

Summer 2015

Embodied Literate Practices of Freshman Women Students: A Phenomenology of Students in First-Year Composition

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**EMBODIED LITERATE PRACTICES OF FRESHMAN WOMEN STUDENTS: A
PHENOMENOLOGY OF STUDENTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION**

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ENGLISH

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2015

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ABSTRACT

EMBODIED LITERATE PRACTICES OF FRESHMAN WOMEN STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF STUDENTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

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Old Dominion University, 2015
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This project examines the experiences of freshman women students as they compose their first papers for first-year college composition. This study uses an interpretative phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences freshmen women undergo before they arrive at college and how those experiences inform these women's practices in first-year composition. This dissertation has three main goals: to recover and clarify Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology, to use that clarified method to explore freshman women's experiences in first-year composition, and to suggest ways in which phenomenology might be used in the daily practices of writing instructors and administrators in higher education.

To address each of these three goals, I first differentiate Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as well as from other phenomenologies. I also put interpretative phenomenology in conversation with both feminist and composition scholars to address some of the criticisms of interpretative phenomenology. The study itself consists of the interactions with seven volunteer participants in first-year composition, as well as my classroom observations and reflection journals. Keeping in line with phenomenological practice during the interviews, I outline a set of questions for the participants, but I allow the participants to lead the conversation, sometimes to

places outside of my prepared outline; my classroom observations and reflection journals coincide chronologically with the interviews though they are performed at different times and locations. Then, using five broad research questions as a loose structure, I highlight conversations from the three data sources (interviews, reflection journals, classroom observations) to demonstrate what interpretative phenomenology confirms or reveals about our assumptions of freshmen in first-year composition. Finally, I use both the method as well as the data to describe “phenomenological thinking” and how that practice might be used to teach and assess student writing in higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for offering me honest, if not always amiable, critiques of my work. No doubt their suggestions have made this work stronger and more applicable to the field.

I would like to thank my family for supporting me during the long process of completing this work. Though they might not have always understood my rantings, they never doubted that I could prevail.

I would like to thank the Academic Writing Professional Development Collaborative, supported by my institution. In our weekly writing meetings, my colleagues offered me emotional support as well as brilliant suggestions.

Most important, I would like to thank the numerous graduate students that created and maintained grassroots movements to support one another during the dissertating process. From the Dissertation Bootcamp to individualized writing groups, the selfless and magnificent contributions of my colleagues made this process a lot less lonely.

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CHAPTER 1

**INTRODUCTION TO THE TENSION BETWEEN LIVED EXPERIENCE AND
WRITING ASSESSMENT**

I work as a composition instructor at a small, private, women's college with an enrollment hovering around two thousand. The composition sequence is fairly standard. There are two successive courses, ideally taken in the first year. The first course focuses on structure, organization, and correctness; the second course focuses on arguing with textual evidence. What made this college's composition program different from a variety of college first-year writing programs, however, was the first semester competency test in English. That is, the "comp test" was a method of writing assessment that reportedly assured students have learned the content of the course.¹ Despite this rather noble claim, the comp test had several traits that make it more than just mere writing assessment. First, in an attempt to be fair to each student, the same comp test was delivered to all students enrolled in the first semester course *en masse*; in other words, the test was created largely in isolation by the Director of Writing and dispersed to students at a predetermined time and space, similar to other standards tests like the SAT or GRE. Second, the comp test served as a gatekeeping mechanism to higher levels of English study.

¹ As reported by the sitting Dean of Humanities and the faculty who were present when the competency test was devised, the competency test was instituted to "control" an unruly faculty member who was not teaching students in the way the department thought best. In other words, the competency test was not originally designed to make sure students were meeting certain benchmarks for good writing; instead, the test was a way to control and potentially relieve the department of undesirable faculty.

Students who did not pass the comp test earned a failing grade for the entire course and must repeat it.

In the fall of 2010, I taught a student, Ada,² who was pregnant and scheduled to have a caesarian-section delivery at the end of the semester. She was an incredibly conscientious student, scheduling a weekly appointment with a writing tutor to work both on her formal compositions as well as her practice exercises for the competency exam. Her work in the course was also outstanding; despite being a multilingual writer, she started early on all assignments and earned high marks for her essays. Unfortunately, though, her pregnancy was not a simple one. Around mid-October, she was rushed to the hospital for an emergency c-section; the baby was delivered two months early and was put in the neonatal care unit. My student suffered from a low-lying placenta, which caused her to lose an alarming amount of blood; she, too, was put in an intensive care unit and was given several blood transfusions. Ultimately, mother and baby recovered but not before the end of the semester and the end of the course. Throughout her hospital stay, Ada kept writing. She turned in all of her formal compositions via her husband, who would drop off her work by my office. I kept assuring both of them that she need not feel so rushed; I would give the student an incomplete, and she could make up the work after she had healed. She did not stop writing, however. She turned in each assignment, maintained a high B average in the course,³ and scheduled a time with me—after everyone had left for the semester—to take the competency test.

² All student names in this project have been changed to ensure anonymity.

³ Since Ada had approached me earlier, in the summer, about potential absences from the class, I did not factor absences in her course grade. Once more, she and I agreed that she would complete any

I don't suppose it surprised me that Ada failed both the essay and grammar portions of the competency test and, thus, failed the course. Because of her hospital stay, she had been unable to continue her work with a writing tutor (thus making her writing skills more "rusty"), and she also had just undergone a drastic physical ordeal. Her body was tired, weak, and sutured, yet she still had to feed and nurture a new baby. When we met after her test to go over the results, she cried.

I'm not certain that it is any great revelation that bodies affect academic performance. If a student, for example, feels rested and healthy, she might attend class regularly, finish homework assignments on time, and ask questions during class. If that same student, however, is sick or experiencing emotional turmoil, she might miss class, find her homework assignments unusually challenging, or find her attention in class wavering. In this case, however, I suspected that Ada's trouble was more than just feeling physically weak or mentally unfocused because of non-academic distractions. In addition to learning English as a non-native speaker, contending with a difficult and dangerous pregnancy, and carving out a limited amount of time to complete her coursework, Ada was also expected to attend to her responsibilities as daughter-in-law, mother, and wife—roles that she seemed to readily accept and even cherish. The competency test, for her, was not a ritual initiation into a welcoming academic community; instead, it was a barrier that excluded her from participation, an obstruction that seemed arbitrary and unfair.

assignments, like the oral presentation, before she was scheduled to deliver her baby. Not only had she earned a high B in the course but she had done so by completing almost all the work in the course before her due date. I recognize and acknowledge that this assessment of Ada's work is subjective and based upon my negotiation of the institution's expectations and what I personally and professionally value in student writing.

By making the choice to go to this particular college, she had also unwittingly committed to an educational hurdle (i.e., the comp test) that seemed, at the time, impossible to surmount.

I would like to imagine that Ada was an exceptional case, that the comp test was problematic for her alone. I know, however, that Ada is not the only student to struggle. She is one student of many who simply had the fortune to invite me (a faculty member and representative of the college) into her life early, before her traumatic pregnancy. There are other students, some who are on their fourth repetition of English 111, for whom faculty have stories that are equally traumatic, yet those stories have not been made public (unlike Ada who involved several people to assist her). Judgment of student writing—indeed, of the student as a whole person—is based on a score of a single seating of a timed test. The problem, of course, is that there is much more to the story. Student writers represent a whole host of experiences with which we instructors and writing administrators may not even be familiar, yet those experiences are largely ignored in our research. The circumstances in which Ada found herself in her second year of college were perplexing to me, and I wondered if her experience was an exception. How, I wondered, do the lived experiences of women in first-year composition affect their academic writing? What lived experiences do women bring with them to the academy? What materials conditions of academic writing are unfamiliar/familiar to these women; more specifically, what literacy practices do women bring with them to the academy? How do women's lived experiences shape their strategies for approaching academic writing? How does the formal instruction of academic

writing reshape these women's literacy practices, and how does it shape their lived experiences? How do the lived experiences of women in first-year composition inform and/or revise literacy practices in the academy?

I recognized that, to explore these questions, a typical experimental method would be insufficient. I needed a methodology that recognized these students' authority of their own experiences and one that also resisted the typical reduction of participants to themes or codes. In other words, I needed a methodology that explores the students living the experience of composition which also incorporates lived experiences as a valid part of knowing and allows for both expected and unexpected experiences to be "counted." A methodology that seemed to meet my criteria is phenomenology.

Finally, I did not seek to pursue a traditional interpretation of the data collected. That is, I wanted to allow patterns and themes to emerge from the conversations, rather than to find examples of certain patterns or themes that I had identified before the discussion. That students bring with them a whole host of lived experience both in and out of the academy means that they (and, by extension, their writing tasks) defy neat categorization. Indeed, I will argue that the very purpose of phenomenology is to uncover the complexities of human experience; experience, then, that is decontextualized for categorization loses the very complications that make it interesting for study.

This project, therefore, relies upon localized contexts and layers of experience to situate the data. In chapter two, I outline the immediate concerns for Ada as she encounters the competency test for the first time. First, I describe the

competency test as it appears to students in the course as well as how it affects the campus at large. Then, I describe Ada's lived experience as a new student in first-year composition. Finally, I address a recent revision to the competency test (called the "common final") and how that revision addresses some of the practical and philosophical problems of the test—some revisions having greater success than others. The discussion of the common final will reveal some implications of tests designed specifically to assess writing ability, namely that tests often (though not always) isolate the writer from the text produced. The artifact, then, is largely what is examined rather than the people and experiences that gave rise to that artifact.

In chapter three, I explore the use of phenomenology both as a theory and a practice. Phenomenological theory has some negative associations, such as the difficulty in its practice, the differing versions of the multiple theories, and the affiliations with certain socio-cultural movements⁴; the theory also has several strands which are often conflated. Once I have clearly delineated my position within phenomenological theory, I then outline a phenomenological research design that unearths women's lived experiences as they move through their first-semester of composition, specifically as they undertake their first college-level writing assignment. As I move through the different sections of the design, I put my design choices into conversation with phenomenological theory. Though the term

⁴ Criticism of phenomenology has existed since its inception, and these criticisms have varied depending upon who played the role of critic and who played the role of phenomenologist. To claim that there exists a broad criticism for a single phenomenology misrepresents the movement. Husserl and Heidegger, though close in the beginnings of their friendship, found themselves arguing for different ontologies. Gadamer critiqued Heidegger (claiming to be a true Husserlian). Derrida critiqued Heidegger, and, in response, Searle critiqued Derrida's critique. There are, indeed, as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists, and each of these strains has been criticized by another community or school of thought.

“phenomenology” as a method is often used as a universal term to describe first-person description, phenomenological research is anything but uniform. I will outline the choices I make throughout the methodological design to help reveal how the design can both address many of the concerns scholars have with the method and remain true to the complementary phenomenological theory.

After outlining my methods, I will then, in chapter four, report the data collected from the study. As I note earlier, my reporting methods are somewhat non-traditional. Each of the participants in my study is concurrently living in familial, academic, and personal contexts, which contribute to her understanding and performance of writing. Though I place the data within the framework of my research questions, I outline the entirety of experience with selected participants to answer those questions. The entirety of experience, then, reveals both commonalities and exceptions to the lived experiences of freshman women students.

In chapter five, I discuss the implications of this research project. I believe that this study can highlight ways in which this new-found information about students’ lived experience—though not a conclusive description of all students’ experience—can affect the ways in which we assess and judge student performance. Certainly, this project could have implications for writing instructors in the classroom, but it could also influence writing program administration in a variety of forms, from learning assistance coordinators to trainers, administrators, and assessors of contingent faculty in composition programs. Once more, this project could reach outside the composition community to writing instructors in other

disciplines, such as those who teach writing intensive threads. But influencing the communities of writing programs is not the only way in which this project could be useful. The reporting of data could be read and inspected by students who are negotiating their own experiences while enrolled in first-year composition. A review of comparable life experiences could alleviate the isolation some students feel as they negotiate new, unfamiliar academic writing tasks.

CHAPTER 2

EXPERIENCES IN CONTEXTS

At the beginning of fall 2010, when Ada arrived in my classroom, I was well immersed in the language and culture of the competency test. One-half of every class period was spent on grammar practice for the test, and two whole class periods were spent on practice exams. I truly believed that I had developed a classroom practice that prepared my students to pass the competency test with little to no problems (as they often did). It was not until Ada experienced her difficult childbirth that I began to see how experiences outside the classroom altered, informed, and co-created experiences within the classroom.

To unravel some of the elements that converged for Ada in the fall of 2010, I outline several contexts: the experience of the competency test by students; the competency test's effect on the campus community; Ada's own lived experience; and, finally, the ways in which the revision of the competency test (now called the "common final") speaks to the challenges of the competency test with greater or lesser success. The discussion of the common final will reveal some implications of tests designed specifically to assess writing ability.

LOCAL CONTEXT

As I mention in the previous chapter, the first-year composition sequence at my institution is fairly standard. The students take two composition courses (ideally in succession and in the first year), and the focus of the courses is to prepare students for college-level writing. The first course, ENG 111 "Principles of Writing," is described as a course in "instruction and practice in writing well-organized

compositions with a review of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure” (Undergraduate Catalogue, 2014-15). The second course, ENG 200 “Critical Reading and Writing,” is similarly described as a course in “continued instruction and practice in reading, writing, and critical thinking with particular emphasis on analysis and interpretation” (Undergraduate Catalogue, 2014-15).

What’s not described in the catalogue, however, is the difference in the ways these two courses are integrated into the fabric of the institutional community. ENG 200 is a standard college course. In other words, ENG 200 is part of the general education requirement that students must fulfill to graduate; students must complete ENG 200 before they enroll in upper-level English courses, and they must receive a D or better to successfully complete it.

ENG 111, however, is a much different course. ENG 111, like ENG 200, is a part of the general education requirement, but it is also required for all students on academic probation. It is a requirement for honors students, who are enrolled in a special section in their first semester. ENG 111 is a prerequisite for upper-level English courses, but is also a prerequisite for other courses outside English. Students in ENG 111, unlike those in ENG 200, must make a C or better in the course for it to fulfill the requirement. Once more, while instructors of ENG 200 have some authority in what and how they cover the material in that course, instructors of ENG 111 are given little room to maneuver pedagogically. (I will discuss the pedagogical management of ENG 111 more fully in chapter four.) While instructors of ENG 200 rely on their professionalism and expertise to assess the writing of students in their courses, instructors of ENG 111 are aware of the common writing assessment

distributed at the end of each semester to assess students' writing abilities. Though many ENG 111 instructors at this institution do not claim that they "teach to the test," they still note how difficult the course is to manage; that is, they struggle to find a balance between teaching "well-organized compositions" and "drill-and-practice" grammar.

ENG 111, a difficult course for both students and instructors, is viewed by the rest of the institution as a way to assure that students have mastered some basic skills of college-level writing. Once more, the course is assessed in different ways than any other course at the institution. The placement test is delivered to all students attending orientation at the college, and that test is used to mark the improvement of each student on the follow-up common assessment. In the fall of 2010, when I first met Ada, ENG 111 was assessed by the competency test.

The competency test purports to assess students' abilities in grammar, proofreading, and essay-writing skills (to be defined in later sections) taught in the first semester of composition (English 111). The test is given in two parts: the grammar portion described below is delivered during a normal class session; the essay portion is delivered in the student's choice of one of two seatings, one in the afternoon or one in the evening.¹ Because this test is made up of complex parts—

¹ The comp test is given exactly as described but in two different times during the semester. The first time, about one-third of the way through the semester, the grammar portion is delivered to all students during class time, and students take the essay portion during one of two evening sessions. Students who do not pass the first comp test (or those few who want to make a better grade for classes in which the instructor includes the comp test score in the final grade calculation) have a second opportunity about one month before the end of the semester. Because not all students will be taking the second chance of the test, the grammar portion of the second chance is delivered all at once in a large lecture hall, and the essay portion of the second chance is delivered, again, in one of two evening seatings.

each of which is historically rooted in the department's culture—I will parcel out the discussion into three sections: the proofreading exercise, the “best of three” exercise, and the essay test. Once I have described the test, I will discuss its impact on the institution at large with a particular focus on the students' experiences. (To see a complete version of a retired competency test, refer to Appendix A.)

THE PROOFREADING EXERCISE

The first page of every comp test is an editing exercise. On the page is written a story of multiple paragraphs, and students are asked to edit the paragraphs for various mistakes in grammar and mechanics. Though the paragraphs differ from semester to semester, the department attempts to have the same number and types of errors on each test. Table 1, provided by the Director of Freshman Writing, describes the numbers and types of errors over seven versions of the test.

Competency Test Error Distribution

TYPE of ERROR	TEST #							Aver.*
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Subject-Verb Agreement	3	6	4	7	5	6	5	5+
Boundaries								4
comma splice	2	4	1	3	2	2	2	2+
fragment	2	2	4	1	2	2	1	1+
fused			1		1			>1
Commas								8
res./non-restr.	2	2	3	3	4	2	6	2+
appositives	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1.5
w/coord. Conj	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
intro elements	3	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
series	2		1					>1
between S & V	1		1	1	2	1	1	1
Semicolon error								2
How., although	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1+
Other	1	1		2		1	1	1-
Apostrophes	4	3	5	5	4	7	7	6-
Capitalization	2	4	3	2	3	2	1	2+
Pronoun Case	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	2-
Pronoun agreement	1				1	1	1	1+
Title punctuation	1	1	1	1		1	1	1

*The clear outliers are thrown out and the average score recorded.

Table 1. Competency Test Error Distribution (proofreading section), 2010.

The intentions of the department—to be fair to all students—as demonstrated by Table 1 are good; that is, the department wants to make sure that the test is similar across student cohorts and that the test is a reliable measure of what the students learn in ENG 111. The problem with such a test, however, is that it can become a mechanized interpretation of actual writing. In other words, the paragraphs designed for this purpose are written by faculty, are very stilted, and represent sentence structures rare in student writing constructed in writing

classroom contexts. Once more, because the test is created by a faculty exclusively made up of literature scholars, each of the paragraphs is written about a literary text with which students are likely unfamiliar (e.g. *The Children of Lir*). The grading of such an exercise, therefore, becomes difficult; even if the students do not “catch” a certain comma error, for example, they may have corrected that error in another way—such as removing a subject after a coordinating conjunction to change a fused sentence into a grammatically correct one. The types of errors that are “corrected” by students, then, may be very different from the “answer key” provided by the department, making the scoring of such a task subjective at best.

For Ada, the proofreading exercise posed a host of problems, as was indicated by her multiple erased corrections. First, the sentence structures were stilted and odd—even for native speakers—so finding the “correct” sentence seemed to be a struggle. For example, below is a sample sentence from the proofreading exercise from a retired comp test:

The complexity of the relationships in quality films are provocative, and probably are responsible for these film’s popularity, however, neither the critics nor I are able to say exactly why some films are a hit.

According to the “answer key” for the above sentence, there are five errors: two subject-verb agreement errors; one comma error; one comma splice; and one possessive error. The “correct” sentence (which is actually two independent clauses separated by a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb) would be very clear to any instructor scoring the proofreading exercise, as the instructors have scored this test many times. To Ada, however, the sentence is riddled with cultural and academic hurdles. One hurdle for Ada could be to understand the genre of film review.

Another might be to understand what is meant by “the complexity of relationships” that occurs in a film—especially if the composition course in which she is enrolled has never analyzed a film.² Even if Ada is able to negotiate those experiences into understanding the content of the sentence, however, she still has to locate five separate errors in one sentence. She has to do all of this in a foreign language and in a time-restrictive sitting.

The possible pressure and stress in this situation is enough to cause any student consternation, but Ada has additional, bodily constraints that alter her performance as well. As she took her first comp test in 2010, she was a nursing mother who was recovering from a c-section. Her body was uncomfortable, painful, leaky, and exhausted.

THE “BEST OF THREE” EXERCISE

After the students complete the proofreading exercise, they move on to the next section, known as the “best of three,” or a multiple-choice section in which students choose from the most grammatically correct of three sentences. The data collected from the best of three is similar to that of the proofreading exercise. Table 2 demonstrates the types of errors that appeared on seven versions of the test.

² I want to reiterate here that the competency test is delivered to instructors a maximum two days before the actual test. Instructors are unaware of which prompt will be given.

