3) because it was about “find[ing] good fact, good data, and support[ing] it.” While her

interpretation spoke to a generalized notion of research, one that was immature or undeveloped, she perceived herself as confident with that skill. Yet, because of the “difference” in formatting, Emma reports a level of unfamiliarity that wipes the slate clean. “This felt different. I wasn’t as confident, I guess. Like with an English paper, if you give it to me, I can write it up real quick and fine tweak it. But this, I felt was, a whole lot more research, like I’ve never done a paper like this, *never*” (my emphasis, p. 6). This never moment, this “moment of erasure,” appears to block the participants’ negotiation of past writing skill, process, or knowledge to the present writing task. The ability to recall familiar skills, processes, and knowledges and apply them or transform a similar skill, process, and knowledge and apply them to the present writing task appears stopped.

It seems to be clear that a change in audience, purpose, or format changes participants’ perception of the writing task to the extent that it becomes unfamiliar, even though the entire task may involve embedded familiar skills, processes, and knowledges. Therefore, while the instructor may perceive the task as scaffolded to previous instruction and assume the students perceive that as well, the participants’ perception overrides those assumptions on the part of the instructor, in effect clearing access to those previous skills, processes, and knowledges that may or may not be internalized. The participants’ prior knowledge base goes through a “moment of erasure.” Transfer does not seem to happen here, either consciously or subconsciously, because they perceive the task as unfamiliar.

They are stopped to the point that each one of them reported a reliance on external tools, completely.

The Outlier

One participant's responses were different than those of other participants. She repeatedly explained writing tasks as different without being unfamiliar or new. She recognized the difference among writing tasks as needing a different set of rhetorical concerns, for example attention to content due to audience or purpose. In contrast, other participants named the difference in writing tasks as completely unknown or even frightening. This participant's assessment of the writing environment included an understanding of the rhetorical situation and its attendant tools (Flower & Hayes) as well as the various professional and academic discourse communities' conventions (Bartholomae). Helen, a Business Management major, explained writing tasks she was given in the capstone writing course as understandably different and expressed a level of confidence in her description of the writing task and what it took to accomplish the writing task.

Interestingly, this participant also claimed that she was ready for my questions about any of her assignments because "I remember pretty much everything I write and what my thought processes are" (Helen, Business Management, p. 1). When I asked if her research paper for the capstone writing course was different than her research papers for her Business courses, she was quick to affirm that difference and explain the modifications necessary as well as the reasons.

HL-R: *Your language and content in your research paper in English 400, is that different than what you'd do in Business? Or was it the same?*

Helen: *It's a lot different actually. Just because, like I said, in Business, our reports are completely: here's the statistical fact, here's what is actually happening. Whereas in my report I had to explain it and kind of create the problem for the audience, because the audience doesn't necessarily see the problem.* (Helen, Business Management, p. 4)

Helen saw the need for a revision in the content of her paper in order to explain and create a problem because she understood her writing in terms of a readerly focus (Flower, 1981).

Her understanding of crafting information in terms of audience illustrates a broader notion of writing as an activity system. This activity system changes with the instructor/audience (the subject), the assignment (the objective), and the tools. Her crafting according to audience was illustrated her in a subtle change in wording regarding statistics. In an essay submitted to National Public Radio about issues of civic, public concern (an essay that Carrie described as completely different and Barry terms ‘tricky,’) Helen explained how she would make changes to one sentence.

***Helen:** [. . .] In Business, we pretty much just write like: “48% of participants—“ or “Students tend to score a 48.3%.” Whereas here I kind of said: “Students scored an all-time low on the survey of only 48.3%.” And then, “The need for financial education is steadily increasing with the economic crisis and the changing of financial wealth,” which the business world and students are already going to know that. That’s pretty common knowledge with us. So, because I was relating it to the different audience I had to add in that piece of information they didn’t necessarily know. (p.4)*

Repeatedly, Helen was able to explain specific changes to content and why they were necessary according to audience and purpose.

When I asked Helen what taught her to do the shift in this assignment, she explained that her choices were based on what the teacher wanted for the assignment, and yet, in the next part of the sentence she connects the teacher instruction to guidelines about audience from business communication.

***H L-R:** OK, what taught you to do that?*

***Helen:** I guess kind of a mix of—well, what she said is “Act like the people have no idea what you are talking about.” It’s the same thing with my report; I kind of threw in details that if I was writing to the educated business people they’re going to know this is what they’re actually spending on a house, this is what*

they're actually spending in an interest rate in credit cards. Whereas if I'm relating to someone who hasn't had a good quality business education, they're not going to know they could end up paying 3x as much for houses, just because of interest rates. And what may seem low isn't actually low. It just depends how much you are taking it out for or if you can get ahead of yourself. If you can take out a loan you're paying 600/month, if you can up that and pay 750, you going to pay it off a lot sooner. (p.4)

It was as if the content choices she was making were called forth or embedded in a rhetorical knowledge of purpose and audience rather than general writing strategies.

In addition to shifting her content and language according to audience, Helen also shifted her use of grammar situationally. A few minutes later in the interview, she explained that her rule for length of paragraph was generalized due to early teaching in freshmen composition, yet she knew that the Business school does not follow those rules. So, she breaks the rules of the Business school, understands her rule as inaccurately applied, but also understands when to ensure the rule is followed.