Competency Test Error Distribution

ERROR	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	Aver.*
Pronoun shift-person	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	1+
Pronoun agreement	-	1	-	1	2	-	-	>1
Broad which/this	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2-
Pronoun re. it/they	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Parallelism/series	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2-
Parallelism/correlatives	2	1	1	1		2	1	1+
Passive verbs	-	-	-	2		1	-	<1
Sequence of tenses	1	1		1		1	2	1+
Dangling modifier	2	3	1	3	4	3	3	2+
Misplaced modifier	1	1	2	1	1	-	2	2-
Adverbs	2	2	1	1		1	1	1+
TOTAL*	14	14	13	15		14	15	14

Table 2. Competency Test Error Distribution (best-of-three section), 2010.

Like the proofreading section, the best-of-three section implies some care and concern on the part of the department to make the test fair across cohorts. Also like the proofreading section, however, the best-of-three section can create a misrepresentation of the task of writing outside of academic test-taking situations. First, a student taking the test does not need to know the rules to guess a correct answer for which she has 33.3% chance of getting right; that is, the test may or may not be a valid measure of grammar knowledge. Second, the test proposes three sentence structures, which may or may not represent the student's own writing, in order to achieve the appropriate number and type of error. Third, the sentences—especially those with more than one error—are “tricky” in the sense that an argument could be made for the correctness of more than one sentence. As of 2010, the department had not collected data on which questions were missed an inordinate number of times to revisit a question's clarity, so whether or not students

are stumbling on these “tricky” questions is up for debate. Last, and perhaps most important, the test is composed by faculty at this institution who have a very different set of lived experiences than the students. Some faculty at the institution received their undergraduate educations in the 1960s, some in the 1970s; the narrative strand upon which the test is built is foreign to the students taking it.³ I will briefly outline these problematic components of the best of three sections.

First, the best of three section does not measure a student’s understanding of grammar and mechanics. In other words, “[l]earners view responding to multiple-choice questions as a problem-solving task rather than a comprehension task” (Rupp, Ferne, and Choi 441). A test, then, which purports to measure understanding of grammar and mechanics yet does so by using multiple-choice questions, is more likely testing the student’s ability to eliminate potentially incorrect answers. The best of three section of the competency test typically includes twelve questions of three points each. In 2010, I had graded, literally, hundreds of these tests, and I noticed one reoccurring feature: Students isolated a set of sentences and marked through the ones they knew to be incorrect, sometimes even marking out parts of sentences that were similar in order to find the “error.” Here is an example:

- A. If I learn to type really good, maybe I can get a good summer job.
- B. If I learn to type really well, maybe I can get a good summer job.

³ Though the English department has hired many adjuncts to teach FYC—and those adjuncts might be younger instructors with closer ties to the students’ lived experiences—the tenured faculty all attended undergraduate colleges or universities before most of the 2010 fall cohort was born. Since the tenured faculty are the only instructors composing the competency test, I am arguing that the distance between their lived experiences and the students’ is a significant distance.

- C. If I learn to type real good, maybe I can get a good summer job.

A typical student will mark out sentence C because she will immediately notice the misuse of the adjective “real” in front of the adjective “good.” She then has only two sentences from which to choose. Sometimes, students will also cross out “maybe I can get a good summer job” in sentences A and B to isolate the “error,” which they recognize must be in the subordinated clause because the subordinated clause is the only difference between A and B. At this point, a student has a fifty percent chance of getting this question correct. This strategic approach to multiple choice questions is completely reasonable, but it hardly suggests that a student understands the grammatical rules underlying the differences between sentences; that is, the test does not appear to test grammatical correctness as much as it tests test-taking prowess.

Second, the best of three section also creates sentence structures that are often stilted in order to devise the same number of grammar errors on each test. For example, one of the items tested regularly is pronoun usage, specifically the “naked this” or “naked which.” Here is an example of the item used to test that item:

- A. Nothing is as exciting as the ACC tournament, although many people don’t understand this.
- B. Nothing is as exciting as the ACC tournament, which many people don’t understand.
- C. Although many people don’t understand its appeal, the ACC tournament offers an excitement that nothing can match.

Arguably, sentence C (the correct sentence) is a sentence structure that many first-year students would not create on their own. As a frequent grader of this version of the test, I can say that I can only remember one or two instances when a student actually chose C as her answer. Sentences A and B are certainly sentence structures that appear in student writing, but, when corrected, the sentence does not often end up looking like sentence C. Instead, sentence C has been created because a correct version of the sentence needs to be created. This sentence is rather rare in student writing, so it's a sentence that either *seems* incorrect because of its difference or *seems* correct because of its difference; the sentence set is odd precisely because it doesn't follow the format of other sentence sets. Once more, sentence C's construction—though perhaps more grammatically correct—means something entirely different than the other two sentences. Though the instructions ask for students to pick “the best choice” in each set, “the best choice” here is not at all clear.

Third, because there are many items targeted for testing and only twelve questions on the test, the sentences created in the best of three section may test more than one item at a time. Here is another example of the best of three from a retired comp test:

- A. When the professor asked who had read the assignment, everyone raised their hands.
- B. When the professor asked whom had read the assignment, everyone raised their hands.

- C. When the professor asked who had read the assignment, everyone raised her hand.

According to the “answer key” for this question, the correct answer is C because it is the only sentence which matches the singular subject “everyone” with the singular pronoun “her.” The difficulty with this type of question for a student like Ada—and, in fact, with many students—is that the three sample sentences provide a red herring with the who/whom use. In other words, a typical multiple-choice test isolates one item at a time to assess, but Ada and other students might struggle with the fact that there are multiple items in one question; thus they struggle between answers A and C because of the who/whom use. Once students come to terms with multiple-item testing (if they do), they then have to choose between the plural pronoun “their”—which is predominantly used in English both written and spoken—and the singular pronoun “her.”

In this one case, Ada, as a non-native speaker, might have a small advantage over her native-speaking counterparts. As native speakers are inundated in spoken English with the singular use of “their,” Ada learned English through academic lessons rather than through her ears, as a native speaker would. Native speakers of English, however—despite having been taught in ENG 111 to use the singular pronoun with indefinite pronouns like “everyone”—hear “their” used with indefinite pronouns repeatedly from peers, parents, the press, and even their instructors. The singular use of “their” has become so culturally accepted that it is normative in speech. It is entirely possible that a native speaker would not

recognize that the singular pronoun is, in fact, the item being tested on this question on the comp test, especially if there is another item (i.e., who/whom use) that *appears* to be the item being tested.

Finally, the strategic approach to multiple-choice tests, the creation of unusual sentence structures, and the testing of multiple items in one question are problems with multiple-choice tests in general, but there are attributes that make the best of three section on the comp test particularly problematic: Students bring with them to the test setting already-formed experiences with English, and students' lived experiences (both past and present) affect how they understand the narrative of the test. When I speak to a test's "narrative," I mean something very specific to test design. Faculty creating the comp test choose to design sentences for the best of three in a string of related topics. In other words, the faculty choose a subject from which to draw their sentences and create sentences in a narrative. This choice is a reasonable one; the faculty suppose that students can focus on grammar rather than context in such a sitting—that there will be less confusion about the meaning of a sentence if it is placed in the context of a single narrative.

In a study examining multiple-choice testing to gauge reading comprehension, however, Rupp, Ferne, and Choi found that "test-takers frequently segment a text into chunks that are aligned with individual questions and focus predominantly on the microstructure representation of a text base rather than the macrostructure of a situation model" (469). The larger narrative structure of the best of three section, then, seems unnecessary for the students. If, in fact, the narrative structure did matter, though, Rupp, Ferne, and Choi found that a narrative

structure which did not align with the students' experience was detrimental. That is, the authors "highlight the importance of prior knowledge, which our respondents frequently drew upon to eliminate choices" (465).

If students are, in fact, drawing on prior knowledge to eliminate choices, then the test narrative should be constructed from the experiences of the students taking the test instead of the faculty creating it. That is, in order to create sentences, faculty have to imagine a storyline or narrative—yet these faculty members often imagine a narrative from their own perspectives, not the perspectives of the students. Here is an example of a narrative strand:

1. A. I had been working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen goes blank.
B. I had been working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen went blank.
C. I was working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen goes blank.
2. A. I did my best to remain calm, to think clearly, and to recover the document.
B. I did my best to remain calm, to think clearly, and was trying to recover the document.
C. I did my best, remaining calm, thinking clearly, and to recover the document.
3. A. Vanishing into thin air, I begged the lab assistant to bring back my paper.
B. I begged the lab assistant to bring my paper back to me, which had vanished into thin air.
C. When my paper vanished into thin air, I begged the lab assistant to bring it back to me.

4. A. I guess one should not let your fear of computers get the best of you.
- B. I guess one should not let her fear of computers get the best of her.
- C. I guess you should not let your fear of computers get the best of one.

This narrative strand is probably very familiar to students and faculty alike. Most of us have lost an important document to technological failure. There are two problems in this narrative, however, that I think reveal how the lived experiences of faculty are markedly different from the lived experiences of students: the assumption of the location in which writing happens and the environment in which writing happens. First, when many of the faculty were composing for college, personal computers were not as ubiquitous as they are now. In fact, in 2010, this college had a laptop program that provided laptops to every single full-time enrolled student. To assume that students would be using a computer lab to compose their papers is a faulty assumption. At that time, students could compose, save to a common drive, and print wirelessly from anywhere on campus—from a computer that was provided to them by the college. When a technological failure occurs, students must physically take their laptops to Technology Services, which will provide them with a “loaner” until their own laptop is repaired. Students, then, are wholly unfamiliar with the institutional history of having to compose in a computer lab.

Second, despite the misguided assumption that students would compose in a computer lab, there is another problem with the narrative. Most students are generally aware of the computer labs (i.e., that computer labs exist) because some

classes are sometimes held in the labs. Indeed, all students in ENG 111 must attend an Information Literacy mini-course in the library's computer lab to learn about searchable databases. In short, students are aware of the labs, even if they don't regularly use them for composing their papers; students use the labs mostly for printing and scanning. This college, however, is a small institution with limited resources and funding. In a place that has such a large laptop program, any extra resources are put into maintenance and support of the laptops. There are, therefore, *no lab assistants* at the entire institution. Students attending college for the first time might not be aware that there are such things as "lab assistants." To reiterate, faculty who attended college within the past decade might have experience with a lab assistant, but this experience does not map on to the current lived experiences of students at this college. If, in fact, a narrative strand might help students focus on grammar instead of context, the foreign nature of the narrative strand in this case might actually impede test-takers instead of assist them. That is, the narrative—intentionally designed to effectively "disappear" during the testing of grammar—does not do so.

Here, again, Ada might have a slight advantage over her counterparts. As a student who had attended several institutions, she might be aware that there are such colleges that don't give out laptops and that the computer labs on some campuses are staffed with personnel. She might be able to move between the narratives of a small college with few resources to a larger college with more resources. As this narrative is taken directly from her second chance of the comp

test, her ability to move between these narratives fluently might have given her the ability to focus on the grammar and get this question correct.

The department's apparent concern for fairness and equanimity on the grammar portion—that is, the editing a paragraph and best-of-three exercises—disregards the lived experiences of students during the test. That is, the test, designed by PhDs in English literature, is assumed to be a valid and reliable measure of a student's success in later English courses and, indeed, other courses at the institution. At the same time, the test is created and maintained by a faculty who believe they understand what types of errors students should be taught and how those students can demonstrate knowledge of correctness. The test is not a measure of writing ability, however; it is a test that measures the ability to understand the academic discourse valued by the English Department and to respond to the questions in ways that are valued by that discourse community. Once more, the grammar portions of this test assume that students are already entrenched in the culture of an institution's history ; indeed, the faculty at this institution believe that the competency test assesses the natural outcomes of FYC instruction. This course, a required course for every student at the institution, as it is at many higher education institutions, is a sanctioned barrier to higher-level courses and thus to a diploma; by choosing to participate in higher education at this institution, students are indirectly choosing the path that leads to the competency test, and they must submit to it. Once more, the students who are taking this test must adapt to the constraints placed upon them—whether or not the discourse

valued by the English Department is valued by the discourses of other majors and programs—or risk paying for the course a second (or third) time.

THE ESSAY TEST

The essay portion of the comp test is given in one of two seatings: one at around 3pm and another at around 6pm. Non-native speakers of English and students receiving accommodations from Disability Services are required to attend the 3pm session; all of these students requiring extra time sit in the same designated room and are allowed to sit for time-and-a-half, or for two hours. All of the essay tests must be handwritten (unless a letter from Disability Services is received prior to the test), and students are encouraged to write in pen. Other than paper and a writing utensil, students may bring a dictionary to the comp test. The same procedure is repeated later in the semester. To help alleviate confusion, I will name the four parts of the essay portion: first chance, seatings one and two; second chance, seatings one and two.

The essay test follows the same format in both chances and seatings, though the reading prompt will differ across seatings and semesters. Students are given a short reading⁴ and three potential questions to answer. For example, in 2010, students were given “The Best of Times” by Kathleen Martin Tanskey to read for the

⁴ The readings given in the comp test are usually one-and-a-half to two pages. Though many of the readings are non-fiction pieces, I would classify them as “creative non-fiction.” In other words, the pieces are based upon real experiences of the authors, but the authors choose to use literary elements—dialogue, first- or third-person narration, poetic description—to make their cases. Three examples of such creative non-fiction that have been used for the comp test are “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” by Alice Walker, “The Art of Procrastination” by Jeffrey Voccola, and “The Bird and the Machine” by Loren Eiseley.

first chance, first seating. Then, they had to answer one of the following three questions for their essays:

1. Tansky says that her childhood made her the person she is today. What kind of person does she seem to be?
2. What specifically about Tanskey's childhood has had a profound effect on her?
3. Contrast Tanskey's response to a childhood of deprivation with what one would expect her response to have been.

Once students have completed the test, all of the tests are collected and brought to a room in the English Department. For the rest of the evening, the faculty will norm the scoring procedure with sample tests, divide up the tests by instructor, and cross-grade roughly two hundred tests. The cross-grading is done by having one instructor (not the student's composition instructor) rank the test; the second scorer is the student's instructor. In the event that the scores are widely divided, a third scorer may be called in to serve as a mediator. There are three scores that a student may earn on the essay portion; those scores are outlined in Figure 1.

Comp Test Essay Rubric

3 -- Above average:

- clear and focused main idea or thesis
- clear organization into paragraphs with each paragraph logically related to thesis
- rich and plausible support
- few errors and those that occur less serious than sentence fragments or run-on sentences

2 -- Average:

- clear main idea, but thesis may be fairly broad
- clear pattern of organization into paragraphs
- some plausible support for each subpoint, but support may be thinner than in above average work
- some errors but not numerous illiteracies⁵

1 -- Below average: An essay may be below average for one or more of these reasons:

- no clear main idea
- no logical pattern of organization
- little or no support, or implausible support
- numerous illiteracies

Figure 1. Competency Test Essay Rubric, 2010

Though it is discouraged, faculty will occasionally give a “half” score, a 2.5 for instance, to indicate that the scores are insufficient to describe the merits of the essay.

⁵ The faculty scoring the comp test have argued many times over the interpretation of “numerous illiteracies.” Does the phrase mean “many of the same mistake” or “many different mistakes”? Does this include errors in interpretation of the text? Does a mistake in spelling count as an “illiteracy”? What kind of errors, exactly, are “less serious than sentence fragments or run-on sentences”? Though these conversations can sometimes be quite fruitful, the rubric has not been changed because most of the essays will be 2s.

After the scores are tallied for the first chance of the comp test, instructors may share the tests with students, but the instructors are not allowed to let students take the test away from the classroom or instructor's office. A combined score of two or three earns the student a passing grade; any combined score of one during the first chance of the test requires that the student take the test again during the second chance. During the second chance, however, a score of 1.5 is sufficient to pass the test. A common practice of faculty during the scoring of the first chance of the comp test is to be "tougher" in the rankings than during the second chance. In other words, faculty are more likely to give a score of one to a student's essay since those faculty know that the student has another opportunity to pass the test. During the grading for the second chance of the comp test, faculty are much less likely to award a one on an essay. Before awarding a one, faculty often collaborate with one another to make sure they can articulate the reasons an essay was rated as a one (i.e., articulate why the student will fail ENG 111 and have to repeat it).

The English Department does not collect data on the essay portion of the comp test. That is, the essay is not parsed out like the grammar portion in terms of numbers and types of errors. Once more, while students are expected to improve by 20 or more points from their placement test to their comp test on the grammar portion, the department does not make a similar comparison between the placement essay and comp test essay. Notably, correctness plays a large part in the scoring of the essay test even though correctness is graded in separate sections of the test (i.e., the editing and best of three exercises). This "double grading" of correctness puts grammar and mechanics at the forefront of composition, as the

strongest measure of what is considered “good writing.” As the Department Head noted only recently, “We are the queens of grammar.”

For Ada, the essay test places constraints on her that are atypical for normal writing tasks, including formal papers for classroom grading and informal homework tasks. In other words, her writing is placed in isolation from the supports with which she had become accustomed: peer review, tutoring, a <home language>-to-English dictionary, and even typing and spell-correction. The comp test, for Ada, asks her to perform, in the appropriate English-sanctioned discourse, several complicated tasks. First, she must read, process (i.e., translate), and understand the given essay prompt. Second, she must read and understand the cues set forth in the essay questions. Last, she must take all of that information and compose a full-length essay with few grammatical errors, in handwritten prose, within an hour and a half. To demonstrate some specific instances of complexity Ada might have encountered, I have collected the questions she was presented for her first chance comp test essay. The prompt for Ada was Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens.”

1. What obstacles prevented Alice Walker’s mother from becoming a conventional artist, such as a painter, writer, or pianist?
2. What kind of woman did Walker at first consider her mother to be, and what new perspectives does Walker now have about her?

3. What rewards did gardening bring Alice Walker's mother?⁶

The simple structure of the questions to Walker's essay belies their complexity. These questions set up a structure for an essay: the first asks for a list of obstacles; the second a compare/contrast; the third a list of rewards. Based upon the discussions I have witnessed during the norming sessions, an essay that would earn a score of 3, however, is an essay that *resists* these structures. In other words, an essay that earns the highest score would recognize the simple structure outlined in the question and *challenge* that structure by incorporating something unexpected—a notable example not in the essay (such as a current event), a surprising comparison, or a relevant personal narrative. But these terms—"notable," "surprising," "relevant"—are words that are culturally and socially contextualized; what is "notable" in one community might not be so in another, or what is notable for one individual might not be notable for another.

Based upon my several years of teaching non-native speakers, Ada and her non-native speaker counterparts, find the ideas of "notable," "surprising," and "relevant" are, if not completely foreign, then at least unfamiliar. For Ada, a new mother who was only just recovering from a difficult delivery, Walker's essay is especially poignant. What is "relevant" to Ada is perhaps her comparison of her own experiences with motherhood, a comparison of herself with Walker's mother. What might be "notable" to Ada is Walker's description of her mother with "never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own thoughts." I imagine

⁶ An excerpted copy of Walker's essay as it appeared on Ada's comp test can be found in Appendix A.

that Ada might have felt a kinship with Walker's mother as both women felt the joys and struggles of balancing work and family. Despite these obvious similarities, though, the personal narrative is generally shunned in academic writing:

To some, academic writing often implies *impersonal* writing, writing that is detached, distant, and lacking in personal meaning or relevance. However,... academic writing helps you broaden that [personal] view by going beyond the personal to a more universal point of view....In short, academic writing is largely about taking a critical, analytical stance toward a subject in order to arrive at some compelling conclusions. (DasBender 43)

The examination is particular to academia, a way to demonstrate that knowledge has been gained. Personal knowledge, at this college, is seen as a mark of a writer who does not know the material, and an essay that includes personal experience is traditionally scored low.

Assuming that Ada's essay would resist the rudimentary structure of the questions and provide "notable," "surprising," or "relevant" examples, she would still encounter hurdles with some of the tacit rules of literary interpretation, rules that the English Department is looking for when scoring the essay portion of the comp test. For example, the first question asks for the student to explain the reasons that Walker's mother did not become a more "conventional" artist. Alice Walker, an accomplished writer, does not explicitly list the reasons that her mother did not become an artist; instead, she uses figurative language. Rather than claiming that her mother worked tirelessly, Walker says "her day began before sunup, and did not end until late at night." Instead of pointing out her mother's struggles with racism, Walker describes the "muzzled and often mutilated creative spirit that the black woman has inherited" and the "battle[s] with the white landlord." Rather than describing the poverty inherent in the racism of mid-twentieth century America,

Walker says that her mother “made all the clothes we wore... made all our towels and sheets...spent the summers canning...spent the winter evenings making quilts.” Walker’s command of illustration and specificity—what makes her writing complex and sensuous—are the same features that make writing an essay about “the reasons” her mother might not have become an artist a challenge to new writers, particularly for new writers who are in a time-restricted sitting without peer or instructor support.

Because this first-semester composition course is a composition course (and not a literature course), Ada had very limited experiences with literary interpretation during the fall 2010 semester. I am not sure if Ada had ever read any works from Alice Walker or even knew that Walker is a famous writer. The literary cues, such as the use of adjectives (e.g., white landlord) and lists (e.g., sewing, canning, laboring), are familiar to expert readers but could be easily glossed over by a first semester freshman. Though Ada was older than her colleagues in class, she had only been in the US for around seven years. In her essay, Ada made the mistake of focusing only on the “work” Walker’s mother did to keep her from “conventional” art instead of the work and the underlying reasons why the work had to be done so tirelessly. This “mistake”—committed frequently in comp tests with this essay prompt—along with her occasional grammar lapses and sentence boundary errors earned Ada a 1+ on the essay portion. Her grade on this essay meant that she was slated to take it a second time, but, since she had extraordinary circumstances, I was able to argue to the Department Head, Director of Freshman Writing, and the Dean of Humanities that she should not have to endure another seating of the essay; in

essence, this test should count as her second chance. Her score of 1+ (which translates into a 65-69 on a 100-point scale for the essay) was enough to prevent her from having to take the essay portion a second time.

IMPACT ON THE INSTITUTION AT LARGE

The first chance of the comp test is delivered at about three-quarters of the way through a given semester and is similar to a midterm or final, a format with which students are already familiar. What reportedly makes the test particularly distasteful to students, though, is the fact that a failing score—on either the grammar or essay portion of the test—results in a failing grade for English 111. Currently due to the department’s data collection methods, there is no data available about the pass/fail rates of the competency test as a whole (that is, with both grammar and essay portions together), but my personal experience with the test is that students who fail English 111 due to the comp test fail because of the grammar portions. In the last two years of the comp test, I have had students fail English 111⁷ for missing the coveted 60 points by as few as two points—while passing the essay portion with a two or three. On two memorable occasions, an angry parent has complained to the Director of Writing, who gave those two students a third chance to pass the test. One of these students passed; one of them did not.

⁷ I had been a composition instructor and the Learning Center Director for around three years in 2010. Not only had I seen my own ENG 111 students fail the comp test for the grammar portion, but I had also seen numerous students in other FYC sections in the Learning Center. The writing tutors and I held “practice tests” in the Learning Center, which mimicked the stress and time constraints of the comp test. Several students I saw during practice tests, who passed the practice test, failed the actual comp test. Since the development of the common final, the Learning Center has had fewer requests for practice tests.

As a composition instructor, I have many objections to the competency test: that the test foregrounds correctness over invention, discovery, or process; that the test drives the pedagogy of the faculty⁸; that the test fails to be a valid “test” for writing ability; that the test forces students to memorize rules and strategies that are ineffective for writing in multiple contexts; that the test fails to measure a type of writing that transfers across disciplines, and that the test ignores that writing is designed to communicate an idea, point, or argument. These objections, however valid, are not, I think, what makes the competency test so problematic. Instead what is problematic is the effect it has on the students who take it; the test is so high-stakes that many women students find themselves becoming ill. If a student is missing during the first few minutes of the grammar portion, she can usually be found in the lavatory. Students who have passed practice exams (“retired” competency exams) with high scores barely earn the points needed to pass the actual exam. A score of 60 out of 100 (“passing”) on the grammar portion of the exam is highly coveted, as if that score is a mark of a good writer. Examining the textual artifacts of these women provides the department and the institution lots of data to analyze⁹, but the data hardly explain the culture of fear that surrounds this test.

⁸ When I asked the Director of Freshman Writing how she managed to teach to this test, she proclaimed that instructors do not teach to the test. What they did, she said, was teach them matters of correctness that are then assessed by the test. In other words, the test was seen as a “natural” outcome of “proper” teaching methods.

⁹ The data collected from the competency test is exclusively about grammar. The grammar scores from a placement test given at orientation are compared with the grammar scores on the competency test. Students are expected to improve 20 points or more on the grammar section of the competency test from their placement grammar score. If students fail to improve by 20 points; this fact is noted by the Director of Freshman Writing; that failure is recorded in the faculty member’s yearly evaluation. The collection of essay scores in the fall of 2012 is the first time that the essay has

The competency test is most certainly a decisive point on the horizon to which students keep an eye directed; the test is also a summative evaluation of the faculty that teach first-semester composition—indeed, the percentage of students passing the competency test is noted in each composition instructor’s annual evaluation.¹⁰

Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, the competency test also drives the training and support of the writing tutors in the Learning Center, of which I am the Director.¹¹ The Learning Center trains its undergraduate tutors in a seven-week, credit-bearing course, yet the writing tutors have additional tasks—outside of their regularly-scheduled training course—which center entirely on the competency test. For example, the writing tutors run a six-week “Grammar Review,” in which they offer workshops to students the six weeks prior to the first- and second-chances of the competency test. That is, the Grammar Review sessions are six weeks, four days per week of grammar practice, twice during the semester. These twelve weeks must be staffed, budgeted for, and organized as well as recorded and assessed.

Likewise, faculty who advise freshmen are notified of the upcoming test and are alerted when students fail. The Academic and Career Planning Office braces

been systematically recorded. As of the date of this project, the data had not been used for programmatic, training, or classroom improvement.

¹⁰ I know of at least one instructor in fact (and several others anecdotally) that have been verbally reprimanded for “not keeping their numbers up” and that have had similar notes made in their annual evaluations.

¹¹ There are two directors in the Learning Center, one of which trains and mentors writing and foreign language tutors and one of which trains and mentors math and science tutors. Both directors have full-time teaching faculty appointments with administrative leave to direct the Learning Center. My job, as Director, is to train writing tutors but also to offer monthly meetings to those same tutors, who always need additional support for the variety of subjects and tasks for which they will tutor.

itself for numbers of distraught students, and it prepares its Student Advisors how to look for signs that a student might be in distress, which can include but is not limited to writing anxiety, writer's block, "dropping out" of ENG 111 (excessive absences), depression, guilt, extremes in eating patterns, and failure to complete work in English or other courses.

The competency test in English, then, is rooted in the culture of the institution. That is, the composition sequence (particularly ENG 111) is seen as an initiation into the important work of the college. Students who have completed ENG 111 are expected to have a certain set of skills that they can apply to any other course at the institution. Students appear in ENG 111 as unruly and in need of taming. The English Department itself, as the maker and distributor of this test, has embraced the idea that ENG 111 is a service to the college at large. The enormous task of creating, proctoring, and grading this test is a strain on time, energy, resources, and staff. To say it is dreaded by most of the institution is not an understatement.

ADA'S CONTEXT

Students come to academia already saturated with prior knowledge about both socio-cultural and academic institutions. Ada, for example, was born in an Asian country, had lived for a time in another Asian country, and had learned to speak and write in four languages—two character-based languages and two alphabetic languages. Once more, she had high marks academically and had made the equivalent to the Dean's List each semester. Before Ada enrolled in ENG 111, she had arguably become accustomed to the political, financial, cultural, and material conditions of academia. She had also acclimated to a range of socio-

historical contexts, negotiated her role as student, wife, and mother. Once more, she had been able to coordinate her personal and academic roles. Because this was her second pregnancy, Ada was familiar with the negotiation of the personal and academic: she organized her class schedule around her child's school calendar, so she could be available before and after school; she was the primary care-giver to her aging in-laws; she baked and wrapped pies and cookies for each of her instructors; she distributed coupons and flyers to her classmates and warned them against using credit cards for these purchases. How did this woman—doggedly determined and successful by several measures—fail anything, particularly a composition test in her chosen major of English?

The answer to this question lies, I believe, in the way in which the comp test (and, by extension, college academic assignments at large) consider the disembodied intellect as a natural and effortless outcome of education; more than that—academic assignments presuppose a disembodied intellect as the indicator for college preparedness. Students who “confuse” personal experience as an authentic form of evidence are considered less thoughtful, less skillful; those students who can deftly separate the assignment and their feelings about the material are considered smart and insightful. As Kurt Spellmeyer notes, “the right to speak must be learned—or perhaps more accurately, earned—through what is essentially the effacement of subjectivity” (265). Even students who enter first-year writing courses without such skill are expected to learn the separation of lived experience from the disembodied intellect; tests like the comp test—a high-stakes audition which assures this separation has, in fact, occurred—assert their power over

students and institutions by being perceived as a “natural” outcome of writing instruction. In addition, these naturalized examinations select an isolated piece of a student’s (writing) experience, decontextualize it, and use it for judgment. In a discussion of examinations, Foucault suggests that “[t]he examination leaves behind it a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days. The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them” (*Discipline* 189). If we ignore the ways in which our students’ bodies constitute their entire lived experience (including the lived experience of the comp test) and then assess their performance for future access to degrees and resources by ignoring (and even suppressing) their lived experiences, then we are doing a disservice to ourselves and our discipline. In other words, we are knowingly basing our foundational knowledge on incomplete and perhaps misunderstood data.

One way to address incomplete and misunderstood data is to acknowledge the contributions of the physical body to lived experience. Acknowledging the physical body, however, is not an easy task in academia. Susie O’Brien notes that to acknowledge the body’s contribution to academic settings “is to allow the body to intervene in an idealized purist pedagogical enterprise” (48). That is, she observes that academia believes the existence of the body is a blight on an otherwise “pure” intellectual endeavor. O’Brien’s observation could explain, in part, why most colleges and universities are divided—quite markedly—between academics and student services. The materiality of existence—eating, showering, sleeping—is kept apart geographically from academics; the reporting lines and budgets themselves

are kept separate.¹² And nowhere is that separation more apparent than in the discourse generated for and within the classroom; the performance of academic discourse (either written or spoken) “is not simply at the level of consciousness, of representations and in what one thinks one knows, but at the level of what makes possible the knowledge that is transformed into political investment” (Foucault, *Discipline*, 185). In the academic writing, particularly the kind of writing that is valued in the competency test, this political investment is made manifest in prose that is distanced, impersonal, and disembodied. The inability of a student to reproduce that discourse on command determines her “failure” in the course and, indeed, puts her behind in her chosen curriculum.¹³

Writing assessment at its best does, in fact, place value on certain discourse conventions as a way to determine improvement, but Ada’s failure of the competency exam is an example of how discourse production can go awry. Even though Ada was writing- and speaking-fluent in several languages including English, she was unable to produce written language according to the parameters set forth by the English Department; therefore, she was deemed incompetent to move to the next level of English. Ada’s “failure,” however, was not due to her lack of interest or motivation. Instead, her “failure” directly implicated her physical body; her unruly and untamed body had interfered in the “idealized purist pedagogical enterprise” (O’Brien 48). Ada had earned a high B for the course before the competency exam,

¹² Foucault notes that “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space,” particularly via “enclosure” (*Discipline* 141-2). Similarly, Deborah Hawhee points out, in *Bodily Arts*, this separation of bodies and minds has not always been the way education has operated. Indeed, separation is not an inevitable condition of education; it is a deliberate construction.

¹³ Students must pass ENG 111 with a C or better to take the next course in the sequence (ENG 200) and also to take several other general education courses such as literature.

and I was not convinced that a second semester of introductory English was appropriate for her. Would taking the exact same course again be counterproductive? I believed it would.

I do not mean to suggest that departments, like English, should not hold students accountable for the work they do, should not require students to demonstrate in some fashion that they have absorbed the course content, in this case, improvement in clear written communication.¹⁴ Quite the opposite, assessment and review are integral parts of the educational process. What I mean to suggest is that students' production of a particular set of standards for discourse is currently separate—however closely linked—from the experiences students have of the course content. In other words, we now judge (and assign grades) not based upon the knowledge of the student but on the ability of the student to argue in writing that she has that knowledge. Part of the argument a student makes, of course, has to do with disciplinary authority—or at least the mimicry of disciplinary authority that Bartholomae outlines in "Inventing the University."

Students who attend this all-women's institution might suspect that the ways in which they are educated and assessed take into consideration their lived

¹⁴ I understand that "clear written communication" can be somewhat vague, and I leave it so purposefully. Students entering first-semester composition are at differing levels of writing, so the assessment of one student may look slightly different from another. Like scholars who study writers across time (Haswell; Kelly-Riley), writers in ecological contexts (Wardle and Roozen; Syverson; Slomp), and writers moving through discourse communities (Smit; Beaufort), I also argue that "improvement" in writing is a multi-faceted concept, one which must take into account a variety of contexts and circumstances in which writing is composed. As Possin points out, assessments applied in standardized form across cohorts and even institutions "impl[y] that all colleges and universities are created equally, and that student populations can (and should) attain similar and uniform levels of undergraduate performance" (qtd. in Kelly-Riley 61). I leave "improvement in clear written communication" as vague precisely because the assessment of clear written communication can be different in different contexts and, more particularly, different for different students.

experiences as women, but those suspicions would be misguided. This college prides itself on its comparisons with co-educational institutions¹⁵, so the measures and outcomes in its vision and mission statements—and, by extension, the measures and outcomes in each department and program—reflect that comparison. Despite her very real bodily experiences with surgery and childbirth, Ada was expected to take the same test under the same conditions as other students under the auspices of fairness. This decontextualization of writing, an androcentric version of intellect, severely punishes students who allow anything (in this story, a pregnancy, a language disparity, a cultural context) to interfere with the production of that disembodied discourse. Ada, as a non-native speaker, is also subject to what Matsuda calls the myth of linguistic homogeneity, or the conditions in which English is not only assumed to be the ideal discourse in composition but also the default position of students in that course. Ada's experience as a woman, as a non-native speaker, and even as an adult returning student have put her at odds with the de facto view of the typical student in the composition classroom: a traditional-aged, on-campus, English-speaking, new high school graduate.

I should also note that, though the example of Ada in my freshman composition course is a negative one, disembodied intellect in higher education is not only fraught with examples of negative outcomes; instead, many students find it a source of great joy and pleasure. In an interview in *Quel Corps?*, Michel Foucault

¹⁵ The Research, Planning, and Assessment Office maintains an updated list of both peer institutions and aspirant institutions for comparison purposes—sixteen colleges from a state organization and sixteen colleges from national peers. Of those thirty-two colleges, two are all-women's colleges, even though The Women's College Coalition lists forty-seven all-women's colleges among its ranks.

cautions against the view of power only as an oppressive force: “power is strong...because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire....Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it” (*Power/Knowledge* 59). In any given classroom, we might be able to find students who feel liberated by the disembodied intellect and students who feel oppressed by it.

The collision of the disembodied intellect and embodied knowledge (created by lived experience) is nowhere more apparent than in the composition classroom. In a composition course, where arguably the course material¹⁶ is varied across sections and sometimes nebulous within a single course, the demonstration of knowledge via disembodied discourse highlights the belief that “the world readily surrenders its meaning to anyone who observes it properly”—how Berlin describes the epistemology of Positivist Rhetoric (770). That is, students who are subjected to the appropriate methods in the first-year composition course should naturally arrive at a standard of language production that exists across disciplines. This position, however, ignores that knowledge (and, therefore, knowledge-making) is a cultural-historical construct; knowledge does not sit apart from (or above) its location. In a composition classroom, “writing well” is constructed by the discipline, the institutional context, the professor and even the students in that class—not by a standard of “knowledge.” When the intellect is placed back into its corporeal location—the brain is, after all, a part of the body—then assessment of writing (and,

¹⁶ I use the phrase “course material” here to denote the material used to study writing. For example, instructors are allowed to choose the readings for students, but the students must, in the end, perform the skills outlined on the competency test. The “course material,” then, varies across sections, though the outcomes of the course do not.

by extension, the intellect) becomes messy and labor-intensive as well as potentially illuminating and rewarding.

For Ada, the answer to moving through first-semester composition was found by connecting with resources outside of “regular” academic infrastructures. In other words, after Ada had reached out to me earlier in the semester, and I was able to become personally involved in her story,¹⁷ I awarded her an incomplete for the semester, and I sought out alternative ways for her to complete ENG 111. I happened to know a colleague—an adjunct instructor of composition—who found enjoyment and professional satisfaction in working with non-native speakers. This colleague often worked with students outside the regular course. Even though the fall semester was over and the spring semester had started, I contacted this colleague to see if he would be willing to work with Ada. He was more than willing. He and Ada met once per week for about six weeks, helping her craft her grammar skills specifically for the competency test. Just before the fall semester began, I administered the competency test to Ada again. This time, she passed, and she left first-semester composition with a well-deserved A for the course. Because I knew her story so well, we were able to locate resources to help her overcome this particular obstacle. If I had not worked so closely with her (and, it must be admitted, if she had not been so willing to allow me to know her), Ada would have gone unnoticed as another casualty of the comp test, recorded as a number in a spreadsheet.

¹⁷ As I noted earlier, I was able to argue for Ada’s successful completion of the essay portion of the comp test, but she did not earn a 60 on the grammar portion. That portion, considered “objective,” caused her to fail ENG 111 outright.

A REVISION TO THE COMPETENCY TEST

The English faculty has long had various objections to the competency test. Over the course of three years, the faculty introduced several revisions to the test, which have, until recently, been voted down. In the fall of 2011, however, some changes to the test were piloted. The feature of the competency test that most troubled faculty is the “gatekeeping” function—that students without a passing score failed English—so that feature is being abandoned in favor of making the test no less than 15 percent of the course grade. The current revision of the competency test, now called the “common final,” seems to have some garnered support in the department, so it has been vetted and used since the fall of 2011.

The common final is a writing assessment delivered to students during the final examination period. The test is divided into two sections: one section for grammar and one for essay writing. The grammar portion makes up five percent of the final examination grade, while the essay portion makes up ten percent. Like the competency test, the common final is graded both by instructors and the department. The instructor of the course grades the grammar section, and the department cross-grades the essay section, with each essay receiving a minimum of two scores; essays with large differences in the two scores may receive a third score.

There are two primary differences between the competency test and the common final. First, the common final alleviates the gatekeeping function of the competency test. If they have done competent work throughout the course, students can conceivably pass ENG 111 with a disastrous score on the common final. Second, the common final relies on sentence combining to test the students’ grammar and mechanics abilities rather than the multiple choice narratives in the

competency test. In addition to those differences, the campus at large has seen a notable reduction in the time and resources devoted to a single test.

Though these differences mark an encouraging philosophical shift in the ways the department views assessments of writing, some of the same or similar problems exist with the common final as did with the competency test. In order to explore these problems, I compare grammar and mechanics of both assessments; then, I compare the essay portions of both assessments. I begin each discussion with a brief outline of the new common final and end the discussions with comparisons with the competency test, including page number references to the opening discussion in this chapter to facilitate easy referral.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

The grammar and mechanics sections of the common final are primarily composed of sentence-combining exercises, though there is a short (five to six lined) paragraph exercise which asks students to change the entire paragraph from singular to plural case (without changing tense), noting corrections in capitalization and apostrophe use. Because the department is still developing and actively using this test, I will not publish a version of it in this project. Instead, I will use examples from a practice exam I crafted for use in the classroom as well as for writing tutor training. A complete version of the practice common final exam is located in Appendix B.

The common final asks students to combine a set of two to five sentences into a single sentence with a given type of structure. For instance, students might be

asked to combine sentences using an appositive or using a standard form of coordination. Here is a sample from the practice exam:

The people of Atlantis were apparently ambitious.