HL-R: *Have those rules from [FYC] changed a bit in your business class or have you changed them? Have you seen them change?*

Helen: *I try to make all my paragraphs 5-7, at least, now. Versus, it doesn't really matter because all of ours are like memos. If you're at 3, you're fine. But just because that's what I'm used to. But definitely when I go back to Gen Ed class, I make sure that every paragraph is 5-7 sentences or I make sure there aren't any grammatical errors. It doesn't necessarily matter in Business class, they're looking for the facts. And they'll tell you as long as they can understand it and the facts are there. It's fine. (p.7)*

Helen explains the rules she uses, why it is wrong, but then where and why she specifically employs it.

Helen displays an awareness of content and language changes according to audience. Later in the interview, she explains that this shift in language and content according to audience is not simply a skill she employed for this particular assignment alone. Rhetorical knowledge of writing conventions is a heuristic she applies to the

various audiences across the curriculum. She admits to consciously changing according to an understanding of the different discourse community of the various colleges and curriculum.

***H L-R:** So, you're using different skills in different classes. You're consciously switching—*

***Helen:** You have to. [...] What [teachers] expect is very different. And that's when you go back to any Gen Ed class from your major. If it's not in your actual field, you have to switch back. Because every teacher in every department wants something different. (p.7)*

This appears to be the only example of high-road transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988) as Helen applies a rhetorical understanding of writing in her General Education courses and her Business classes. One of the significant moments of the interview was asking Helen when she learned this rhetorical approach to writing. She stated that it came early in her college career, due to a required Business Communication course during her sophomore year (p. 7). Does this moment have pedagogical implications and call for the teaching of rhetorical knowledge earlier in a student's writing career? More research needs to be undertaken of the Business department students to make an assessment of their writing perceptions and performance in General Education courses.

At one point, Helen explains a moment of erasure but only partially. She admits needing help with writing a paper that requires the audience to act on a civic, social issue and that she had never done this before. She used an external tool of teacher instruction but still explained that the audience work was done herself:

***H L-R:** What helped you to write that?*

***Helen:** I think that was mostly the 400. I've never had to ask someone to change something before. [English] 150 [FYC] is just writing. I don't even know what else I took—some English History class. But that's [FYC] just writing, here's the facts. In Business, it's the same way. So, this is the first time I've had to be like: Here's a problem, now, what are we going to do to fix it? So, I kind of had to see her examples and how she talked about it in class and say, 'OK, what*

would relate to my audience?' What would they think of and be like, I know exactly what that is even if they don't know anything about finance. They know who Bernie Madoff and they know what Enron was. (p. 6)

In the end, Helen reported that the skills for this course were similar to what was asked of her in high school and middle school.

H L-R: *Where did you pull skills in order to write [the Issue Research Report]? Did you know?*

Helen: *Probably all the way back from middle school or high school, probably, in English classes, because you're taught to write about something you're knowledgeable about or researching it about and then you have to present it to a class who didn't research the same topic, so they don't have any idea what you're talking about and you wouldn't have before you did your research.*

H L-R: *So, writing for a general audience is something you've done for a while and you'd say back to middle school or high school where I used to write like that for a general audience.*

Helen: *If the end goal is to present to the class, yes. Or if the end goal is present it to somebody who that's not their field of study. (p.5)*

It is unclear from the transcript whether Helen understood her work in middle or high school of writing to a general audience as a useful framework that might carry forward to college or whether this explanation is the result of reflection encouraged by the interview process. What this passage does reflect is a rhetorical framework for writing that is used now.

In sum, Helen is a study in contrast to most every student I have talked to about the capstone writing course and each participant in this study who claim that the capstone writing course is NOTHING like any class or English course they have ever taken. Helen likens this course to the general education courses of high school and even middle school by explaining that writing tasks are merely writing to an audience that may or may not know what you are talking about.

The next chapter provides a summary of the study, limitations, discussion of the analysis, and pedagogical implications.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is divided into four parts: Summary, Limitations, Discussion, and Pedagogical Implications.

SUMMARY

After piloting the capstone writing course at Longwood University in the fall of 2004 and watching students struggle with seemingly familiar ‘versions’ of writing tasks, I became interested in what was happening for them. As a composition course placed at the end of the students’ academic career, the capstone writing course should profit from a certain level of writing development, shouldn’t it?

Certainly there was a developmental level of cognition and writing processes that instructors could assume were in place as students attempted to write for public, civic issues. Granted *any* writer is at different developmental level than any other, but why weren’t some even basic writing skills, processes, and knowledges being carried forward with a certain confidence into this course? Students could write complete sentences but couldn’t begin to draft a letter to an elected public official with confidence or a productive plan. They could find research about their academic subjects but didn’t know where to start in researching a public, civic issue. Questions of pedagogy and instructional design were valid points of contact in understanding what was happening in the classroom; however, the starting point for this study was the students’ perspective to understand their processes and tools before I interrogated what might be the best praxis.

To that end, I began to question what was happening for and within them. The purpose of this study was to:

- discover how the students perceive writing tasks
- understand how students negotiate completing the writing tasks of the capstone writing course
- and understand what students bring forward or not from past instruction.

From there, I developed three research questions:

1. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report having used or been required to use in their writing-intensive courses at Longwood University?
2. How do students define the writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes required in a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?
3. What writing skills, knowledges, and/or processes do students report using in completing a selected writing assignment in English 400, their general education capstone writing course, at Longwood University?