The people of Atlantis were apparently warlike.

use paired coordination (such as either/or, neither/nor, both/and, not only/but also)

An example of a correct response to this question would be the sentence “The people of Atlantis were apparently both ambitious and warlike.” Students could lose partial credit for faulty parallelism (“The people of Atlantis were both apparently ambitious and warlike.”) or illogical sentence structure (“The people of Atlantis were apparently neither ambitious nor warlike.”). Students could lose full credit for the question if they do not use the requested method (here, paired coordination) or create a non-grammatical sentence.

The short paragraph used for editing focuses primarily on correcting case. Students should be able to switch between singular to plural (or plural to singular) throughout the paragraph, which may include switching pronouns as well as verbs. The ultimate goal, as stated in the directions to the paragraph exercise, is “to make the paragraph consistent and correct.” Here is a sample paragraph exercise from the practice exam:

As New Year’s Eve approaches, typical conspiracy theorists begin to renew their claims about UFOs, Atlantis, and doomsday prophecy’s. Conspiracy theorists seem to think that such folklore is covered up by either the Government or powerful corporations. Either the interviews on the web or the attention from the media feed conspiracy theorists’ drive to create more mania around their projects. Though their tales of conspiratorial intrigue is fascinating as fiction, those tale’s have yet to be proven as fact.

Students are asked to change this paragraph from “typical conspiracy theorists” to “a typical conspiracy theorist” and “Conspiracy theorists” to “A conspiracy theorist.” Then, they are to make the case consistent throughout the paragraph. Once more, they are asked to correct errors in capitalization and apostrophes. Students may lose points by not correcting the errors in case (in the above example, four subject-verb agreements and two pronoun-antecedent agreements), failing to recognize errors in capital or apostrophe use (one error in capitalization, three errors in apostrophes), or adding incorrect punctuation. Students may either correct the errors directly inside the text of the paragraph or rewrite the entire paragraph with corrections in a blank space provided on the page.

The differences between the competency test and the common final grammar and mechanics questions seem to be considerable. (See pages 14-23 for a sample of the test questions; see Appendix A for a copy of the entire grammar portion of the competency exam.) Sentence combining, rather than multiple choice questions, appears to offer the students some choice in composing sentences. In addition, the resurgence of sentence combining as a best practice in teaching sentence-level skills has some support. For example, Saddler and Preschern note that students who experienced sentence combining rather than direct grammar instruction “became more adept at combining simpler sentences together to create more complex sentences,” and students who experienced sentence combining instruction showed “improvements in both writing quality and revising ability” (7). Similarly, the paragraph editing portion of the common final, which also gives students a choice in how to craft the paragraph to meet the assignment, focuses less on editing skills and

more upon consistency of the text as a whole. These changes represent a concern within the department to make the common final a better instrument to assess student writing abilities, taking care to consult best practices in the discipline.

Problems still remain, however, with this type of writing assessment. First, the grammar and mechanics section of the common final asks students to create correct sentence structures in isolation of their context. In other words, a student may be able to correctly combine two to five sentences on the test, but this correctness may not translate to a grammatically correct or mechanically complex sentence in her own writing. Second, the paragraph editing section in the common final does not accurately represent student learning. A specific example might clarify this point.

Here is the first sentence from the above sample paragraph: “As New Year’s Eve approaches, typical conspiracy theorists begin to renew their claims about UFOs, Atlantis, and doomsday prophecy’s.” A correct edit for this response is “As New Year’s Eve approaches, a typical conspiracy theorist begins to renew his or her claims about UFOs, Atlantis, and doomsday prophecies.” Though this correct edit is often the way many students correct this sentence, some students correct the sentence this way: “As New Year’s Eve approaches, a typical conspiracy theorist begins to renew claims about UFOs, Atlantis, and doomsday prophecies.” In the second example, what is the appropriate score? In one interpretation, the student, unsure of what pronoun case to use, has maneuvered her way out of actually responding to the test question; this interpretation supports a loss of points. In another interpretation, however, the student is aware of the pronoun case but

eliminates the pronoun altogether to simplify the sentence, avoiding the clunky “his or her” construction; this interpretation does not support a loss of points. That one interpretation is “better” than another is not the point; rather, the point is that a grader of this paragraph cannot make a clear distinction of the student’s learning from the test alone.

That the common final isolates sentence-level skills from the task of writing and does not assess student learning directly parallels the problems with the grammar and mechanics portions of the competency test. (See page 14.) Likewise, the test as a whole isolates sentences and errors into segments without concern for the complexities of an organic writing task.

ESSAY

While the essay task has not changed considerably from the competency test to the common final (a timed essay in a single sitting), several of the key structures of the essay have. First, the reading prompts selected for the common final essay section are often selected from newspapers, magazines, or online news sites rather than literary nonfiction pieces. (See page 26, especially footnote 6.) That is, students are more likely familiar with the subjects and styles of the reading prompts. For example, the practice common final uses “Strong Enough” by Wendy Shankar as its prompt. Second, the common final essay addresses only one question: Do you find the author’s argument persuasive? Rather than having to choose between questions, all students answer the same question. Once more, the essay prompt in the common final more closely aligns to the department’s

requirements for first-semester composition, which include at least one analysis of an argument; that is, all students in ENG 111 would have some knowledge of and experience with analysis. Third, and perhaps most important, the common final essay portion uses an expanded rubric. (See Appendix C for the complete revised rubric.) The new rubric is much improved in terms of quality and specificity. (See page 27 for the competency test rubric before the revision.) Many of the problems with the original rubric for essay scoring (e.g., “numerous illiteracies”) are solved with a description of each category on the revised common final rubric.

Though this rubric clearly represents a strong move in a positive direction, it still has some confusing descriptions for a scorer. For example, the rubric seems to weigh all four parts of the scoring (content, structure, use of source material, grammar and mechanics) equally. If a student were to use incorrect citations (though she did, in fact, cite the source), could she be given as low a score as a student who had not created a thesis or main point? The faculty scoring this version of the exam have often had similar questions, and they are still undergoing some refinements for the essay portion of the exam. The faculty has, however, continued to use norming sessions before the exam to talk through some of their concerns and come to some consensus before the scoring begins.

One last improvement should be noted about the common final that is largely due to its delivery rather than its design. The common final is given in one sitting during the students’ regularly-scheduled exam time. One implication of this method of delivery is that the students prepare for only one exam. When students took the competency test, they took the test during the semester outside of class and were

still expected to take a final exam for the course. Reducing the amount of “testing” time spent outside of class time has benefitted both students and faculty. Another implication of this method of delivery is that the students receive a full three hours to complete the entire common final.¹⁸ In other words, students have nearly twice as much time to complete the common final essay as opposed to the one-and-a-half hours allowed for the competency test. As a member of the department that has tackled these changes to a complicated and high-stakes competency test, I am proud of the faculty’s willingness to explore a variety of options for delivering a common assessment.

Having said that, though, the common final essay still poses problems similar to those of the competency test essay. First, this final is a timed essay response written in isolation of support systems (like peer review) in handwritten, grammatically correct prose. Though students are accustomed to composing on computers and to collecting feedback from peers, instructors, and tutors, the supposed outcomes of learning in this course are assessed by having them write in unfamiliar terrain—unless, of course, the instructor chooses to incorporate several in-class practice essays, thus teaching to the exam. This test, despite its strong improvements, still seems, like the competency test, to be an assessment of instructors rather than an assessment of students’ writing ability. (See page one, footnote one for a discussion of how the competency test has affected instructors of composition.)

¹⁸ Students registered with Disability Services qualify for time-and-a-half exam periods. Since instructors of all courses at the college contend with “extra time” students, the resources (e.g., spare rooms, proctors) are already in place for the common final.

Second, this common final seems to suggest, in Spellmeyer's words, the same "effacement of subjectivity" that the competency test did. Spellmeyer recognizes that the push against what he calls "a naïve material determinism," in which the writer's experience and creativity help her to "discover" meaning inherent in the text, can sometimes inadvertently result in "an equally naïve and constricting linguistic determinism: the view that people who do not share the same words cannot share the same world" (265). Spellmeyer makes a compelling case that, in some arguments between writer-based prose and discourse community-based prose, the student's role in situating herself within academic discourse is largely negligible; indeed, she can either consume or dispel, absorb or ignore the choices given to her by presumably experienced "insiders" of the community. In this sense, her own experiences and knowledge are disembodied; she must distinguish between her corporal experience and the pure intellectual endeavors of academic institutions as if those two features were not invariably and inevitably intertwined.

The situation which initially led me to this project (Ada's experience with the competency test), therefore, does not seem to be radically altered by the introduction of the common final to replace the competency test. That is, students bring with them to the academy a wealth of lived experiences which are overlooked by the common final as they were by the competency test. The competency test and the common final separate writing both from the organic material contexts in which it is composed and from the cumulative lived experience of the human who composes it. Certainly, this is not an accident as assessment generally attempts to isolate elements of a process or program for improvement. There are, however,

some implications for the testing specifically of writing ability that deserve some special consideration.

IMPLICATIONS OF OBJECTIVIST WRITING ASSESSMENTS

Many academic institutions are interpreting the push for accountability as a need for “standardization” with all of the negative connotations of that word. Though there is a sizeable constituency which protests “standardization,” there seem to be fewer objections to the idea of having “standards.” That is to say that “standards” suggests a set of expectations that a given degree or certification program upholds for its graduates, while “standardization” suggests a Fordian view of education, complete with the requisite assembly line of production. Despite the differences between “standards” and “standardization,” these terms often get conflated and even used synonymically. For the purposes of this discussion, I will continue to use the term “standardization,” since it already carries these connotations, to mean a repetition of tasks, a boilerplate in which students and their activities can be made uniform. I will use the less politically-charged term “criteria” to mean the expectations and hopes we have for students as they move through courses or curricula.

The discussion of these two ideas is important because classrooms, departments, and even entire institutions have resorted to standardization to demonstrate a set of criteria. Yet, as Sadler notes in a recent discussion of indeterminacy¹⁹

¹⁹ Sadler defines “indeterminacy” as “a technical condition denoting that a proposed solution system is incapable of producing, wholly within its own parameters, complete solutions for a given class of problems” (168).

Divergent tasks dominate a range of disciplines and professional academic programmes [sic], and account for a significant proportion of assessment activity in higher education. They are intended to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate sophisticated cognitive abilities, integration of knowledge, complex problem solving, critical opinion, lateral thinking and innovative action. (160)

These divergent tasks, argues Sadler, are valuable precisely because of their “considerable latitude for creative solution, analysis or expression” (160). Sadler argues that “[d]ivergent works are typically complex, in the sense that their quality can be explained only by reference to multiple criteria, possibly including some that are abstract in nature” (160). Not only do writing assignments seem to fit Sadler’s description of divergent tasks, but the resulting written compositions seem to align with the description of Sadler’s divergent works. Once more, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, an outstanding written response often resists a standard or traditional structure in favor of an innovative or surprising one. (See page 28 for a full discussion.) What is “innovative” or “surprising,” however, “requires skilled, qualitative judgments,” not “a set of measures or formal procedures that a non-expert could apply to arrive at the ‘correct’ appraisal” (Sadler 160).

What I mean to suggest is that written composition, as a form of communication, arises out of a need, an experience, or even a requirement, but the resulting product is a unique consequence of a set of kairotic circumstances and experiences (though those circumstances might be an essay or project assigned by an instructor). Written composition, then, is a divergent work which can meet certain criteria. On the other hand, student writing produced *en masse* in an isolated, time-restrictive sitting, which also responds to the same reading prompt with a single question, resembles an objective response, a standardization. Sadler

expressly prohibits objective questions from being categorized as “divergent.” What is being tested, therefore, on tests like the competency test and common final does not resemble the types of writing done inside or outside of class (unless, of course, the course is designed merely to prepare students for the test), but these tests are being scored *as if they do* resemble other types of writing, namely the divergent works produced throughout the course. That the competency test and the common final are perceived as being “natural” outcomes of course instruction (see page 35) reveals an incongruity; the criteria for the course outcomes (divergent works) are assumed to have been met through standardization of a test (non-divergent work).

Not only do standardized tests fail to assess the very work done in a course (here, ENG 111), but there is another, more troubling, concern with such assessments: the auspice of fairness. The desire for fairness and equanimity is a noble one, but “fairness” in education has been increasingly misperceived as “sameness.” That is, in order to determine the success of a department, program, instructor, or student, assessments are designed to appear the same (or remarkably similar). However noble the pursuit for fairness, though, it does not—and cannot—result in sameness. In fact, what gets touted as being “fair” is not necessarily so if it is merely the “same.” As Narter points out in a recent discussion of objectivity in *College English*,

...education is not, and cannot ever be, just the transmission of facts, systems, and skills....Education is a dynamic undertaking between human beings within a common culture in which teachers impart knowledge by means of careful selection and concern for the receivers and interpreters of this knowledge....You can't quantify writing; you can assess it, but you can't quantify it. (65-6)

Narter's observations highlight some of the challenges of a teacher grading written work. How does a teacher grade something like "tone," when "tone is defined by a particular relationship: that of the writer toward his or her audience and work"? Narter suggests that "[t]he teacher must employ a means of assessment whereby he or she seeks to understand the writer's intentions and then *in that particular case* determine how successfully the writer established whatever was meant to be established..." (67). Though Narter does advocate for the use of "objectives" (in this discussion, what I am calling "criteria") for an assignment, he resists the idea that grading an assignment outside of the contextual situatedness of writer and reader can be totally impartial.

Narter makes some salient points about the difficulties of "objective" grading for teachers, and I would argue that many of his points also apply to the students themselves as writers. If, in fact, students in first-year composition are learning how to compose divergent works, then certainly they are not experts in the creation of these works—yet. Instead, they have incorporated some of the strategies of rhetorical awareness and are perplexed by others; their expertise is still in development. And development, here, is uneven. Students will develop as expert writers in a variety of ways, some in large leaps with plateaus, some in steady predictable growth, some in a combination of leaps and steady growth. The result is that writing, and by extension the grading of that writing, not only cannot be "objective" but *shouldn't* be. Each individual student, a human being with a variety of skills, talents, and experiences, should be evaluated based upon criteria based upon her own individual capacity.

How, then, do teachers and administrators of writing and writing programs go about supporting individual students on their paths to writing expertise? I propose that phenomenology as both a theory and practice can help differentiate between “fairness” and “sameness.” Phenomenological theory, however, has some negative associations in some circles; the theory also has several strands which are often conflated.

I open the next chapter with a delineation of phenomenological theoretical strands, positioning myself within a particular strand that resists aligning itself with objectivism. Once I have identified my specific phenomenological position, I then outline a phenomenological research design that unearths women’s lived experiences as they move through their first-semester of composition, specifically as they undertake their first college-level writing assignment. As I move through the different sections of the design, I will put my design choices in conversation with phenomenological theory. Though the term “phenomenology” as a method is often used as a universal term to describe first-person description, phenomenological research is anything but uniform. A careful outline of each methodological choice will help reveal how the design can both address many of the concerns scholars have with the method and remain true to the complementary phenomenological theory.

CHAPTER 3

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF WOMEN IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

The competency test in English is an assessment with particularly high stakes, and Ada, a non-native student struggling with a life-threatening pregnancy, is not a “typical” student. Yet the clash of these two extremes helps to highlight the ways in which writing assessments—even those with the best intentions—can constrain students in unpredictable ways. As I outlined in the previous chapter, students are on their way to creating divergent works which meet a given set of criteria, but tests like the competency test and the common final create standardized evaluations that both restrict the production of divergent works and also only assess a particular sanctioned skill set within a particular discourse.

I do not propose to categorically eliminate writing assessments, nor do I suggest that writing assessments are exercises in futility. What I do want to argue, to justify my inquiry about lived experiences, is that writing assessments are often designed out of a cultural-historical location; that is, writing assessments rely on what has gone before. We instructors often decide what can and should be assessed, design assessments based upon our own interpretations of lived experiences in the academy, and use the same (or remarkably similar) assignment structures for decades with little reflection on how the structure itself can misrepresent outcomes. What would happen instead, if we ask students to describe their experiences with these assessments, so that we can better understand what students already bring with them to the institution, how students interact with our

current assessments, and how we might better design assessments in the future to capture what we claim to assess? In essence, would this create a system in which we design assessments that make students better writers and thinkers, not better test-takers?

In order to explore these questions, I have chosen to use a phenomenological method, but this method is not only contested in some circles but also resists a standardized set of practices. Generally speaking, “[p]henomenology may be characterized initially in a broad sense as the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears” (Moran, “Introduction” 1). This definition is slightly unsatisfying to a researcher who is using a phenomenological method, but the imprecision of this definition is precisely, I believe, the reason phenomenology can be useful. That the phenomenological project has been described as a “pre-science”—not because it is better or more robust than science but because it should lay the foundation for scientific work—demonstrates this point. A phenomenological method in all its “fuzziness” can explore regions that have previously been unmapped, without presupposing any particular outcome or hypothesis. This exploration can then tease out themes and experiences that could then be further explored by experimental methods. Phenomenology and the sciences were never seen by early phenomenologists as competing systems; both occur in recursive fashion, illuminating human experience in tandem.

The seeming ambiguity of the phenomenological method, however, has triggered some spirited debate over its rigor and usefulness. That is, critiques of

phenomenological methods have ranged from a suspicion of a particular design (e.g., Berthoff's critique of bracketing) to a dismissal of the entire phenomenological theory (e.g., Deleuze's post-structuralism). Because of this wide range of critiques, I place this project in context of the discussions surrounding the theory and practice of phenomenology. More specifically, I focus on a range of questions: Why use a phenomenological method to study women in first-year composition? From what theoretical stance does this particular project arise? How does that particular theoretical stance address qualities like "reliability" and "validity"? How does that theoretical stance translate into research methods? By addressing these questions throughout the description of the methodological design, I hope to mitigate concerns about phenomenology's usefulness in composition research.

WHY USE A PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD?

The primary goal for this project is to understand how students *experience* their writing tasks—in other words, I did not set out to understand *what* students do when they write; I set out to understand how students *experience* the writing task because of their contextual locations. Because of my focus on the corporeal realities and experiences of writing, the textual artifacts produced by students in the course were of less concern to me—unless, of course, those artifacts helped to explain a particular experience. My task, then, was to find a methodology that explores the students living the experience of composition which also incorporates lived experiences as a valid part of knowing and allows for both expected and unexpected experiences to be "counted."

Phenomenological research "represents a philosophic and human-science research method that constitutes an avenue to provide discursive space where

those traditionally muted voices can be heard” (Orbe 6). In the introduction to a collection of essays exploring the link between phenomenology and existentialism, Mark Wrathall and Hubert Dreyfus outline the similarities between the two movements, but their description does a good job of highlighting the distinguishing characteristics of phenomenology:

A concern with providing a description of human existence and the human world that reveals it as it is, without the distortion of any scientific presuppositions. This leads to:

1. A heightened awareness of the non-rational dimensions of human existence, including habits, non-conscious practices, moods, and passions.
2. A focus on the degree to which the world is cut to the measure of our intellect, and a willingness to consider the possibility that our concepts and categories fail to capture the world as it presents itself to us in experience.
3. A belief that what it is to be human cannot be reduced to any set of features about us (whether biological, sociological, anthropological, or logical). To be human is to transcend facticity. (5)

These traits—an “awareness,” a “willingness,” a “belief”—highlight the ways in which the phenomenological method fuses with the phenomenological epistemology; the two are comingled in such a complicated fashion that it is difficult to distinguish practice and philosophy. Indeed the explanation offered by Wrathall and Dreyfus is closer to an ontology rather than a methodology. In this way, the

phenomenological researcher orientates herself first to phenomenology as a belief system.