To answer my research questions, the first step was to ask the participants of the capstone writing course what writing skills, processes, and knowledges they remembered using in previous composition courses. My thinking was that this information would suggest the battery of tools participants could access in completing the writing assignments for the capstone writing course. Using an electronically delivered group administered survey, I queried 13 of 20 sections of the spring 2010 semester of the capstone writing course in order to record the frequency with which participants used or practiced a list of writing skills, processes, and knowledges. The first three sections were surveyed in a pilot study to ensure the participants' readings of the survey could be completed without questions about meaning or unintended error. Next, eight sections of the capstone course were surveyed and analyzed for this study.

The second step to answer my research questions was to interview selected participants of the capstone writing course. The interviews captured their descriptions of a self-selected writing assignment and provided an explanation of what aids participants found useful in completing the assignment. Using audio recording equipment, I conducted semi-structured interactive interviews with 13 participants who were presently enrolled in the capstone writing course and who had completed the survey. Using open coding, I analyzed the transcripts for themes of description and useful aids. By examining each participant's explanations of the writing assignment, I was able to code the information into four categories: 1) genres of writing; 2) familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks; 3) internal tools used for completion of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks; and 4) external tools used for completion of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks.

As a result of my analysis of the survey, I found that participants had access to a number of writing skills, processes, and knowledges from previous composition experiences at Longwood University. As a result of the interview analysis, I found that the participants' use of the previously practiced writing skills, processes, and knowledges depended upon their perception of the writing assignment or writing tasks they described. Participants reported using previously learned writing skills, processes, and knowledges if they perceived the writing tasks as familiar. However, they described certain writing tasks as unfamiliar if there was a change or alteration in the way they had previously performed or completed the familiar writing task.

More importantly, participants were NOT accessing previous writing skills, processes, and knowledges for the completion of the assignments they described as

involving unfamiliar writing tasks. The dominant aid for the completion of unfamiliar writing tasks was external tools of direct instruction by instructors or peers and model sample writing. For example, some participants reported that completing a reflective, persuasive essay for publication on the radio was a completely unfamiliar writing task. However, they reported completing reflection and persuasive essays previously. The change of delivery and audience altered the assignment to the point where participants reported needing direct instruction feedback and sample essays to complete the assignments. In an example of a writing genre more closely matched to a school genre, participants reported that a research paper that focused on a public, civic issue was “completely different” and “unlike anything they’ve ever done before.” In this case, the arrangement and style of the writing for the Issue Research paper appeared to cause what I termed “moment of erasure” from previous instruction and the reliance was once again on direct instruction and sample writing.

Although my original framework for the study involved questions of transfer, my conclusions were similar to other studies that suggested that unmediated high-road transfer—“the deliberate, mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another” (Perkins & Salomon, p. 25) was not happening. To describe what *was* happening required another framework. Through the lens of activity theory, participants were rightfully not using the tools from past experiences and instead had recognized the change in the outcome or objective of the unfamiliar writing tasks, thus requiring new tools, or at least new information. The tools they reported using for the completion of assignments perceived as unfamiliar writing tasks were external tools of direct instruction by teacher and/or peers and model sample writings among other

externally located tools. Participants rarely reported seeing the unfamiliar writing tasks as a modification of a familiar writing task and using their own skill set to make changes or adaptations. My conclusion was that participants had negotiated an insightful analysis of the writing task as part of a new activity system, thus requiring new tools.

Without completely abandoning the questions of transfer, my analysis suggests that some familiar writing skills, processes, and knowledges were involved in terms of low-road or near transfer, which “reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable similarity to the original learning context” (p. 25). The familiar writing tasks of citation, incorporating sources, and proofreading were reported with the highest frequency in the survey as being used in previous composition courses and they also were reported in the interview as being used in familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks. The highest reported familiar writing tasks appeared to transfer; however, the use of citation, incorporating sources, and proofreading are an example of low-road transfer as these tasks did not require modification or abstraction to the present context of the capstone writing course, at least the students thought so. This finding echoes the conclusions of James (2009) and Nelms & Dively (2007) among others.

LIMITATIONS

The nature of a descriptive study is to produce a description within a limited time and place. This study represents site-based research and conclusions. Therefore, my findings are limited to a description of the writing skills, processes, and knowledges reported by a small number of participants in the spring 2010 semester of a capstone

writing course at Longwood University. In order to increase the likelihood that my findings could be generalized to other writers as they approach familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks, a larger study surveying and interviewing capstone writing course cohorts would need to be undertaken. Another possibility would be to follow a number of participants from their first-year composition course at Longwood University through their writing-intensive courses and into their capstone writing course in the junior/senior year in order to collect data about the writing tasks they encounter and what tools they use to complete them.

Another limitation is that the insights of this study come from the perspective of a research-instructor (myself) who has been with the course after the initial piloting in the Spring of 2004 and has taught from two to four sections every semester since then. While I would argue that my experience has enriched my perspective, others would suggest that I may be too embedded to produce objective conclusions. To best reach this objectivity to the extent that it is possible, I have tried to triangulate my data when possible by designing a survey informed by recent research and reviewing interview protocol, questions, and data analysis techniques informed by recent research, being in close consultation with my advisor and with colleagues.

Another limitation of the study has to do with terminology. I used the descriptor “writing skills, processes, and knowledges” to encompass many parts of the writing complex. That is, writing is comprised of a combination of discrete skills like punctuation, writing processes like the recursive use of revising, and knowledges both in the content of what a person is writing and the active use of writing skills and processes in ones’ repertoire. It is beyond the means or the goal of this dissertation

study to attempt to define or separate writing tasks as skills, or processes, or knowledges. To that end, I often combined the terms as a phrase which some may claim inhibits or invalidates the conclusions I make. However, the results of the study do not work to define skills or processes. Neither do the results operate to differentiate between skills versus processes as more important. The results of the study illustrate how participants define writing tasks in terms that suggest familiarity or unfamiliarity.

Finally, the survey and interview data on which this study's findings are based are all self-reported. Thus, the writing skills, processes, and knowledges the participants reported in the survey as practicing in their composition courses may not have actually been used since their recall involves courses that they may have had three or four years ago. Their interpretation of the skills of summarizing may be highly variable; however, the survey did not mean to imply that there is only one version of summarizing that works for all contexts. The questions about their skills were merely meant to capture what the participants perceive as a skill they can bring forward. Similarly, the interview participants could have misrepresented what tools they used to complete the assignments by explaining what they thought they did rather than what they actually did to complete the writing assignment. Although it is unlikely that they would have intentionally misrepresented their actions in a case of egotism, they may have recalled their process incorrectly.

DISCUSSION

Robert Haskell's (2001) heed to study transfer *seems* apropos here: "In our highly complex, rapidly changing Information Age, the ability to transfer or generalize from the familiar to the less familiar, from the old to the new, not only renders our

world predictable and understandable, but is necessary for our adaptation to the technological and global demands of the 21st century” (p. 37). If students in the 21st century academy are to communicate within the complex “technological and global demands,” as Haskell calls them, compositionists’ study of transfer seems not only apropos but woefully slow. But what if we are all finding that transfer, *far transfer*, is not happening?

I am not the first person to suggest that far transfer is not happening (Nelms & Dively, 2007; Detterman, 1993) or that skills for writing may be context-specific (Kain & Wardle, 2004; Kent, 1999; Russell, 1991; Perkins & Solomon, 1989). Psychologist Edward Thorndike’s (1901) earlier studies of transfer have been replicated over the last century without significant changes to the conclusion that only a few cases of near transfer happen.

Thus, one important question deserves to be raised. In Detterman’s (1993) book *Transfer on Trial*, he questions *whether or not we really want transfer at all*.

It can be argued that it is not transfer we want to achieve in the solution of the important problems but freedom from transfer. The creative solution to an important problem may depend on freeing the problem solver from interference from old solutions. So the question is, if we want to build creative problem solvers, should we teach people to transfer or teach them to avoid transfer? p. 2

Perhaps the students are more creative problem solvers than we deduced from previous study. This ‘perhaps’ stands on the shoulders of foundational composition studies which first recognized student writers’ processes by asking and observing the students themselves. And although Bartholomae called for what appeared to be a traditional return to the examination of students’ products (p. 627), his articulation of student error in terms of an unwillingness or inability to invent the university also suggests that

student writers are creative problem solvers. Thus, the participants of this study may have more agency than the questions of transfer would afford.

If I look at the interview participants answers from this perspective of agency, it is good that they reported the familiar writing tasks as unfamiliar. From this perspective, the participants are showing an important understanding of new genre conventions and the rhetorical sophistication of understanding the newness of the situation suggested by the activity system in which they write. The findings of this study imply that the participants' understanding of the changes in the familiar writing tasks mark an *insightful shift* to the point of needing tools. The participants rightfully recognize this new objective in the activity system of the capstone writing course which often involves writing to a civic, public audience. Within the lens of activity theory, the writer's search for external tools is the right method of accomplishing an unfamiliar writing task. To ask or expect that writers abstract from a previous writing situation and adapt it to the new writing task without mediation may not be just highly unlikely, as research suggests again and again.

Furthermore, many of the participants' descriptions of their processes or inability to perform certain writing tasks point to rhetoric as a possible solution. Certainly, the findings based on the outlier of the study, Helen, point strongly to rhetoric being a useful heuristic for instructor and student. However, the suggestion for teaching rhetorical awareness is not new. The current academic sequence of composition courses—FYC, writing-intensive courses, the capstone writing course—suggests, at the very least, if not requires a rhetorical education. The first outcome for our FYC course “English 150: Writing and Research” is that student are to

“Understand and **adapt to rhetorical and contextual differences** in tasks involving reading, writing, speaking, and listening.” The Writing-Intensive courses should provide “[**instruction**] in **specific forms and processes of writing** used in professions related to the course discipline.” And finally, course description for the capstone writing course “English 400 Active Citizenship: An Advanced Writing Seminar” reads: “**Develops rhetorical skills** needed for citizenship in a democracy.” The second, third, and fourth outcome for the course are respectively:

- Understand the nature of public discourse/debate as determined by purpose, audience, and context;
- Choose appropriate formats in writing for a variety of purposes;
- Analyze the effectiveness of their own texts and processes for specific rhetorical situations.

If the implication from the goals and outcomes from Longwood’s composition sequence is that instructors should be delivering a rhetorical education, why isn’t it happening? If this suggestion to teach rhetoric and the requirement are not new, the answers to this boring question (to borrow Petraglia’s phrase) are not new either. With a FYC instructor base that is 75% tenure-track composed of literature faculty, only two of whom have doctoral or graduate coursework in composition pedagogy, the answer may be clear. The task for any Director of Composition may be to continue to provide faculty workshops in teaching composition for a rhetorical perspective. Making rhetoric more visible from FYC into the writing-intensive courses and finishing with the capstone writing course may help students to invent topics, accept and understand the new arrangement of discourse among different courses in their major and their

general education courses, adjust their use of style, and successfully adapt and deliver their compositions to a new audience.