PHENOMENOLOGY IN THE HEIDEGGERIAN TRADITION

As Koch notes, however, there are “distinctions between Husserlian (transcendental) and Heideggerian phenomenological (existential/hermeneutic) traditions” (175). Of note, Husserlian phenomenology arises out of the Cartesian tradition of separating mental and physical experiences, the knower and the known. Husserl himself said that phenomenology’s purpose is “to understand the *ideal* sense of the *specific* connections in which the objectivity of knowledge may be documented. It endeavors to raise to clearness the pure forms and laws of knowledge by tracing knowledge back to an adequate fulfillment in intuition” (“Introduction” 76-77, italics in original). In other words, Husserl’s vision of the phenomenological method includes two types of reduction¹: phenomenological reduction (epoché) and eidetic reduction. The first, phenomenological reduction, involves isolating (i.e., “bracketing” out) features of the mind (e.g., theories, cultural lenses) to explore a phenomenon in its “pure” form; in fact, the term “epoché” refers to “suspension of judgment.” The second reduction, eidetic, involves removing qualities of a given object or phenomenon (e.g., hardness, malleability) in order to eliminate inessential qualities of that object or phenomenon so that only the “pure”

¹ Husserl also supports a third type of reduction: transcendental reduction, which is a type of mindset the researcher adopts as “pure” or without any socio-cultural or socio-historical influence. The transcendental reduction was introduced by Husserl in his much later work. I choose not to include it in this discussion because the transcendental reduction was critiqued by many of Husserl’s contemporaries and is not used in current research outside of the epoché and eidetic reductions.

object or phenomenon remains. In other words, the epoché refers to suspending socio-cultural positions of the researcher, while the eidetic reduction refers to suspending the cultural interpretations of the object or phenomenon. In a Husserlian study, the main question under consideration is “What is the [true, objective] essence of this experience?” Because the reductions are performed in a Husserlian study, the essences unearthed in such a study are considered objective; thus, Husserlian research is called “descriptive.”

Heideggerian phenomenology, on the other hand, resists the separation between researcher and context and participant and context. Instead, “data generated by the participant is fused with the experience of the researcher and placed in context” (Koch 176). As opposed to the Husserlian descriptive tradition, the Heideggerian tradition is termed “interpretive,” though the term “interpretive” does not translate directly to the interpretation performed in scientific study like a Husserlian one. “Interpretation,” here, does not mean to “[seek] purely descriptive categories of the real, perceived world in the narratives of the participants,” but instead means to “focus on describing the meanings of the individuals’ being-in-the-world and how these meanings influence the choices they make. This might involve an analysis of the historical, social, and political forces that shape and organize experiences” (Lopez and Willis 729). A Heideggerian interpretive study, then, recognizes a concept called “situated freedom”: “Thus, while the self constitutes its world, it is also constrained in the possible ways in which it can constitute the world by its language, culture, history, purposes, and values” (Leonard 44). Although a researcher may bring to the study a wealth of information and experience and

might, therefore, be inclined to extrapolate meanings from the data, the focus of a Heideggerian interpretative study is the participant's individual experience. The challenge, then, is to "[go] beyond mere description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in common life practices. These meanings are not always apparent to the participants but can be gleaned from the narratives produced by them" (Lopez and Willis 728). A question proposed by Heideggerian interpretive study is "How does the experience of an individual participants contribute to the understanding of the similarities and differences within a given experience?" The Heideggerian stance, then, allows both an open exploration of women in first-year composition as well as methodologies that encourage an explicit acknowledgement of the researcher's position. I will explain my particular use of Heideggerian interpretation at length in chapter four.

Because this study deals with women participants at a women's college, feminist concerns are especially salient. Linda Fisher points out that feminist researchers are widely suspicious of phenomenological research methods, primarily for two reasons: the methods' reliance on reduction and the search for essences. Bracketing (or reduction) asks the researcher to remove unimportant assumptions during the research process, but, as Berthoff notes, "What gets bracketed—read out of court—is trivial, self-evident, not to the point, or merely distracting. At other times, bracketing is an overt ideological act, as when a certain idea is held to be contaminated and is thus treated as hazardous waste.... If phenomenology is to guide us, it cannot be by bracketing meaning" (11). For women, who have largely been "bracketed" out of culture, history, medical research, and positions of power in

general, the idea of reduction is rightfully questionable. Similarly, phenomenology's history of searching for "essence" of experience seems to indicate that there exists a singularity of experience in human consciousness, a singularity that feminist scholars have pushed against in their research and publications for centuries.

Phenomenology's malleability, however, can address some of these concerns. For example, Sandra Harding argues in the introduction to *Feminism & Methodology* that "feminist methods" is a short-hand term to describe a complicated history of feminist contributions to social science. Instead of listing the features of "feminist methods," Harding suggests that a "historical approach is the best strategy if we wish to account for the distinctive power of feminist research" (6). By describing the features of "the most illuminating examples of feminist research" (6)—of which Harding lists three—the author hopes to distinguish feminist research from the more limiting term "feminist methods." Harding's three features include a focus on underrepresented women's experiences, on research for women to answer questions women in particular have, and on the location and power structure from which the researcher operates.

Phenomenology as a methodology certainly does not require that feminist methods be used, yet phenomenology offers a way to incorporate Harding's three features into a study about women for women. Harding's first example of feminist research is to explore underrepresented populations. As Stephanie Riger notes, "For many years, subjects of relevance to women, such as rape or housework, have been considered either taboo topics or too trivial to study, marginal to more central and prestigious issues, such as leadership, achievement, and power" (731). Though

women have not necessarily been excluded from composition research, this project looks particularly at the immediate, lived experiences of freshman women students. In a consideration of the lived experiences of these women, a careful consideration of experiences not usually counted can make this phenomenological study a feminist one. For example, many of the participants enjoy and take pleasure in considering fashion, a subject typically considered superficial. But, as Fiona Blaikie points out, however, “creating a personal visual identity through aesthetic choices in clothing provides a metaphorical connection to a particular individual’s socio-economic, aesthetic and political relationship to and with the world and with fellow human beings” (2). Women so often negotiate the binaries between fashionable/vulgar and prim/suggestive in their clothing choices; it is no wonder that they might be fascinated by clothing. Fashion, then, is no trivial matter. By bringing usually trivialized subjects into the foreground, this particular study can arguably be employing feminist methods.

Once more, Harding’s second feature—a study for women—can also be explored through phenomenology. As Harding so aptly points out, the questions historically asked and answered by research are driven by androcentric institutions like “welfare departments, manufacturers, advertisers, psychiatrists, the medical establishment, or the judicial system” (8). Often, these institutions drive research and the reporting of that research as if it were an irrefutable truth. “That we are human inventors of some questions and repressors of others...,” claims Michelle Fine, “is sometimes rendered irrelevant to the texts we publish. Such narrative removal seeks to front universal truths while denying the privileges, interests, and

politics of researchers" (14). "A study for women," according to Harding, is the type of study whose genesis comes from the questions of women instead of institutions. For example, how do women's experiences translate into first-year composition? Is the college climate as "chilly" (see Hall and Sandler) on an all-women's campus? What experiences unique to women could or should be supported by an institution's infrastructure? Should those support systems be designed differently on an all-women's campus than those systems in a coeducational institution? A phenomenology is an excellent way to engage in questions that of particular concern to women.

What makes phenomenology especially compelling as a feminist methodology, however, is its focus on the researcher herself, Harding's third feature of feminist research. As an active participant in the phenomenological research process, the researcher must confront her own biases and assumptions; in fact, the researcher is required by phenomenology to engage with both the participants as well as the textual artifacts produced by the study in a reflective journaling practice: "We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character" (van Manen *Researching Lived Experience* 47). In other words, the researcher's own pre-suppositions about the project or the participants is recorded and grappled with throughout the research process. Indeed, Linda Fisher points out that

"[p]henomenology and feminism share [the] commitment to descriptive and experiential analysis, where the systematic examination and articulation of the nature of lived experience, along with the attendant theoretical and

practical implications, function as the basis for reflective discourse. Indeed, in a fundamental sense the cornerstone of feminist theory and politics is the elaboration and analysis of the particular situation and experience of being a woman” (33).

In this particular design, the phenomenological method offers a way to explore the individual experiences of being a woman in a first-year composition course as well as the individual experiences of the researcher (also a woman) conducting that study.

Phenomenology can accomplish the three tasks of capturing women’s experiences, addressing concerns specific to women, and openly acknowledging the researcher’s position, but I would also like to suggest that phenomenology, carefully attended to, can become “a truly integrated feminist phenomenology, in which feminism and phenomenology are not merely co-conversationalists but are intermingled, interwoven—speaking, as it were, with one voice” (Fisher, L. 85). Once more, phenomenology, again, carefully attended to, can become a part of the repertoire of feminist rhetorical practices.

In their 2012 *Feminist Rhetorical Practice: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch examine a range of feminist scholarship “to take into account both the general contours of the evolving landscape and make clearer our aesthetic consciousness of what constitutes, not so much *standards* of excellence as *qualities* of excellence in these practices” (19). As Royster and Kirsch begin to examine the scholarship, they found several “terms of engagement” (19) to describe feminist practices that found a foothold in feminist scholarship. Though Royster and Kirsch’s mapping of feminist

rhetorical practices focuses rightfully on the ways in which feminist scholars have reclaimed connections with historical figures, the authors' descriptions of imagination, contemplation, and circulation share some important practices with phenomenological research. For example, in a description of "critical imagination," the authors describe a critical framework:

...we focus on listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly; grounding inquiries in historical evidence with regard to both texts and contexts; creating schemata for engaging critical attention; and disrupting our assumptions regularly through reflective and reflexive questions.... The challenge is to seek answers within such a framing while being fully aware that both questions and answers shift as knowledge shifts, as we think dialectically and dialogically, and to take notice of different feature of the landscape." (21)

In the phenomenology I propose for this project—one that includes interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journaling—shares some commonalities with critical imagination. In other words, the study for this project seeks to locate the course within the context of institutional history, report the participants' experiences as they recount them, allow the participants to unearth the important topics and themes as they live the experiences of freshman composition, and disrupt the researcher's assumptions about those experiences through a reflective journal. In chapter four, I will return to Royster and Kirsch's framework to explain my engagement with the data collected.

The notable difference between phenomenology and critical imagination, however, is the three voices echoing through the data. Though I will explain these three voices in detail in the next section ("Types of Phenomenologies"), I will say that compositionists have historically used phenomenology as a type of meditation

that critically examines a concept or idea as it appears to the scholar, author, or researcher. Not only is this meditation primarily Husserlian, but it also confines the “data collection” and “analysis” to only one perspective², no matter how rigorously critical that single perspective might be. A phenomenology, however, that incorporates human participants necessarily triangulates the information. That is, there are two “voices” in the moment—the participant’s and the researcher’s in their search for shared understanding. Then, a third voice is introduced in the reporting of the data—the voice of the distanced researcher. Compositionists have rarely if ever used Heideggerian phenomenology to explore the experiences of participants in the moment of the experience, so I’ve reached outside of the discipline to recover some methodological strategies that will both address feminist concerns while remaining faithful to interpretive phenomenology. The work of Rivera-Fuentes and Birke (described at length in the next section) is one such work.

The phenomenological method, then, that can be used to address both the student participants and address feminist concerns comes from the Heideggerian, not the Husserlian, tradition. Research claiming phenomenological theory is perhaps more widely Husserlian because Husserl’s project is closely tied with experimentalism so valued by many disciplines including composition (Williams; Elbow; Andersen; Phelps; Ihde; Haswell; West; Davis, K; Meyers), but the Husserlian tradition lacks the immediacy and complexity of voices that comes from a

² I recognize and acknowledge that scholars using this kind of phenomenological meditation are, in effect, bringing in other “voices” as they contextualize their discussion within conversations of a given field. My point is that phenomenological meditation allows for the interpretations of only one person, which necessarily limits the perspective.

conversation involving multiple, interwoven voices and contexts. Once more, a Husserlian study assumes that the researcher can, in fact, bracket out assumptions or reduce the data into essences.

The Heideggerian tradition, on the other hand, not only acknowledges contexts but celebrates them. As Pamela Moss suggests, "...the reader's preconceptions, 'enabling' prejudices, or foreknowledge are inevitable and valuable in interpreting a text. In fact, *they make understanding possible*" (italics added, qtd. in Broad 201). Heidegger introduced the concept of "being-in-the-world," an idea that suggests that we can simultaneously intersect multiple worlds. McConnell-Henry, Chapman, and Francis use nursing as an example for "being-in-the-world": "...when a nurse leaves a hospital the nurse is still within the world of nursing, and always able to understand, or consider, the meaning of 'being-in-the-world' of nursing" (9). This "being-in-the-world" meant that the "suspension" of beliefs was impossible: "Understanding is never without presuppositions. We do not, and cannot, understand anything from a purely objective position. We always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world" (Heidegger qtd. in McConnell-Henry et. al. 9). A nurse who is fully entrenched in her "being-in-the-world" of nursing could still understand the language and context of nursing even outside of her work day; she can help family and friends with medical concerns or read articles and literature with an insider's understanding. Likewise, a researcher fully embedded in her cultural situatedness can use that situatedness to her advantage: "...the researcher's ability to interpret the data [is] reliant on previous knowledge and understanding" (McConnell-Henry

et al. 9). The study design, the data collection, and the data analysis are all ways in which a researcher can call attention to her contexts and use her “being-in-the-world” (here, as a knowledge-maker in a particular discipline) to frame a discussion within disciplinary conventions.

To position oneself in the Heideggerian tradition, there are two particular beliefs (in Wrathall and Dreyfus’ terms) with which the researcher must accept. First, the researcher must insist that the participants in the study are experts on their own lived experiences; they are, in fact, co-researchers rather than subjects. Once more, the participants³ in such a study can help guide and shape the research project. Second, the researcher should not assume that there is an ultimate Truth (as Plato might define it), but she should believe that participants’ experiences are true. In other words, the researcher should not understand the truth of lived experience as a universal, collective experience but rather that “truth” is arrived at through contexts as experienced by an individual. In studies using phenomenological design, the researcher spends time reflecting in writing both before and after the engagement with the participants; these reflections offer a way for the researcher to unearth and acknowledge her own assumptions about the phenomenon, create a common language of understanding between herself and the participants, and record what parts of a phenomenon are essential to those who have experienced it.

³ Though some phenomenologists do, in fact, use the term “co-researchers” to describe participants (Colaizzi; Connolly; Kane), a majority of researchers continue to use the more familiar “participants” to describe the group being studied (Blow et. al.; Hussain; Kirova and Emme; Robertson-Malt; Svendler Nielsen). I chose to also use the terms “researcher” and “participants” in this study to more easily distinguish each agent syntactically.

TYPES OF PHENOMENOLOGIES

I should pause here to differentiate between several types of phenomenological projects. Compositionists seemed to have developed a sense of phenomenological theory from literary criticism, a sort of pedagogical movement which highlighted a reader's first experience with a work of literature. These types of phenomenologies involve the first-person description of an experience by the researcher herself. Williams' "A Phenomenology of Error" or Elbow's "Toward a Phenomenology of Freewriting" are seminal examples of this type of phenomenological study in composition studies. Similarly, feminist studies has used the first-person description of an experience to explore a phenomenon. Young's "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" is an example from feminist studies. These types of explorations—a type of critical meditation—are ways to approach ideas and even paradigms in new ways, pointing out the subjective connotations assumed "natural" to those ideas or paradigms. For example, Joseph Williams, in arguably one of the most familiar of phenomenologies in writing studies, removes linguistic "error" from "strictly an isolated item on a page" to a socially-constructed, fluid, and individual concept, heavy with meaning (153). The types of "errors" and the intense emotions those errors induce in a reader are, likewise, socially-constructed, fluid, and individual. One of Williams' main points is that, though scholarly readers may read an essay (even his own) without "mak[ing] error a part of our conscious field of attention" and therefore not noticing many errors (even the ones Williams himself placed in

the essay), writing instructors sometimes or often place error at the forefront of their consciousness when grading. “In short,” Williams says,

...if we read any text the way we read freshman essays, we will find many of the same kind of errors we routinely expect to find and therefore do find. But if we could read those student essays unreflexively, if we could make the ordinary kind of contract with those texts that we make with other kinds of texts, then we could find many fewer errors. (159)

Arguably, Williams’ phenomenology greatly influenced the field of writing studies by both examining error in critical ways as well as demonstrating his points about the consciousness of error by sprinkling errors throughout his published essay. His phenomenology is both scholarship and illustration.

However important, thoughtful, and remarkable Williams’ phenomenology might be, this type of exploration is firmly grounded in the Husserlian tradition. Like Elbow and Young, Williams explores his own reactions to a phenomenon (in Williams’ case, error) to find the essence or pure existence of the phenomenon—or at least the essence as it appeared to him in his own explorations.

If my current project on the lived experiences of freshman women writers were to use this type of phenomenology, I would not necessarily have to participate with students at all. Instead, I would simply engage in an examination of my own suppositions and experiences, exploring with different ways to approach the phenomenon. Researchers might find this type of phenomenology useful if they are suggesting a theoretical framework or are challenging the discipline to consider a phenomenon in creative ways, but this type of phenomenology did not appear to offer solutions to my research questions, questions that required me to interact with

students living the experience of first-year composition. That is, a critical meditation on women students in first-year composition did not seem to offer the missing element of the students' own voices. No matter how well-read or experienced I am as a Learning Center Director or Assistant professor, I needed the students' voices to ground my research in active, lived experience.

Similar to the critical meditation type of phenomenology is a type of writing called "phenomenological writing" or a first-person description of an often literary experience. Phenomenological writing has often been seen as a fruitful pedagogical tool used to help students explore their own first-person experiences. In phenomenological writing, the writer freewrites or brainstorms her experience with a phenomenon. The more detailed and rich the details, the better the phenomenological writing is considered to be. Jacobs describes the usefulness of phenomenological writing (though he terms it "personal writing") in composition pedagogy in "Existential Phenomenology and Personal Writing." Though phenomenological writing is sometimes used in a phenomenological study (for example, in a reflection journal), it is also used as an end unto itself. For example, van Manen uses phenomenological writing both to teach his students in education about phenomenology ("Practicing Phenomenological Writing") and to engage in phenomenological research (*"Doing" Phenomenological Research and Writing: An Introduction*). Though phenomenological writing can often serve a valuable purpose in a phenomenological research study, its primary intention is to engage the reader in her own critical meditation; it is, therefore, closely allied to Williams'

phenomenology in that its design is to help readers perform the same types of critical analyses that Williams performs..

If I were to use phenomenological writing in my current project, I would ask the students to respond, in writing, to a given prompt—perhaps about what literacy practices they already bring with them to the academy or how they expect to change as a result of their participation in first-year composition. Phenomenological writing can produce some of the results I hoped to gain from my interviews with participants, but I also wanted the chance to clarify and explore items that participants brought up naturally during conversation. I, therefore, used a type of phenomenological writing during my reflections (to be explained in a subsequent section), but I did not want to constrain the participants' involvement by asking them to compose what might be seen as "just another essay." Once more, I did not want my participants to necessarily become phenomenologists during the course of our interviews. Phenomenological writing would, perhaps, be a worthwhile strategy for development of critical thinking skills, but my purpose for this project is to focus on the lived experience as it is lived, as close to the moment as possible without the space for reflection.

The study I am conducting does not fit into either of the above categories of descriptive phenomenology; instead, I propose a study that seeks to understand the experiences of students in first-year composition—experiences which I, as a composition instructor fully entrenched in the infrastructure of power at an institution, cannot fully understand from a student's perspective—from a Heideggerian perspective. My research project, then, is akin to similar projects in

educational (e.g., van Manen and Adam's "The Phenomenology of Space in Writing Online"), nursing (e.g., Svendler Nielsen's "Children's Embodied Voices: Approaching Children's Experiences through Multi-Modal Interviewing"), or feminist research projects like the one conducted by Rivera-Fuentes and Birke.

In their article "Talking with/in Pain: Reflections on Bodies under Torture," the Rivera-Fuentes and Birke explore Rivera-Fuentes' experience of torture while held by the Chilean military. In this case, Birke and Rivera-Fuentes engage in a "feminist dialogic process" which disrupts "the power relations usually established within the production of knowledge... by linking—rather than confronting—pain and (academic) performance" (653-4, italics in original). That is, the authors explore a phenomenon, bodies in pain, which has no language in scientific discourse. Bodies are abstractions in the scientific community; furthermore, that bodies often "remember" pain in ways that henceforth modify lived experience (e.g., through migraines, ulcers, or even strained interactions with other people) after a traumatic event is obscured or dismissed in scientific reports. Rivera-Fuentes and Birke confront this disparity by layering a set of narratives to explain the experience of pain. First, Rivera-Fuentes describes her experience during the moments of torture. Then, Birke conducts a set of conversational interviews with Rivera-Fuentes. The first is about the difference between the human experience of pain and the "strange language by which the body's mechanisms are described in biomedicine" (657). The second is about language itself as an act of distancing from the body; when the primal experience of pain is fixed in language, it becomes more manageable, more appropriate: "I insist, though, that pain does have a voice, if not in words, then in its

performance....if you are able to...perform your pain in public...people doubt your experiences (as we all do sometimes), precisely because of that idea about pain having no language to express itself” (Rivera-Fuentes 661). The third and final interview between the two women focuses on the violence of the distance between academic (especially scientific) discourse and human subjects: “For [Birke], that [distancing] was sometimes a response to the sheer horror of the central tale, to being forced to imagine what torture feels like; far easier to retreat to the (for her) more familiar territory of academic pondering” (665). The central tale coupled with the three resulting interviews creates a dialogue for both authors as well as the audience to reach a shared understanding of bodies under torture.

What phenomenology offers to composition research, then, is the kind of interaction that Rivera-Fuentes and Birke demonstrate: the shared understanding between an “insider” and “outsider” of an experience. In a composition course (particularly an entry-level one), the difference between the instructor’s experience and the students’ experiences can be vast. Once more, traditional-aged students are particularly unfamiliar with college-level discourse, a discourse with which the instructor is not only familiar but in which she is practiced—so practiced, in fact, that some instructors and administrators have internalized the discourse as a natural outcome of their educations (i.e., the “familiar retreat” to which Birke refers). Before composition students can fully acclimate to academic discourse, instructors and students can have these phenomenological discussions—between “insider” and “outsider”—to help this transition be a meaningful one. What a Heideggerian perspective can offer to this type of research is an open

acknowledgment of the differing positions of power as well as a recognition of the students (like Rivera-Fuentes) as authorities of their own experiences.

There are several methodologies that recognize the difference between insider and outside knowledge, but these methodologies seem to lack some of the robust exploration that I was seeking for my study. I focus on two here (action research and ethnography) to explore why phenomenology fits my project most completely.

In the context of this project, action research might seem to offer a compelling way to research these students. Action research specifically aims to perform research that “is always relevant to the participants” (Sagor 3). The difference between phenomenology and action research, however, is the orientation of the researcher. Specifically, the Study of Inquiry in Education defines action research as “a disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by* and *for* those taking the action” (Sagor 3). In other words, the studies performed by action research are initiated by a teacher, for consumption by the teacher, and used by the teacher in subsequent lesson plans and classroom activities. Though the information gathered by this phenomenology might initiate some valuable classroom or programmatic changes, the study is not designed to do so; moreover, while action research focuses on a particular “practice or aspect of student learning” (Sagor 4), phenomenology resists limiting the study to a single item. Instead, phenomenology offers a very rich description of the participant’s life—which may or may not include student learning.

Another method which recognizes insider and outsider sensibilities is ethnography. Ethnography and phenomenology both ask a researcher to engage in

a community in which he or she is not a member—indeed a community in which he or she cannot be a member (because of race, age, ethno-cultural background, physical ability and the like)—but the methods have very different aims. Both ethnographers and phenomenologists seek to understand and catalog local activities to suggest larger trends. In other words, both methodologies may include similar practices—observations, interviews—but the purposes and goals of each methodology are importantly different. Ethnographers might focus on “immersion in a culture over a period of years, based on learning the language and participating in social events with them” (Silverman and Marvasti 70). That is, ethnographies approach cultural description through an *emic*—or “insider”—lens, and the ultimate outcome of such studies is to describe the workings of an entire community. Phenomenologists, on the other hand, privilege the individual. While ethnographers might ask, “How does this culture understand [x]?” the phenomenologist might ask, “How do these individuals experience [x]?” What phenomenology offers is a methodology that allows for the validity of personal experience and a method that encourages collecting data from multiple sites to substantiate these individual experiences.

In this particular study, an ethnography of composition at this institution might examine how the student body interprets and interacts with the stated outcomes and goals of composition. A phenomenology, however, would seek to understand the individual experiences of women currently enrolled in first-semester composition. The primary difference, then, is that ethnography would use

individual experiences to map a cultural position of composition, while phenomenology would foreground individual experience.

As a brief side note, I would like to call attention to the uncommonly used methodology known as “phenomenological ethnography.” Such a methodology might seem at first to employ the best aspects of both research methods. A closer look at the research, though, shows that the term “phenomenology” is used a bit differently by scholars in ethnography than scholars in phenomenology. For instance, scholars might refer to their methodology as a “phenomenologically influenced ethnography” (Katz and Csordas) or one that brings a “phenomenological sensibility” or a “phenomenological foundation” (Kusenbach) to the data collection and reporting. For example, in the Rivera-Fuentes and Birke article, a phenomenological ethnography might take several such projects to explain the experience of pain through torture of, for instance, women held by the Chilean military. As their project stands, however, a single phenomenological investigation foregrounds Rivera-Fuentes’ experience as a valid experience of pain through torture without comparing that experience to another’s. Though phenomenology has much to offer ethnography, the focus of ethnography remains the whole of a culture—the situated knowledge of a culture—rather than the unique experiences of individuals.

FROM WHICH THEORETICAL STANCE?

Though this project is decidedly aligned with the Heideggerian tradition, there are still variations within that tradition. The influence of *Being and Time* on a host of European and Continental philosophers (whether those philosophers defined themselves as aligned with Heidegger or opposed to him) reaches into

current-day philosophy and practice. There is a strand, however, of Heideggerian phenomenology that addresses both lived corporeal experience and feminist concerns: Judith Butler's phenomenology.

Butler's landmark work, *Gender Trouble*, has often linked her work with gender studies and queer theory, but her history reveals that, as Borgerson notes, Butler "is not primarily a queer theorist, but a phenomenologist" (65). Butler trained in graduate school at Yale with Maurice Natanson, a phenomenologist. Once more, Butler spent time in Germany on a Fulbright scholarship studying with Hans Georg Gadamer. Her approach to gender performance, then, is a phenomenological one; Butler sees "masculinity and femininity perform much the same role as concepts of subject and object; mind and body; and time and space in the history of phenomenology's development" (Borgerson 65). In other words, binaries of gender are constructed both by what is possible and by what is impossible. In *Bodies that Matter*, she says of the two, "This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of the intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside" (xi). Butler's phenomenological approach to the duality of gender can also be salient to a study of women in first-year composition, as I discuss below.

The phenomenological lens that Butler uses to examine gender can also provide some new and interesting ways of viewing women in first-year composition. Drawing heavily on Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Butler develops a phenomenological approach to deliberately explore the

experiences of those “not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms and who live with the threat of violence or the threat of unemployment or the threat of dispossession of some kind by virtue of their aberrant relation to the norm” (qtd. in Olson and Worsham 730). More specifically, Butler takes issue with the Heideggerian propensity to “take human subjectivity as a unitary starting point,” to argue that “the groundbreaking subject of phenomenology is a sexless pure ego or neutral *Dasein*”⁴ (Heinämaa and Rodemeyer 1-2). Like Heidegger, Butler theorizes the ways in which human experience can be explored, but she incorporates perception as a central tenant to understanding individual experience.

Through Butler’s phenomenological lens, we can understand more completely the individual lived experience of students as those students try on the different performative personalities or characters (via de Beauvoir). Students are undulating back and forth between subjectivity and objectivity in the composition classroom. That is, they are trying to authenticate their own voices while still maintaining an “academic” identity, “an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.... A performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 519-20). Butler’s sense of what she calls “becoming” (as defined by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*) appears similar to Bartholomae’s description of a student “trying on the discourse even though he doesn’t have the knowledge that makes the discourse more than a routine, a set of

⁴ The term *Dasein* comes from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*: “This being which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being, we shall denote by the term ‘Dasein’” (Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* 13). The essential qualities of *Dasein*, however, do not include a consciousness. In other words, a Being acting in the world does not necessarily account for his or her ontological existence; though the account is possible, it is not necessary for *Dasein*. Heinämaa and Rodemeyer’s description, then, of *Dasein* as “ego” is apt.

conventional rituals and gestures” (6). Similarly, focus on the social construction of writing has produced a variety of research (for example, Berkenkotter; Bizzell; Anson and Forsberg; McCarthy; and Faigley and Hansen) supporting the idea that a person (a novice) moves into a discourse community and “dare[s] to speak [the language], or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is ‘learned’” (Bartholomae 5). Yet the apparent similarities belie a more complex relationship. Butler, as opposed to scholars of academic discourse communities, resists the “unfortunate grammar” that suggests “that there is a ‘we’ or an ‘I’ that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 521). Instead, Butler complicates the idea of “the subject” as “the performer”:

I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. (*Bodies that Matter* 95)

In other words, Butler suggests that the subject does not “take up” or “resign herself” to a position; instead, the subject position is formed in a dialectic with an other, an outsider in a given socio-historical time and space. In the composition classroom, students become writers, in Butler’s terms, by the performative space that opens up between novice and expert; they do this becoming through the regularized reproduction of academic discourse (and perhaps pushing against that regularized discourse). Understanding that performative space, then, is imperative

to opening up the possibilities of reform, especially from women at an all-women's college.

There are some obvious connections with Butler's performative space and the space of a first-year composition classroom at an all-women's college. In a study exploring gender and writing, Pajares, Valiante and Cheong found that female students in elementary, middle, and high school "report higher self-efficacy in their writing at each level of schooling than do boys" (157). The authors speculate that "[l]anguage arts in school is typically associated with a feminine orientation in part because writing is viewed by most students, particularly younger students, as being a female domain" (157). What these findings suggest is perhaps that female students feel more welcomed by the language arts in general so, therefore, feel more competent in its performance. Yet this suggestion is challenged by a later study from Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers and Lawrence. The Troia, et al. study found that "girls reported writing for varied purposes more often than boys" and that "girls dominated online content generation through blogging and web page authoring activities" (22). Though writing may be "gender stereotyped as a feminine activity," girls seem to perform writing in a variety of contexts and may, therefore, feel more competent simply because they have practiced it more.

These findings by Pajares, Valiante and Cheong and Troia et al. demonstrate what I believe to be important about exploring these students' experience with first-year composition with interpretive phenomenology. If women do, in fact, engage in a variety of writing tasks, does this mean that they are less likely to encounter difficulties in the composition classroom? I suspect that women have additional

difficulties with academic writing tasks because they write in a variety of genres—but in genres which are trivialized by academic institutions. At the same time, however, women might bring with them to their first-year composition class a set of experiences which might include writing in a variety of genres. The dialectic that opens up in this performative space, then, allows women a chance to realize agency in how they accept or revise standard academic discourse.

What Butler's phenomenological lens adds to this project is a more expansive, even hopeful, version of Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology. She says that, yes, we may be created in our circumstances, but that same knowledge about our circumstances gives us the power and ability to resist those circumstances. Once more, we can choose the places and ways in which we wish to act—precisely because we already know the rules. What interpretive phenomenology (tempered with Butler) offers as well to exploring these kinds of performative spaces (those affiliating with becoming in the composition classroom) is the student voice. In other words, we instructors and administrators of writing base our assignments, course plans, and tests upon our admittedly broad experience, but our perspectives on student performance are limited without the students' own explanations of their lived experiences.

WHAT ABOUT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY?

A Heideggerian method which also incorporates Butler's awareness of the subjectivity of *Dasein* is a method that can address women students' experiences in the first-year composition classroom, yet the Heideggerian method poses some hurdles to the historically accepted notions of "reliability" and "validity." Research that cannot be reproduced is typically seen as less rigorous or scholarly, yet

phenomenology's task is precisely to unearth interpretations of human experience—a task that is, by definition, not reproducible in the collective.

Writing studies is not immune to the tension between human science research and empirical reliability and validity. Stephen North, for example, disapproves of Sondra Perl's research design in *The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers* because she "offers no evidence for either the validity or reliability of her system, and...she is vague about the collective designation of her categories, calling them behaviors" (Grant-Davie 279-80). More specifically, North critiques the choices that Perl makes during the coding process as not reproducible. At the same time, Janet Emig notes in "Inquiry Paradigms and Writing" that "[t]o examine how the world is experienced means necessarily to describe the nature of that world for the perceiver" (67). These two positions—one which appears to value some sort of standardized judgment of validity while the other appears to value multiple perspectives—are hardly reconciled in Janice Lauer and William Asher's definition of validity in *Composition Research: Empirical Designs*: "its ability to measure whatever it is intended to assess" (qtd. in Grant-Davie 280).

The difficulty in establishing rigorous research methods seems to arise from empiricism's ubiquity; that is, "reliability" and "validity" as defined by empirical science are taken as the standard from which deviations must be argued (Slomp and Fuite; Perelman; Osborne and Walker; Elbow, "Do We Need"). Cheryl Tatano Beck points out, however, that "[r]eliability and validity are two major areas where the criteria of logical empiricism appear to be imposed upon phenomenology" and that "[o]ne cannot assume reliability and validity have the same meaning in the two

paradigms of logical empiricism and the phenomenological framework” (254). .

Once more, phenomenologists themselves tend to resist a single definition of “rigorous,” thus making their scholarship seem ineligible for claims to knowledge. Phenomenology, however, was developed precisely because empirical science, though valuable, has limitations—especially when performing research on human subjects. For example, Osborne and Walker take issue with assessments that are unilateral and standardized across classrooms and cohorts (i.e., reliable). The authors argue “that all assessment is limited and, given that fact, we should stop working toward perfecting it technically”; in short, the authors propose an assessment system that pushes against both standardized assignments and standardized assessments. They “do not make any claims that the data [they] collect and the numbers [they] arrive at are somehow more accurate objective measures of the quality of student writing, somehow representative of the ‘Truth’ of student writing” (46). Instead, the authors suggest that instructional faculty—at differing levels of authority—are all working to develop disciplinary knowledge in students; in short, the professionalism and expertise of these instructional faculty should be trusted as a valued resource of their institutions. Other writing studies scholars (Adler-Kassner and O’Neill; Condon; Haswell; Neal) have also argued for the multiple, complexities in writing assessment. Though there does seem to be a large circle of academics pushing against the standardized, controlled assessment of writing, the attractiveness of data points across large sample sizes seems to maintain a foothold in research.

Phenomenology approaches this push for reliability and validity by asking only that the descriptions of experiences be reliable and valid to the person who has lived the experiences. In other words, the participant should be able to affect the description of her experience. Colaizzi proposes that researchers enter into a mutual dialogue with the participants in the study to assure that the representations of the experiences are accurate. "Validation" in this context is determined by the participants, not the researcher. In order for a "valid" interpretation of the phenomenon to be uncovered, Colaizzi argues, the dialogue between researcher and participant must be based upon a feeling of mutual trust: "Trusting dialogal research permits the coresearchers to illuminate dimensions of their lives which prior to this [conversation] could not be easily questioned" (qtd. in Beck 261). "Reliability" is similarly determined by the participants, but it does have a somewhat different usage than in that of empirical science. In the sciences, "reliability" is determined by a study's reproducibility by different scientists and labs in different locations. In a phenomenological study, though, the nature of human experience suggests that, once the participants are changed, the results will never be an exact replication. Therefore, reproduction of information occurs across situations rather than participants; a single participant, for example, should feel that her interpretations in different interviews are accurately represented.

Though a researcher's epistemological stance will be more explicitly revealed in the interpretation of the data than the design of the project, a phenomenological researcher should contextualize her own research before she begins her study. Her

own ideology about the project will help guide her decisions about participant selection, types of data collection methods, and interpretation.

HOW THEORETICAL STANCE IS TRANSLATED INTO RESEARCH METHODS

In current phenomenological research, the researcher involves herself, as much as possible, in the lives of the participants and, more important, in her own thoughts and biases about the community she studies. In addition, she also tests and re-tests her interpretations of the data with the participants themselves. This type of sustained interaction requires information to be collected broadly and recurrently. Several accepted strategies—observations, interviews, “ride-alongs”⁵—can be used to conduct a phenomenological study, but the ways in which a researcher uses these strategies can reveal how she values the participants’ involvement.

Phenomenology takes the ontological position that each individual experience becomes manifest in the person who has lived it; that is, each person’s experience of what Merleau-Ponty calls the “essence” of a situation is unique—even if that experience is shared with another person. Instead of generalizing the whole from a handful of cases, phenomenology seeks to identify themes that arise in a collective group of unique lived experiences. In this project, for instance, the importance of the themes that arise out of the interviews is not that I can point to several qualities of freshman women in a composition course. Instead, the themes are important because I can attempt to answer the question *How do individual women students experience composition?* The resulting information can help

⁵ “Ride-alongs” are similar to “shadowing.” In other words, the researcher might “ride along” with the participant as she goes about her day.

highlight the ways in which women are both the same and different from a “traditional” cohort of freshman students. This study, then, is a series of case studies which might encourage instructors of writing, writing program administrators, and other academic communities to engage phenomenologically with students in each new entering cohort within a variety of social settings (e.g., clubs or study abroad), academic settings (e.g., in classrooms, within committees, and during senior thesis preparation and undergraduate research), and cultural locations (e.g., in the dining hall during meals, in the quad during Field Day, in the Learning Center as peer tutors, and in Rotunda during visitation days).

For the current study of women in first-year composition, I have chosen to triangulate several strategies. First, information gleaned from such a study has to leave open the possibilities of conversation, which include methods like interviews and focus groups, so I have designed a set of interviews that will occur across about six weeks of the semester. Second, this study also requires the researcher be vigilant in her examination of her own biases, so I have included in this design certain spaces for self-examination, which include journaling. The reflection journals are a space for me to reflect on the interviews and examine any biases that reveal themselves there—not to dismiss or bracket out the biases; instead, the journals allow me to bring the biases forward, to admit them to the participant when needed, and to acknowledge the location from which I am reporting. Third, this study asks that students describe experiences for which they might not have the language. Taking my cue from Max van Manen, I have included in this design some opportunities for observation of the participants close to the moment of experience

(i.e., observation of the classroom simultaneously with the interviews).

Observation, for Van Manen, helps the researcher understand the metaphors offered by the participants at a deeper level. In other words, the participant can describe her feelings and impressions of an event or experience without having to remember or explain the circumstances surrounding that event or experience.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As Fleming, Gaidys, and Robb point out, the research question is “essential to ensure internal consistency as well as contributing to the expansion of knowledge” in the community of which a given phenomenon occurs (116), so a focused research question—particularly in a study without an accepted set of prescribed steps—is paramount to a study’s reliability. The phenomenologist, however, “cannot just write down his or her [research] question at the beginning of the study. There it is! Question mark at the end!” (van Manen 44). In order to alleviate the tension between these two extremes, scholars (Crist & Tanner; van Manen; Fleming, et. al.) suggest that phenomenological researchers operate inductively—starting with the broad themes and concerns while moving towards a more specific statement or observation. My broad research question, therefore, is “How do the lived experiences of first-year women’s lives affect their academic writing?” Though this broad question might encourage me to ask questions outside of my agenda, it is a complicated question with several sub-questions:

1. What lived experiences do first-year women students bring with them to the academy?

2. What material conditions of academic writing are unfamiliar/familiar to these women? More specifically, what literacy practices do women bring with them to the academy?
3. How do women's lived experiences shape their strategies for approaching academic writing?
4. How does the formal instruction of academic writing reshape these women's literacy practices, and how does it reshape their lived experiences?
5. How do the lived experiences of these first-year students inform and/or revise literacy practices in the academy?

These questions crafted in this way (in a loose chronology of the participants' experiences of writing in the academy) allow me to engage with the participants in a similar way to Royster and Kirsch's "critical imagination," which I detail earlier in this chapter but will briefly summarize here. Royster and Kirsch describe critical imagination as a tool for inquiry, "as a means for searching methodically, not so much for immutable truth but instead for what is likely or possible, given the facts at hand" (71). In other words, the authors describe a systematic way to look at the local data and contexts (what is available to hand, including current research and scholarly conversations)—what they call "tacking in"—and a way to look at larger trends (how this local data is situated within larger socio-historic contexts)—what they call "tacking out." My project aligns fairly closely with Royster and Kirsch's critical imagination; I can tack in by talking with students, observing the classrooms, and writing immediately in a reflection journal; I can tack out by transcribing the

interviews, reflecting upon the conversations with a distance. What my project proposes outside of critical imagination, however, is the student voice in the experience. That is, instead of using my own methodical structure to tack in and tack out, I have to contend with another voice in the moment, a voice which can cause me to course correct. Interpretive phenomenology, used within the context of a research study such as this one, does not rely on me alone. These women, in effect co-researchers, are allowed and even encouraged to correct my critical imaginings.