Lastly, the “moment of erasure” may be a new explanation for a pedagogical event as well as a student experience that explains the disruption of instruction and a retreat from teaching rhetorical concepts. If instructors have attempted to teach writing and experienced this moment with students, they may be hesitant to continue with new genres or complex expectations. More research is warranted to understand the scope and depth of this “moment of erasure.” Is it particular to ill-equipped or unprepared students in the composition program at Longwood University? Or is it a phenomenon experienced by many writers of various stages of expertise? My collection of anecdotal evidence since I began explaining this finding leads me to believe there is something there. I certainly experienced many moments of erasure writing this dissertation. Yet, the document was filled with familiar writing tasks of researching, drafting, and revising. At times during the writing of this document, I turned exclusively to external tools: peers who had written a dissertation; colleagues who taught research methods courses; my advisor; and many times, I read through other dissertations to examine the formatting, language, and arrangement features. In conversations lately, other instructors, friends and family of struggling writers all relate this moment of erasure as a familiar experience they have witnessed. This moment may need more exploration as composition scholars work to prepare writers for new situations.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The work of studying writers in new situations is on-going for the professional and technical workplace (Dyke Ford, 2006; Dyke Ford 2004; Kain & Wardle, 2004;

Spinuzzi, 1996) and graduate students writers (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman, 1991; Blakeslee, 1997; Winsor, 1996). What about students as they make their way through the end of the academy and face new writing tasks? What should instructors keep in mind as writers face perceptions of the writing situation which invites the conception of civic, public spaces?

I turn to the work of scholars in the field of professional communication as their praxis bridges the two worlds of the academy and the workplace. Similarly, the writers in the capstone writing course based on active citizenship are bridging two worlds: the academy and the civic, public sphere. Following the efforts of Candace Spigelman and Laurie Grobman (2006) to transform a professional communication program by “mediating between rhetorical and pragmatic orientations against the backdrop of disciplinary research” (p. 49), my efforts will be to suggest that instructors of the capstone writing course do two things. They should keep a diligent eye on the students’ perspectives, and they should guide their interpretations of the writing tasks as rhetorical situations guided by a focus on invention, arrangement, and style through the lens of audience.

My call for a rhetorical education is specific to this interdisciplinary capstone writing course on active citizenship. For that call, I turn to the classical rhetoricians. According to Isocrates, the tool of rhetoric applied at the end of one’s education mobilizes the expertise of academic knowledge. The prerequisites for this rhetorical education, according to Isocrates, was not only knowledge but also natural talent (*physis*), knowledge of the art (*paideusis*), and experience (*empeiria*) in speaking (Poulakos 87). Isocrates goes to great lengths to explain that those who waste natural

talent can be surpassed by those who study. Similarly, one can have knowledge or expertise, but without experience or eloquence, one cannot serve the polis adequately.

Therefore, Isocratean rhetoric puts the final touches on a complete institutional education:

With rhetoric at the end of the educational process, the study of sciences and eristic philosophy acquires a preparatory function, providing students with ample occasions to sharpen their minds and develop their sense of discipline so that they may be best prepared to engage in real learning when the time comes. (Poulakos 99)

Of course, I am not the first to advocate a rhetorical approach to composition and the list of citations to that last phrase are too numerous to list.

My focus in pedagogy will not be to review well-known suggestions applying rhetorical principles to the production of writing. My focus will be something more functional: to list the pragmatic goals based on the findings of this study. At the end of the list I suggest a “transactional” approach to best meet those goals, although I recognize that any good instructor can meet the capstone writing course goals in any number of ways. While these goals are written for the instructors of the capstone course, they may be applicable to any teacher of composition. These suggestions include:

- encouraging instructors to question what are familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks from the students’ perspective
- guiding the students’ perceptions of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks
- being mindful of resistance to instruction regarding familiar writing tasks
- providing access to a number of external tools for the production of what students perceive as unfamiliar writing tasks
- engaging students in unfamiliar writing tasks early and often.

1. Interrogate your assumptions about what is a familiar and unfamiliar writing

task from the students' perspective. Don't assume that they will recall a task as familiar when a change in terms of the rhetorical canon can produce their perception that a writing task is completely new. Participants of this study reported that certain familiar skills were unfamiliar and overlooked the adaptations that were necessary to complete the unfamiliar writing tasks with familiar skills. Recalling Beaufort's study of the college writer Tim's passage through various courses, Tim would have needed more guidance in understanding the rhetorical situation of the writing assignments he faced as well as "numerous opportunities to apply abstract concepts in different social contexts" (p. 152). Beaufort's findings suggest that for any writers facing familiar and unfamiliar writing task they will "[miss . . .] the differences in genre requirements and critical thinking required in the discourse communities" (p. 68) without 'priming' by the teachers.

2. Guide the students' perceptions of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks.

Recalling Flower and Hayes's explication of the 'writing problem':

If a writer's representation of her rhetorical problem is inaccurate or simply underdeveloped, then she is unlikely to 'solve' or attend to the missing aspects of the problem. To sum up, defining the rhetorical problem is a major, immutable part of the writing process. But the way in which people choose to define a rhetorical problem to themselves can vary greatly from writer to writer. (p. 279)

Understanding how students interpret the writing tasks before them would be a window into how instructors might support the students' accurate assessment of the situation or help them revise their interpretation.

3. Be mindful of the signs of resistance to instruction. The participants in this study relied on instruction as far back as middle school to complete assignments they perceived involving familiar writing tasks. Some participants did not think that writing instruction was necessary or valuable when they perceived the writing task to be familiar, when in fact the assignment required a modification. As such, error may be a useful sign of the resistance to instruction. Furthermore, error may be the student's interpretation that the instructor does not find important a particular skill or process, i.e. citation formatting.