THE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

In a phenomenological study, participants cannot be chosen in a truly random fashion. That is, participants must be selected from a group that has experienced a given phenomenon. Since my study seeks to understand how the material conditions of women's lives affect their academic writing, a useful population from which to draw is first-year freshmen, or students who are not yet acclimated to academic writing in higher education. There is one course at this institution which serves as an entry-point to academic writing: ENG 111, "Principles of Writing." I contacted the faculty members of the English Department prior to the first day of class and requested an opportunity to find willing research participants in their sections. The faculty members also were informed of my interest in observing their classes and assured that the observations are not observations of instruction but observations of space—what does the architectural space look like? How do students orient themselves in the room? How do students interact with one another? How can the classroom atmosphere best be described? How dynamic is

the communication between students? The faculty members were offered a consent form for my observations (A copy of the faculty consent form can be found in Appendix D).⁶

Two faculty members (of a combined three sections) agreed to allow me access to their classrooms. I visited the class at an agreed-upon time to explain the research project, detail the requirements of any participants, explain the risks and benefits of participation, and offer a consent form to interested students—making sure to record the names of potential participants. (A copy of the student consent form can be found in Appendix E.) My introduction did not last more than five minutes. Once I visited three sections, I followed up the introductory session with an email to interested parties, reminding them to complete the consent form if they were still interested in participation.

This time lag between the introduction and the first interview had unintended benefits for me as a researcher. During the introduction in the three sections of ENG 111, I had collected the names of about 30 potential participants. Thirty is not a particularly odd number; John Creswell notes that phenomenological studies have varying numbers of participants: “In phenomenology, I have seen the number of participants range from 1 (Dukes) up to 325 (Polkinghorne). Dukes recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects, and in one phenomenology, Riemen studied 10 individuals” (*Qualitative Inquiry* 126). Because of the intensity of time and

⁶ Before I attended each section, I met individually with faculty members to discuss my research project and what the faculty member could expect from my sitting in his or her class. I also presented each faculty member with an informed consent form to sign. I offered to serve as a peer observer (a required faculty assessment) to each of the faculty members in exchange for observing their classrooms. One faculty member requested a formal report for peer observation; one faculty member did not.

resources needed to conduct this investigation, I thought that thirty participants for my study was too many, yet I did not expect and was overwhelmed with such a positive response. As a result, I did not have a particular process for eliminating candidates for the study. I chose to set up the first interview session with each participant who returned her consent form to me. From the resulting conversations, I would select the participants. All thirty candidates, however, did not return their consent forms. The time lag between the introduction and the first interview served as its own selection process. In the end, I had only seven candidates return their consent forms and set up the first interview. I initially envisioned a study with only three participants, but I felt that I could manage seven.⁷

As each participant stopped by my office to return her consent form and set up the appointment, I reiterated the nature of the study, that her conversations with me would be tape-recorded and transcribed, that her participation was voluntary, and that she may withdraw at any time. All seven participants set up weekly appointments, which I scheduled for an hour on my calendar (forty-five minutes for each interview and fifteen minutes for reflection).

⁷ After completing the study, I recognize that seven is perhaps too many participants for such an in-depth study. As I will note in later discussions, phenomenology requires that both researcher and participant engage fully in the relationship. That is, in addition to collecting data, transcribing interviews, reflecting on my own biases, working a full-time job, and participating in my disciplinary field, I also built seven new relationships with my participants. Those relationships are true exchanges; many of my participants and I still speak and share stories of successes and challenges with one another as I write this. Phenomenology asks of its researchers and participants to be changed as a result of the process. In similar studies in the future, I would firmly limit my number of participants to three.

Because I hoped to capture first-year women's experience with composition in the very early stages of their composition course, I was very eager to begin my study as early in the semester as possible. In the fall of 2012, classes began on Wednesday, August 15. Within two weeks, I had visited all three sections for introductions and had seen many participants in my office to schedule appointments.⁸ By the third full week of September, I had all participants in for at least their first interview.⁹

In addition to meeting with the participants weekly, I also observed the three sections of ENG 111 in which the participants were enrolled. I cannot overstate how important these observations were. Observation, claims van Manen, "generates different forms of experiential material than we tend to get with the written or the interview approach" (*Researching Lived Experience* 68); classroom observation, coupled with interview material and reflection writing, can develop a richer glimpse into the experiences of the participants. Indeed, many times during the interviews, I would ask the student about a particular in-class activity or occurrence. Because I had been a first-hand observer to her experience, we were better able to talk through generalities and arrive at specifics, to reach a shared understanding of an event though that understanding might come from two different perspectives.

⁸ A detailed outline of the selection and interview process can be found in Appendix F.

⁹ Though I was able to begin interviewing an observing processes early in the semester, I found that my tidy assumption—namely, that I could conduct my research project within a single unit of study (i.e., one formal paper)—was misguided. The instructors approached writing assignments very differently. In one section, September was after a paper had already been due, graded, and returned; in the other two sections, no formal paper had been assigned, though several low-stakes assignments had been due. In similar research projects in the future, I would choose to introduce the project on the first day of class and start the observations within the second week to understand more fully what brand-new students were experiencing with their first college writing assignment.

Finally, a note should be made about the processes of interviewing and observing. Gadamer, in particular, insisted that "collecting data" or "finding results" is impossible in phenomenological study. That is, one individual cannot possibly fully know what the lifeworld is like for another individual, due to their particular historical contexts. "It is thus important," claims Fleming, et al, "that the researcher does not attempt to see through the eyes of the participants to understand the phenomenon of interest. Instead they work together to reach a shared understanding. This is called the hermeneutic difference and is a structural element of hermeneutic understanding" (117-8). For example, a researcher might ask a participant to clarify a statement, as I did with my participants Camden and Juliet. (The interviews will be outlined at length in chapter four.) Since the researcher and participants need to develop this "shared understanding"—of language, of situations—then the interviews and observations cannot be limited to only one sitting. Though the phenomenological process could go on indefinitely, I limited my interviewing and observing to a "unit" of writing instruction (i.e., until a paper is due), so the interviews and observations lasted approximately six weeks.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In order to fully explore the kinds of textual descriptions that would be produced by this project, I analyzed the data collection process in segments, yet the data collection process was not linear. There are decidedly three dialogic stages of the data collection process, but these stages were recursive and overlapping. I will divide the discussion by the types of dialogues—classroom observations, interviews

with participants, reflection journals—with the caveat that the dialogues were iterative and simultaneous.

Before the researcher begins working with the participants, she must, according to Fleming et. al., evoke “confrontation with different beliefs such as opinions of other researchers, colleagues or traditional texts” (117). The method by which a researcher explores and exposes her preunderstandings requires a sort of sustained critical thinking. During the interviews, for example, the researcher may find that she found a participant’s response did not fit with her expectations, so she can retreat to her reflective space to journal or brainstorm potential explanations for that incongruity. The researcher may even ask the participant about that particular concern at the next interview. I found myself often returning to earlier interviews to clarify information that the participants had offered. Sometimes, I found that I had simply misunderstood the participant’s original intent; more often, I found that the participant had proposed an idea that I had not previously considered, an idea that was both reasonable and sound.

I found the reflections to be the most difficult by far of all the parts of phenomenology. At the end of each interview, I sat for fifteen minutes to reflect on my part in the interview while it was still fresh in my memory. First, I found some gaps between what I know I should have said and what I actually did say. In the midst of a discussion, sometimes the most appropriate comment does not come to mind, and I found myself critiquing my own interview style rather harshly. One bias that I had to confront is that I consider myself a skilled conversationalist, so I found it hard to listen to places in which I did not perform to my own rigid standards.

Second, I found the time just after the interview to be less-than-conducive to reflection. In the middle of a busy day at work, I would often have students standing outside my office door, or I would have a list of urgent emails to answer. Dedicating that mere fifteen minutes to my project was difficult for me to keep sacred because of my colleagues' and students' demands on my time.

The interviews themselves were based upon a previously determined set of questions; those questions, however, were merely a set of guiding principles by which to conduct the interviews, not a strict procedure. For example, the researcher may begin the initial interview with a participant with a brief outline of the agenda for that meeting—explanation of the interview, a set of predetermined questions, and ask for any questions about process that the student may have. Then, the researcher may introduce a topic—the next student assignment, for instance. In this case, the researcher might ask, "What are you working on in class?" The researcher might then ask the student to explain the assignment—keeping an eye on concreteness and detail. The conversation would continue in this fashion—the researcher asking a broad question and then prompting the student for additional detail—until the interview reaches some sort of potential theme. The original research question involves material conditions and academic writing. The researcher, therefore, would pay close attention to the parts of the interview that highlight material conditions. If a student were to comment that she "has always been bad at writing," the phenomenologist would perhaps ask her to think of another thing that seemed as difficult to her as writing. Learning to play an instrument? Learning to drive a car? In this sense, metaphor becomes the primary

vehicle by which students can describe their lived experiences. Once more, phenomenological researchers develop interview questions that evoke “concreteness” of an answer, the specificity of an event. Continuing with the “being bad at writing is like learning to play an instrument” metaphor, the researcher could first ask the participant about learning to play an instrument—what specific part seems difficult? Learning scales? Sustaining a habit of practice? Sight-reading? Maintaining a specific rhythm? As the participant begins to define how learning to play an instrument is hard, the researcher prompts her to map those difficulties in instrument-playing onto the difficulties with writing. In this way, the researcher and participant move from generalizations about “mysterious” ideas to specifics about a concrete experience: Being bad at writing is like being bad at learning to play a musical instrument because of learning scales (or learning the rules of order) and sustaining a habit of practice. As Wertz explains, “The most outstanding quality of data sought by the phenomenological researcher is concreteness, that the descriptions reflect the details of lived situations rather than hypotheses or opinions about, explanations of, interpretations of, inferences, or generalizations regarding the phenomenon” (171). The questions that the researcher asks arise from her familiarity or expertise about the given topic, yet the researcher must allow for information to arise that does not fit her preconceived notions.

My intention for every interview was to conduct it as a conversation—allowing the student to direct the subject-matter. Then I would fill with clarification questions and paraphrasing. I allowed the conversations to sometimes drift far afield of my original goal of the interview because, sometimes, those “drifts”

led to important information about the participant's experience. Once more, if a participant came into the interview clearly anxious or upset, I would forgo the interview questions to address her most immediate concerns. In two notable interview sessions, a personal major life crisis occurred in each of the participants' lives, and we chose to focus on her crisis rather than the interviews. The lived experiences of women in first-year composition do not happen neatly and in order; I wanted to allow room for them to actually live their experiences in college without directing or altering their paths, while still providing support for their most urgent needs.

Because the interviews in this project were sustained interactions, clarifying the participants' descriptions was a sustained effort. In other words, I might believe that I understood a participant's description, but a comment in a later interview might cause me to question my original interpretation. I was able to ask the participants directly about a previous conversation and also ask them to explain. Several times during the conversations, I allowed a participant to sit in silence with her thoughts. I was overly cautious not to interrupt her or suggest a word on her behalf.

TEXTUAL ARTIFACTS

The researcher conducts a dialogue with herself by journaling (or other types of reflection) and conducts a dialogue with participants; in addition to those tasks, the researcher also engages with the textual artifacts of the dialogues. In the case of this study, my artifacts included the transcribed interviews, my own journaling

notes, any handouts or assignment sheets collected during classroom observations, and any papers shared with me by participants. Each of these artifacts was revisited recursively throughout the study.

Transcription in a phenomenological study is not a simple typing out of the word-by-word discussion without noting "the words on tape where the two partners are working together to create a common understanding" (Fleming, et. al. 118). In other words, it is incumbent on the researcher to note such "texts" as vocalics and non-verbal communication that may have occurred during the interview yet are hardly expressed in a written transcript. The next step in van Manen's scheme—moving from the broad to the specific—relies heavily on this transcribed "text." As Fleming, et al. note, "some [researchers] will return transcripts, while others may offer a summary of the initial analysis. Yet others will begin a subsequent interview with a discussion of key points from the previous interview" (118). The method I used is the latter one; I did not transcribe the entirety of each interview during the data collection stage. Because I met with the seven participants once per week as well as observed the three classroom sections once per week, I simply did not have the time to transcribe the entirety of the interviews between each session. Instead, I took notes from my reflection process and offered those as discussion points in a subsequent interview. I also had the original list of questions I proposed to ask during the interviews. (See Appendix F.)

Once a researcher has decided that phenomenology is, in fact, the best method to collect data to support her research questions, she must also determine which strand of phenomenology is best for uncovering human experience of a given

phenomenon. Here, in this study, I adopt a phenomenological methodology that is informed by Heidegger and Butler (via Beauvior) because this approach attends to both experiences of women and experiences of underrepresented voices. In addition, this method captures the material conditions of a traditional first-year composition student—young, inexperienced, and relatively powerless—yet also offers a space for reform. The design of the project, then, also reveals this ideology. The class observations, interviews, and reflection journals work in collaboration to produce a whole picture of each participant.

In the next two chapters, I report on my findings of the study as well as indicate some implications for phenomenologies in the discipline. More specifically, in chapter four, I report selected transcripts and artifacts from my research. Though I place the data within the framework of my research questions, I outline the entirety of experience with selected participants to answer those questions. By reporting my findings in the contexts in which they occur, I hope to demonstrate the kinds of rich and complex data that can be revealed through similar studies. In chapter five, I explore the ways in which phenomenologies such as the one outlined in this project can potentially benefit departments, program administrators, instructors of writing, students, and the institution at large.

CHAPTER 4

A FIRST-PERSON DESCRIPTION OF FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

In order to describe how the lived experiences of first-year women's lives affect their academic writing, I embark upon a phenomenological study influenced by Heidegger and Butler. I collect information broadly from interviews with participants then enrolled in ENG 111, a first-year composition course; observe the ENG 111 classrooms in which those students attended; and reflect upon my own experience during the data collection phase by journaling.¹ After the study had concluded, I had a wealth of notes, transcripts, course handouts, and example student writing with which to grapple.

A phenomenological study such as this one suggests that the reporting and analysis of that data align with the methodological stance. For example, in a traditional empirical study, I might put that data into clusters or groups, isolating certain themes or motifs. This study, however, rooted in Heidegger's phenomenological method, resists categories. Heidegger argued that the past (e.g., previous experience, memories), the present (e.g., the current experience, the researcher's interpretation), and the future (e.g., the change in the participants, the change in the institution) are inexorably connected in such complex ways that those time/spaces—past, present, and future—cannot be separated while still maintaining the integrity of the human experience. It is, therefore, incumbent upon

¹ I received IRB approval for this project.

me as researcher to report and analyze the data in a way that supports a phenomenological understanding.

In order to stay in line with Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology, Heidegger explains that "understanding must be made 'explicit'" (Carman 207). To Heidegger, this call is quite pragmatic. In other words, Heidegger's version of interpretation "must consist in manifesting, demonstrating, or showing the how that we know.... [It is a] demonstrative practice, where 'demonstrative' means indicating, manifesting, showing" (Carman 210). In a pure phenomenological report, I might provide conversations in recursive fashion, building upon understandings inductively. This reporting would include dialogue, interruptions, and non-verbal cues; it would allow the reader, through engagement with the phenomenological process, to arrive at a mutual understanding with the participants (including the researcher) of the study.

In a dissertation, which celebrates certain organizational conventions and asks the writer to demonstrate disciplinary understanding within an accepted interpretive strategy, a reader may become confused or, worse, bored by such a report. The conventions of a traditional dissertation ask that the research questions be stated at the beginning, deductively, and the "findings" reported at the end. The dissertation construction (if not always the composing process) directly challenges phenomenological reporting.

Because of the incompatibility of phenomenological reporting and the traditional dissertation project, I have tried to identify a compromise. Returning to Royster and Kirsch's feminist rhetorical practices, I attempt to tack in and out

between the two immediate voices (researcher and participant) and the voice of the distanced researcher, complete with disciplinary expertise. I tack in by including descriptions of the classroom environment as a way to immerse the data within the local classroom context while still acknowledging the differences between disposition and timbre of each classroom cohort. I then tack out by providing the institutional memory for the courses and texts with which the students engage. I tack in again by reflecting on my immediate responses to an interview and tack out by reviewing these journals after some passage of time and the benefit of reviewing interview transcripts. Still, I recognize that readers need more specific landmarks to follow, so I lean on my research questions to provide those landmarks. I began this project with five broad research questions, and I allowed space for emerging themes in the data by using those questions as an organizing principle rather than a static construction. Similarly, I will use those same questions to guide my reporting of the data. Unlike a traditional reporting scheme, however, I allow the voices of the participants of the study to demonstrate meaning. More specifically, I allow the interviews, observations, and reflection journals to speak in circuitous ways to create a glimpse into a student's lived experience as she lives it.

This type of organization is not without precedent. Svedlund, Danielson, and Norberg use a Heideggerian interpretive approach when studying the experiences of women during the acute phase of a myocardial infarction (heart attack). The research team simply said, "Please tell me how you experienced your myocardial infarction" (199). From this apparently simple beginning, the researchers allowed the women to speak about their experiences without interruption. The only limits

put on the conversation were pauses to ask clarification questions such as “So, then what? What happened? How do you feel about this?” (199). The researchers found that “[t]he different parts of the method repeatedly turn in a spiral fashion from understanding to explanation and back to understanding.... The method appears more linear than it is” (199). Once more the researchers did “not [discuss] the meaning of lived experience as a general phenomenon but in relation to the women studied” (199). In other words, the researchers situated their data according to an individual participant’s particular socio-historical, local, and experiential context.

Though the Svedlund, et al. study begins as a Heideggerian study, the authors ultimately resort to Husserlian methods to interpret their data. That is, the authors choose to code the transcribed data into themes, thus reducing the data from a rich, contextual experience to a set of universal themes, Husserlian essences. The authors find that many of the women experienced guilt and shame during the initial stages of their heart attacks and argue that this guilt and shame can be addressed by the nursing staff attending to the women in the cardiac care unit. Thus, the researchers universalize the experience of guilt and shame to all (or at least most) women in the acute phase of a heart attack.

What Svedlund, et al. do in their study is mix ontologies. There could be a variety of reasons for this shift between Heideggerian phenomenology and a Husserlian one in the study—the apparent incompatibility between Heideggerian interpretation and scientific inquiry; the perception that nursing research must align itself with the largely androcentric, logical, detached medical research establishment; or even the focus on scientific research to produce reproducible

results—but I want to push against these forces. Instead, I would like to report the data collected for this project in a way that keeps the individual contexts for each participant intact. For this reason, my data, though organized in a rather linear fashion according to research question, will maintain the conversational context as much as possible. I recognize and acknowledge that my choices in what data to include and how to include it are part of my interpretative analysis.

I reiterate, however, that the data collected, though useful in examining my proposed research questions, may, at times, produce ideas, considerations, and themes outside of my original research design. When those “outliers” occur, they will be noted in the section of the research question that resembles that outlier topically.

In the following sections, I will begin by discussing the classroom environment in which these participants had their first encounter with composition in higher education. I then outline the structure of the data collection, which can be rather mysterious in a phenomenological study. That is, there are certain structures set up for a phenomenological study, but the researcher has to be aware of when those structures are useful and when they are not. Ultimately, the individual participant must feel that her meanings are understood and accepted by the researcher. I will provide an example of the interview process, so I can highlight how the interviews can begin in one direction and take an entirely different direction in the process. This malleability does not, however, indicate carelessness; instead, it indicates that the researcher is attendant to the participant’s experience.

Once I have described the data collection structure, I then divide up the data reporting by research question, of which there are five, and further divide each question by type of data (e.g., interview, reflection journal) to provide landmarks for the reader to follow. Within each section, however, I do allow the course of the conversation to flow unfettered. In this way, I hope to produce, if not the entirety, at least the model of a phenomenological study.

Finally, after each research question, I will provide some analysis of the phenomenological experience as it was reported by the participant. This includes highlighting important ideas that emerged from the data as well as connections between the individual students' experiences.