4. Provide access to external tools to support their production (from beginning to end) of an unfamiliar writing task. All participants in this study sought external tools to complete unfamiliar writing tasks even when the tools were not provided. Many participants required multiple tools or a sequenced combination of processes to complete assignments.

5. Engage students in unfamiliar writing tasks whenever possible. This suggestion applies to any level of writing instruction. Vygotsky termed this learning as the "zone of proximal development." The moment of erasure may be explained with further study as to its characteristics and the strength of the phenomenon. For now, it can be interpreted as a moment when the subject's ability to perform cannot be managed independently. They have exceeded their zone of proximal development. But I see that as a good thing. If instructors operated with the goal of reaching that zone of proximal development by "scaffolding" instruction to aid the learner's development, student writers would demonstrate growth in literacy skills, rather than polishing the same familiar writing tasks.

Finally, my attention turns to specific adaptation of the last pedagogical goal to the capstone writing course. Engaging students in unfamiliar writing tasks can best be accomplished not by mixing the conventions of schools genres (i.e. compare/contrast using your own ideas), but by avoiding “psuedotransactional” (Petraglia, Spinuzzi) texts which require students to fake a public audience and turn a letter to the editor in solely to the instructor. As Christian Weisser (2002) laments, fake letters to the editor often end up as a painful conflation of school and public genre with multiple pages of text and the inclusion of footnotes. Whenever possible, instructors should be assigning “transactional” writing—writing that does what it says it is going to do. This suggestion follows the tradition of many in the service-learning field who advocate for students to write in and for the setting in which the writing exists (Coogan, 2006; Weisser, 2002; Jolliffe, 2001; Adler-Kassner, Crooks, Watters, 1997). Support for this idea of placing students in situ is found in many studies which advocate that writers learn best by being there (Spinuzzi, 1996; Winsor, 1996). Thus, if the student writes for the public sphere, it should be sent to the public sphere. For it is here that the familiar becomes unfamiliar. They have written letters before but the change in style, delivery, or audience translates the writing task to unfamiliar and incites crucial questions about the rhetorical situation of the writing.

Interrogating and preparing for students’ interpretations of the unfamiliar writing tasks would likely support the students’ and the instructors’ understanding of documents as part of a larger activity system (Spinuzzi; Kain & Wardle). Rather than the static and “psuedotransactional” (Petraglia) texts of the classroom as workplace, writing tasks and sample civic, public documents may be analyzed and written as fluid

compositions in response to historical, social, and contextual elements, collaboratively written and revised by civic rhetors doing the work of the activity system. In the best case scenario.

Are there ways to encourage ‘coverage’ of the current course goals without treating them as a sequential guide to skill-based learning? Can instructors of the capstone writing course conceive of ‘coverage’ in another way altogether? There are a number of examples from professional communication pedagogy that suggest a focus on contextualization and critical thinking would do much to support the process and product of a capstone writing course based in civic action.

Donna Kienzler’s (2001) work in professional communication pedagogy proposes that we ask students to “identify and question assumptions,” “seek multiple voices and alternatives,” “make connections both socially and intellectually,” and “foster active engagement.” Broad principles of process here, but also the type of process that may help instructors to avoid assuming students know how to write in familiar and unfamiliar ways that address a civic, public audience effectively.

The medium she advocates to enact this critical thinking is a whole-class or smaller scale service-learning project. Asking students to develop and enact professional proposals for real-world situations precludes the teaching of skills in isolation of the environment in which writers must act. At the very least, it begins to complicate the very skill-based project one might assign in order to fulfill the course goals by a fake letter to the editor. Service or client-based learning is a ripe opportunity that seems under-utilized in the capstone writing courses. As an institution which brands itself as one of the few in the nation that requires an internship in order to

graduate, Longwood's curriculum and faculty development should work to support courses that help prepare students for these various workspaces. And understanding of context and the activity systems students will enter should be at the forefront of these courses.

If we are graduating citizen leaders expecting them to enact their disciplinary expertise in civic spaces, our curriculum must prepare them for spaces that are constantly in flux, fluidly developing, and in some cases not yet invented. As Jenà Burges, then Assistant Provost of Academic Affairs at Longwood University, who proposed this capstone writing course to the General Education committee and saw it through Faculty Senate said, "Most problems today are too big to be solved by any one discipline. Yet there are not many places where we help students understand, let alone grapple with, this important reality" (personal communication, 2007). And she cites Herndl, Fennell, and Miller's analysis of the Challenger disaster for its clear description of this largely ignored skill. Increasingly, civic and community spaces require complex skills of negotiating multiple frameworks of information and this new activity system with its attendant re-crafting of familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks. Our students in particular are encouraged by our mission and the course goals to be "citizen leaders," "community intellectuals" if you will (Eble and Gaillet, 2004). Entering and engaging in the public, civic spaces dominated by familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks necessitates some explicit curricular and pedagogical space. The students' writing skills will not *just* transfer. Students must understand that as they enter public spaces and classroom situations, they are changed, the situation is changed, and any technique,

technology, and technê they use changes in their hands (Hawk, 2004, p. 372).

Instructors must understand this as well.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Written Communications Competency Assessment Pilot Results Longwood University Spring 2009

100 papers were randomly selected from freshmen in English 150 and seniors in English 400. The papers were then scored by Longwood faculty according to a rubric previously approved by SCHEV.

Senior Analysis Average	3.2
Senior Organization Avg.	3.07
Senior Audience Average	3.06
Senior Mechanics Average	3.03
Senior Holistic Average	3.056667
Senior Average Average	3.083333
Freshman Analysis Avg.	2.703333
Fresh. Organization Avg.	2.865
Freshman Audience Avg.	2.763333
Freshman Mechanics Avg.	2.63
Freshman Holistic Average	2.715
Freshman Average Avg.	2.735333
Value Added Analysis	0.496667
Value Added Organization	0.205
Value Added Audience	0.296667
Value Added Mechanics	0.4
Value Added Holistic	0.341667
Average Value Added	0.348
Average Analysis Score	2.951667
Avg. Organization Score	2.9675
Average Audience Score	2.911667
Average Mechanics Score	2.83
Average Overall Score	2.885833
Average Average Score	2.909333

21. paraphrasing
22. summarizing
23. synthesizing
24. analyzing
25. comparing/contrasting
26. defining concepts/terms
27. structuring arguments
28. supporting claims
29. paragraphing
30. introductions
31. conclusions
32. document design
33. organization
34. transitions
35. titles
36. library skills
37. database searches
38. evaluating sources
39. annotating texts
40. incorporating sources
41. avoiding plagiarism
42. internal citations
43. works-cited/references pages
44. increasing vocabulary
45. spelling
46. using grammar source material
47. editing skills
48. global revision skills
49. punctuation rules

Appendix 3: Nelms and Dively Survey

From WPA: Writing Program Administration
Volume 31, Numbers 1-2, Fall/Winter 2007
© Council of Writing Program Administrators
WPA 31.1/2 (Fall/Winter 2007)

Appendix A

Pedagogical Survey: English 101 and 102

Part 1: General Information

Please respond to the following queries by circling the accurate responses.

- 1) Gender? **Male Female**
- 2) Program concentration? **Composition/Rhetoric Literature Creative Writing
Other**
- 3) Number of semesters teaching composition at SIUC? **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 8+**
- 4) Composition courses you have taught at SIUC? **100 101 102 120 290 291**
- 5) Regarding Eng. 101 and 102, the course you have taught most recently? **101 102**
- 6) Your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview? **Yes No**
[If answer to 6 is "yes," please offer your name: _____]

Part 2: Concepts and Activities

Below is a list of concepts and activities that teachers *might* employ in English 101 and 102. As you respond to the survey items, please have in mind the course (**either 101 or 102**) that you taught most recently. Regarding that course, indicate the frequency with which you discussed with students and/or required them to practice each listed concept or activity. (**Discuss** = formally talking about the concept or activity with students; **practice** = having them complete exercises relevant to the concept/activity.) Record frequency for discussing and/or practicing each item by marking the box in the column directly below the most accurate frequency label (see first line of the list on each page). If you did not discuss or practice the concept or activity in the focal course, simply mark the box in the "never" column.

frequently occasionally rarely never

1. process writing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
2. drafting workshops discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
3. teacher conferences discuss: — — — —

- practice: — — — —
4. group conferences discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
5. peer response–written discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
6. peer response–oral discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
7. evaluating model student essays discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
8. evaluating published essays discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
9. interpreting Literature discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
10. interpreting assignments discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
11. freewriting/looping discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
12. brainstorming/clustering discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
13. formal heuristics discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
14. collaborative invention discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
15. narrowing topics discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
16. formulating main ideas discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
17. analyzing audience discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
18. achieving ethos discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
19. achieving pathos discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
20. achieving logos discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
21. developing ideas discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
22. paraphrasing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
23. summarizing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
24. synthesizing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
25. analyzing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
26. comparing/contrasting discuss: — — — —

- practice: — — — —
27. defining concepts/term discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
28. structuring arguments discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
29. supporting claims discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
30. paragraphing discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
31. introductions discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
32. conclusions discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
33. document design discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
34. organization discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
35. transitions discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
36. titles discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
37. library skills discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
38. data-base searches discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
39. critical reading strategies discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
40. evaluating library sources discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
41. evaluating on-line sources discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
42. annotating texts discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
43. incorporating sources discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
44. avoiding plagiarism discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
45. internal citations discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
46. works-cited pages discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
47. sentence types discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
48. sentence variety discuss: — — — —
practice: — — — —
49. sentence combining discuss: — — — —

- practice: — — — —
50. text imitation discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
51. increasing vocabulary discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
52. spelling discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
53. using grammar handbooks discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
54. editing skills discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
55. global revision skills discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
56. grammar rules: discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
57. punctuation rules discuss: — — — — —
practice: — — — —
- * Which grammar rules do you tend to focus on? (please list):

Appendix 4: Study of Transfer in Capstone Writing Course, English 400

Semi-structured Interactive Interview Protocol

Revised from Retrospective Interview Protocol at University of Rochester,
River Campus Libraries

by Heather G. Lettner-Rust for Dissertation Study

Introductions

Background: interested in what students really do when they write their papers

Establish Rapport

Question: What did you bring to the interview? (participant explains)

Explain: We'll be talking about this one paper: the one you wrote for English 400. I'd like you to tell me about it.

Question: How did you receive the assignment?

Question: What part of this text was the easy part to write? What made it easy? How did you know how to do [that part or use that skill]?

Question: What part was more difficult to do? Why was it difficult?

Question: How did you learn to [choose a particular feature of the text]? What was it that helped you do [that]? *I hope to ask this question a number of times.*

[Continue with this question until the features of the text's creation, composing, and revision seem complete]

Question: The next time you do a text like this, will you try to do anything different?

What did the assignment or situation ask for?

How did you know?

How did you decide to write this?

What part of this (text) was easy to write? Why was it easy?

What caused more difficulty?

Why do you think that was difficult or what made it difficult?

Appendix 5: Permission from WPA Journal to Use Survey

Office Outlook & iCal icon Type here to search This Folder [Navigation icons] [More icons]

Mail [Navigation icons] [More icons] Reply Reply to All Forward Print Delete Junk Close [More icons]

Deleted Items (10) Drafts (2) Inbox (3) Junk E-mail (0) Sent Items

Work Items (0) [More icons]

Groups (0) [More icons]

RE: [WPA President] permission to use survey instrument
 Keith Rhodes (rhodekej@gvsu.edu)

You replied on 1/22/2010 5:51 PM

Sent: Friday, January 22, 2010 10:10 AM
To: Heather Rust, Heather
Cc: Keith Rhodes (rhodekej@gvsu.edu); Heather Rust, Heather

Heather,

Typically folks who are asking for copyright releases have their own forms since you understand the use you want to make and the permission that you need. Your first advisors counsel may have one. We do not require any particular form. We do agree to release our copyright interests for the use that you have described and to the same extent as the permission from the authors. If that is good enough for you, it works for us.

Keith

>>> Heather Rust, Heather? <hestrust@longwood.edu> 1/22/2010 1:10 PM >>>
 Hi Keith

It'd be happy to supply you a form do I need to send? Was it located somewhere and I missed it?

Heather Lattre-Rust
 Longwood University
 Department of English and Modern Languages
 201 High Street
 Farmville, VA 22909

434.395.2167

From: Keith Rhodes (rhodekej@gvsu.edu)
 Sent: Friday, January 22, 2010 10:10 AM
 To: Heather Rust, Heather
 Cc: Linda Adler-Kassner
 Subject: Re: [WPA President] permission to use survey instrument

Heather,

I handle permissions for the journal. We will be happy to release the journal's copyright interests. Please send me your form.

Keith

Keith Rhodes, Secretary
 College of Aging Program Administrators
 Writing Department
 312 Lind Center Hall
 Grand Valley State University
 Allendale, MI 49831
 516.331.4147

>>> Linda Adler-Kassner (linda.adler-kassner@umich.edu) 1/22/2010 11:53 AM >>> <mailto:Linda.Adler-Kassner@umich.edu>
 1/22/2010 11:53 AM >>>

Begin forwarded message:

From: hestrust@longwood.edu <hestrust@longwood.edu>
 Date: January 22, 2010 11:03:59 AM EST
 To: jmschelt@wpaonline.org <jmschelt@wpaonline.org>
 Subject: [WPA President] permission to use survey instrument

Heather Lattre-Rust sent a message using the contact form at <http://www.wpaonline.org>.

Dr. Rose
 I am asking permission to use an article published online by Linda Dwyer and Donald Nairs' 2007 article entitled "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from PhD to Writing Intensive Courses". I have permission from both authors so far, but I am contacting the publication source as well.
 incerely,
 Heather Lattre-Rust

Appendix 6: Assignment Sheet Issue Research Report

English 400/Issue Research Report

Where We've Been

We have examined a sample student project in *Public Literacy*, looked at forms of persuasion, and considered your interests. This assignment formally extends your annotated bibliography research, and transforms it into a report.

Where We Are Going

In attempt to find a working situation, we must prove that the issue we are researching is most likely to develop into a *real* rhetorical situation.

There are two goals for this paper:

- 1) to prove that your knowledge of the issue is developed to the extent that you could discuss this issue with other experts, and
- 2) to persuade me (or an ignorant audience) that this issue has relevance to our course objective of active citizenship, that this issue is of civic and public importance not just personal or private.

In other words: If you were invited to a roundtable discussion about your issue, what would you need to know in order to contribute to the discussion? Put that in the paper.

Your paper must provide documented proof of:

- I. What is the current issue?
 - What criteria are you using to define the issue?
 - What is the history/are the contributing factors?
 - How do certain historical factors (events, perceptions, beliefs, people, etc) best explain the current iteration of your issue?
 - What other issue/s (if any) result from this issue?
- II. What's happened of significance to your issue lately? How are you limiting "lately"?
- III. How are major constituents (stakeholders) defining the issue? Is this at odds with your definition?
- IV. Who (persons or groups) is exerting significant influence on the issue today?
 - How do you know this?
- V. What solutions have been tried (and failed, and worked partially, or worked within other contexts or locales) to resolve this issue?
- VI. What plan of discourse do you believe will work to resolve this issue? Who is the audience this issue will target and why are they appropriate? What do you want them to do? Or how do you want them to change? How will your discourse achieve this?

You can choose the parameters of your report according to the research you have found. But you must use headings to define the parameters for your reader (me).

Paper requirements:

- 1250-1750 words
- use report format (with headings for sections),
- Include a Bibliography in the r.h. pocket of the folder; be certain to add any sources utilized since turning in the annotated bib.
- **Due April 2; however, having a *completed draft* is required on March 26.**

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"Distance Learning Interfaces, Classroom Epistemology, and the Gaze" with Kevin DePew, *Computers and Composition*, 26.3, September 2009.

"Service Learning and Social Change" *Interchanges, College Composition and Communication*, 59.4, June 2008.