THE ENG 111 CLASSROOM

Because the interviews with participants coincided with observations of the classroom, a brief description of the classroom environment is relevant. The three sections of ENG 111 I observed were similar in design if slightly different in content. That is, ENG 111 is a highly managed course. In the fall of 2012, the English Department offered each of the instructors of ENG 111 a syllabus template. The requirements of ENG 111 included:

- at least 6-8 essays, some of which may be in class and one of which must include revision
- at least one essay should be 1000 words (3-4 pages)
- 2 conferences with the instructor
- 1 library project
- an introduction to plagiarism

- a passing score on both parts of the competency test
- an oral presentation
- an introduction to the Learning Center
- a final exam of some kind. (Syllabus Template, 2012)

When I describe ENG 111 as “highly managed,” I am suggesting that these requirements leave little room for individual pedagogical style. In addition to assigning six original papers (not including revisions or peer reviews), a week-long library introduction, and an oral presentation, the instructor must prepare students for the competency test as well as a final exam. Each instructor certainly may select the content that he or she uses for each of these assignments, but he or she has little space or time to develop his or her own techniques for writing instruction.

The three sections of ENG 111 were taught by two instructors, both adjuncts that teach composition at other institutions. Both instructors are instructors that teach part-time by choice; one enjoys the flexibility of part-time work, while the other is a retired instructor who supplements his income by adjuncting. The instructors for this study, then, claim to choose composition as an engaging and fulfilling way to meet their financial needs. I point out this similarity because I want to suggest that, even though the data collected is from the students’ perspectives, the instructors are both well-meaning but may be unintentionally causing confusion for their students—especially if those instructors are unaware of the lived experiences their students bring to the classroom.

Three separate sections of ENG 111 were observed during the approximately six weeks of interviews. I entered each classroom just before class with the other

students, sat in the audience with them, took my notes with paper and pen, and left when the class was dismissed. I participated when the instructor asked me to but otherwise did not contribute to the class discussion. After some initial curiosity and uncertainty about my presence in the classroom, the students began to largely accept me as normative.

Because I hoped to observe the classroom in as “natural” a state as possible, I valued my role as “classroom fixture.” In most cases, the instructors did not acknowledge my presence as a faculty member at the college or as a fellow composition instructor. In hindsight, I should have discussed the challenges of being a silent observer in the classroom space more explicitly with the instructors. For example, during an early peer review session in section two, I understood intuitively that I should not participate in a “peer” review—not only because I am a faculty member and director of tutorial services but also because I had not read the assigned essay prompt (did not, in fact, know what the essay was) and had very little understanding of the assignment in general, not to mention that my professional faculty status indicated a power differential that would undercut the benefits of peer review. The instructor also seemed to understand that I should not participate in peer review; she asked me to take a chair outside of the peer review groups, so I could observe without participating.

The differences between my understanding of my role and the instructor’s understanding of my role, however, came into sharp relief during this peer review. As the students shifted their chairs and got into groups for peer review, the instructor pulled a chair up to the front of the class. In effect, I was sitting alone at

the head of the class, right beside the teacher's desk. Before this review, I had been mostly if not completely inconspicuous, but now I was, literally, in the teacher position in the classroom.

CLASS OBSERVATION (SECTION 2), SEPTEMBER 5, 2012

I am feeling very vulnerable now because I had to change seats, and now I am up right beside the teacher's desk, turned to the side, so I almost face the room....The instructor just came up and talked with me about [departmental issues]—that makes a connection that I did not want to overtly make—like we are secret comrades.

I have had to, literally, sit on my hands at times—not because I think I can do the peer review better than the instructor but because I see that the instructor is busy with one student, while two others are raising their hands. There are two instructors here... why not help? The students with raised hands look between me (at the front of the room) and the instructor (busy with another student). I stayed seated in my chair.

The general tenor of this section of ENG 111 changed for me after this peer review. Before this class, my role and authority in the classroom had been ill-defined, so students didn't necessarily see me as a power figure (or at least not as powerful as the instructor). After the peer review, however, the instructor had physically put me on the hierarchy at an equivalent level to her; I was of equal importance in the room. Once those lines had been defined, I had to make a concerted effort to maintain my autonomy. After the peer review, students knew my name; they saw me as another figurehead who could direct them in their success in the course.

CLASS OBSERVATION (SECTION 2), SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

When I came in, a few minutes early, students called me by name to ask questions about the upcoming paper (of which they have a draft due today). I used Socratic questioning techniques to help them arrive at their own opinions; then, I recognized that they were tired and wanted to vent, so I let them vent.

Unfortunately, the instructor came in and wanted to get in on the conversation; her response to the discussion made it clear to me that I was usurping some territory that she had planned to cover in today's class—even perhaps providing information that she did not want me to provide. I just nodded at her comments, put my head down [bowed my head], and started taking my notes.

Though I cannot be sure exactly what was going through the instructor's and the students' minds, I can say that we all were negotiating power relationships. This instructor, an adjunct, had an active observer in her classroom who was also a full-time teaching faculty member. This instructor had also requested that I provide her with an official teaching observation letter for her professional portfolio. In some ways, I imagine that she felt obliged to nod to our authority differences. By doing so, however, she had (perhaps unintentionally) placed me in equivalent relationship to her own authority in the classroom. The students—perhaps unaware of the differences between a full-time teaching faculty member and an adjunct faculty member and definitely unaware of the letter I was to write in support of this faculty member's teaching—saw us as equals. They asked me questions about their assignment possibly because they could not tell the difference between their instructor of record and an instructor of a similar section of composition. In the highly-structured environment of ENG 111, in which all students cover the same types of writing and move toward a competency test delivered *en masse*, it is not

unreasonable to assume that the students thought that all instructors were the same.

Besides this negotiation of power and authority in this particular classroom, there was another power relationship being negotiated. I observed each of the sections of ENG 111 as a doctoral student. My role in the classroom was one of researcher, a researcher who had yet to have her work reviewed and accepted by a committee of authorities. The adjunct instructor, however, had already received her doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with a focus on writing with technologies. Though her role in the college community was one of novice, her role in the discipline was one of expert. She is a published author and a frequent conference presenter. From the evidence of her activity in the discipline, she is well-respected and valued. In the college, then, my title provided me with some authority; the discipline provided this instructor with hers.

I bring up the difficulties in negotiating power relationships in the classroom because my experiences in the different sections of ENG 111 directly affect my interpretation and conduct in the interviews with participants as well as my reflection journals. Though I rarely acknowledge the power relationships in my conversations or writing, power differentials create the landscape in which the following interviews and journals take place. For example, I try to find appropriate lines of communication to express my concerns about one instructor's teaching methods to the Director of Composition; in another case, I try to coach a participant in the final exam structure, so she can better prepare for it. During both data

collection and reporting, I find myself negotiating my multiple roles as dissertator, English composition faculty, and Learning Center Director.

THE STRUCTURE OF DATA COLLECTION

Though I tended to start with my pre-planned questions for all of the participants (see Appendix F), I allowed the participants to take the conversation in their own directions. For example, when I asked the question “Do you write outside of school?” I allowed the participants to talk about the types of writing they did—which varied widely—and would often ask follow-up questions about the specific types of writing. The following excerpted interview will, I think, demonstrate both the conversational nature of the interview as well as the way in which I asked questions to reach a shared understanding of the topic.

This was my second interview with Camden², and we had begun that particular part of the interview with question eleven of my scripted piece: What types of comments have you been receiving from your instructor of ENG 111? Do you think the comments have been fair and reasonable? Why or why not? In response to my questions, Camden mentioned that she had just received a paper back from her instructor with comments. I asked if Camden would mind sharing the paper and comments with me. After a few technological bumps, Camden was able to pull up the graded paper on her laptop for us to look over.

Researcher: That looks very good. I mean... it's not, like... it's not, like, you opened it up and it just has bleeding all over it, you know?

[Camden giggles]

² Participants' names have been changed.

Researcher: ... there are a few little things, but it looks really good. How... how did you feel about that paper when you turned it in?

Camden: I... I thought it was great. I read it to my mom... she was, like, [high-pitched "ooh"]... I always read my stuff to my mom. Umm... but she did... she didn't really know what to say about one little thing that I put in there.... She was, like, that doesn't sound... quite right... at first.

Researcher: Which... which one was that? Do you mind showing me?

Camden: Umm... I was talking about... which point... do I feel... um... does it apply to society.

Researcher: Okay.

[Both researcher and participant look at the document on screen.]

Camden: And, um, I was talking about how she [the author of the article] was saying that people aren't truly evil... they just have... they just have, uh, evil... what you call it... motives. And, um, I was saying how I believe that's true... but people in society don't necessarily feel that way. And my mom said I kind of put it as that, like, she [her mother] could tell that I didn't agree. Why they're... you know... I was trying to say that society agrees... I don't.

Researcher: Got cha. Got cha, got cha, got cha.

Camden: So it wasn't very clear, so I was saying how, um... 911... um... society still feels this hatred towards a whole... conglomerate of people that only a few people did, you know? So... um... that's basically what I was talking about. It's just like... not everybody feels that way, you know.

Researcher: So she thought you were agreeing with that statement...

Camden: Yes.

Researcher: Got it. And you were saying *society* agrees with that, not me.

Camden: Hmm-mm.

This excerpt from an interview, I think, demonstrates the difficulty of both parties to find common understanding about the topic at hand, in this case, the feedback on an essay. Similarly, I, as a researcher and doctoral student, was aware that I was conducting a phenomenological interview, the purpose of which was to gather data. The discussion I have with Camden, though, demonstrates how, on occasion, the interviews have to veer from my pre-planned questions in order to seek out shared understanding. In other words, my first objective during the interviews was to let the participants express their experiences, to ask questions until their meanings were clear to me. My first objective was not to gather the answers to prescribed interview questions. Instead, my first objective was to introduce a topic or area that seemed to need exploration and let the participant lead me through her experience.

In fact, talking through Camden's paper actually made some of my scripted questions seem irrelevant. For example, question fifteen of my script calls for me to ask about topic choice: If at the planning stage, what topic(s) are you considering? After speaking with Camden about her recent paper, however, I recognized that students in this section of ENG 111 had very little choice regarding their topics. The instructor had given them several articles to read, but the articles were all focused on the same topic (body compartment in athletics), and the students had to pick

from just those few articles to compose an essay. I simply threw out that question because I already knew the answer: the topics she was considering were given to her by the instructor.

My data did not only consist of observations and interviews, however. I also sat for about fifteen minutes after each interview to reflect on my own experience during the process. These reflection journals were a place for me to explore my own lived experience in the nearest immediate moment as well as a place to question my own beliefs about the participants, the design and delivery of composition, and the position(s) I held as both doctoral student and full-time faculty member of this institution.

During the reflection writing, I found that the writing—impromptu and unrevised for consumption by an external audience—typically centered on a prevailing theme within the interview. That is, my experience seemed to foreground a particular exchange, even if, during the transcription, I found the reality of the exchange was much more trivial than I imagined during the reflection journal. For example, Carmen³ made an appointment with me earlier than her regularly scheduled interview. She had a proposal due for class, and she was particularly anxious about it. In particular, she was concerned about the structure her argument in general and the structure of a proposal specifically.

³ “Carmen” actually chose her own pseudonym before she knew my first name is also Carmen. Because she was so adamant to use this pseudonym even after I told her my name, I felt like I should allow her to be called the name she wanted to be called. Throughout this interpretation, I will refer to her as “Carmen” and myself as “the researcher.”

Before Carmen arrived to her appointment, I was trying to tap into the most generous part of my being. The proposal that Carmen and her classmates were assigned was a task that was confusing to me as an instructor—even after I had had lengthy email exchanges with the instructor to garner some sort of explanation of the assignment. (The email exchanges had begun when the writing tutors could not understand the assignment and had asked me to step in as mediator.) Once more, I felt embarrassingly inept at assisting students with the assignment because I could not place the assignment in the context of the course or in the context of college composition. I was already frustrated with this assignment before Carmen even asked for an appointment. Before she arrived, then, I was keenly aware of my own resistance to the assignment and was determined to keep my reservations from affecting Carmen's progress with the assignment.

To demonstrate the potential differences between my initial reaction to an interview and the reality of the interview, I will present two pieces of data: a reflection journal and the interview transcript. I will present them in reverse chronological order because this sequence most closely resembles the way I experienced them in real-time. In other words, I would have experienced the interview, then reflected upon that interview while still close to the experience, and finally transcribed the interview. I hope to, in part, recreate the time lapse (and, therefore, the distance) between my in-the-moment reactions to the interview and my analysis of the interview with the benefit of retrospect.

REFLECTION JOURNAL, OCTOBER 12, 2012

Ugh. I am so frustrated with this proposal assignment. I don't see the value in it, so I guess I'm resistant to its being assigned at all. I understand what the instructor is attempting to do (provide smaller steps on the way to a bigger project), but the steps are not clear to me or the students. The purpose is not clear to me or the students. Every time [Carmen] said something about it, I could feel my face wrinkle. I don't remember rolling my eyes, but I wouldn't be surprised to find out I did. I don't think I said anything too negative, but students can pick up on negative feelings. What I wanted to say is, "This assignment is confusing and not important for your final paper [research paper]." But I'm sure I didn't actually say that.

What this journal reveals about my thinking during Carmen's appointment is that I was very concerned about my own appearance and response to her assignment. Very little in this reflection is about Carmen's experience with the assignment. This reflection journal is in stark contrast to the actual interview.

INTERVIEW WITH CARMEN, OCTOBER 12, 2012

Researcher: All right. [participant has brought in a draft of her proposal, which is why she is in before it is due.] I've been reading proposals all day, so maybe I can do okay on this one...

Carmen: Hopefully. Because I think it's, like, really, really bad right now.

Researcher: Why? What do you think's bad about it?

Carmen: I don't know... it doesn't feel like it's organized to me. Like, I was writing, and it didn't even make sense to myself.

Researcher: [laugh]

Carmen: I was, like, oh, my gosh.

Researcher: [Carmen produces a hard copy draft and pulls up the paper on her laptop, so both the researcher and she can follow along on separate copies; there is long pause while researcher is reading the paper] Okay, so if you... this is a paper that... is telling us what you're going to do on your last paper, right?

[Carmen nods]

Researcher: Okay. I'll get a colored pencil... [movement to get a colored pen]... so you can see it better. Um... [long pause]... so... before I even read past this, I... I still don't know what your proposal is at this point...

Carmen: I wasn't really sure how to write that. Do you just write, "I propose to write about...." I wasn't really sure.

Researcher: If you'd like...yeah... or "I would like to write about this for my final paper..." or... "My research will do this..."

Carmen: I just wasn't really sure how to write that.

[long pause while researcher reads more of the proposal; Carmen begins typing directly into the document with her own notes about the conversation]

[Carmen and the researcher discuss some formatting issues with Microsoft Word before getting back to the paper itself.]

Researcher: So... what do you think your... What is your research on?

Carmen: Umm... miscommunications between men and women who are married or dating... or just friends.

Researcher: Okay. So your proposal is kind of about... partners, I guess. Male and female partners. [long pause while researcher reads] Okay... what is that word... what does that mean? Cat?

Carmen: Act.

Researcher: ACT! Okay! That makes more sense. It seems to me like a lot of this... maybe the reason you feel like maybe it's not organized is because you were kind of spewing out your thoughts on the page.

Carmen: Yeah.

Researcher: ... and now you've got to come back in and make it... feel good. Let me print out something else for you... [researcher finds a graphic organizer on her computer and prints it out for the student]. Okay... Each section [of the graphic organizer]... I hate that they [the authors of the graphic organizer] put "paragraph"... because it's sort of like a section... so your first section... It looks to me like you might be talking about the... causes? Is that what...?

Carmen: Yeah.

Researcher: Causes of miscommunication?

Carmen: Yeah.

Researcher: [Researcher writes "causes of miscommunication" into the first section of the graphic organizer] So... what's the next section...

Carmen: Dating. People who are dating.

Researcher: Dating. Okay... so... is it “causes of miscommunication in marriage, causes of miscommunication in dating...” or is it “all causes of miscommunication and then here’s dating”?

[long pause]

Researcher: Do you understand what I’m saying?

Carmen: Yeah. I’m not really sure. That’s why I came to you for help.

[both laugh]

Carmen: Miscommunication between opposite sexes, so the whole thing’s about male and female. And, then, the first one’s [section] about people who are dating. The second one’s about married people, and the third one’s about just friends.

Researcher: Okay.

What I find particularly fascinating between this transcription and my reflection journal is that, in my journal, I am almost consumed with my own performance, while, in the interview, my performance rarely becomes the topic of conversation. Carmen did not, in fact, indicate that she noticed anything about me. Whether or not I was successful in hiding my disdain for this assignment was not at issue; Carmen was concerned with her own writing, her own grade, and her own thoughts. In this way, I found that transcribing the interviews gave me a perspective of my own assumptions that caused me to change the way I responded to conversations in subsequent interviews. That is, I found that I could relax my criticisms of myself as an interviewer because I was more concerned about each little misstep than any of the participants.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study come from a variety of backgrounds. Some of the participants were high academic achievers; some were not. Some of the participants come from affluent high schools; others come from high schools without a consistent supply of teachers and resources. Some high schools are in rural settings; others are in urban centers. The participants' histories with academic writing, therefore, are unique. That is to say, each woman's experience with high school writing must undergird any later discussion of her experience with college writing.

I began the meetings with each participant by first asking each participant to choose her own pseudonym.⁴ Some of the women chose a name with which they had a personal connection (e.g., Emma, Juliet), while others chose a name only after I had prompted them with a question like, "Who is your favorite musician?" or "Do you like a particular actress?" (e.g., Taylor, Marilyn Monroe). Once we had established a pseudonym, I began with the interview questions outlined in Appendix F, asking follow-up questions or allowing the participants to discuss topics off of my list.

As I mention earlier, the number of participants that engaged in this study perhaps reflects a naïveté on my part; I thought that seven participants was a fair number, yet I now know that number to be too large. Because phenomenologies can vary widely in number of subjects, I will limit my discussion instead of outlining my interactions with all seven participants. I will use a participant as exemplar for

⁴ "Marilyn Monroe" chose to be called by first and last name on all occasions.

each of first four research questions. Then, for the fifth and final research question, I will use a variety of data to explore the chronology of the research itself. After outlining the conversations, I will highlight some of the conditions and possible scenes for transformation. By doing so, I hope to explore the stories of these women and show, through narrative, how the participants and I achieved a level of shared understanding of their experiences in first-year composition.

I. WHAT LIVED EXPERIENCES DO FIRST-YEAR WOMEN STUDENTS BRING WITH THEM TO THE ACADEMY?

Courtney is a white, middle-class, traditional-aged woman from a mid-sized town in eastern North Carolina with per capita income at the state average.⁵ She has strong ties to family in eastern North Carolina, but she is known as a “legacy” student, or a student who is following one or more familial generations of graduates at this institution. In fact, I found out during our interviews (and quite by accident) that the Assistant Director of the Learning Center (also an alumna) is Courtney’s cousin. I should also note that, during our interviews, Courtney revealed a long-held desire to choose a career in nursing, though this college does not have a nursing degree. Some of our conversations, therefore, surrounded the transfer process, but Courtney clearly felt personal ties with the institution. Nearly two years after our original interviews, she is still enrolled here rather than at an institution that offers her desired degree program.

During my first interview with Courtney, I asked her about her senior research project, which she had indicated was her biggest writing assignment in

⁵ All information about incomes from cities in North Carolina were taken from www.city-data.com. I do not reveal the specific URLs for each city to preserve participants’ anonymity.

high school. Students were asked to find an organization for which to volunteer for, collect information about, and write a final project. While talking with Courtney about her volunteer experience, I inadvertently stumbled upon a very personal experience:

Researcher: So why did you get interested in Hospice? Why did you choose that to volunteer for?

Courtney: Okay. Because ... um, my dad... passed away, like, two years ago...

Researcher: I'm sorry.

Courtney: ... and, so, I... I don't know. It was weird. Like... before then, I, like, wanted to be a nurse for, like, my whole life...like, I just want to be a nurse. Then, my dad got sick, and I was, like... F health care. [both participant and researcher laugh] I just hated them. And then, like... but, then, after that, I was like, no, I really want to do it, and then I was interested in Hospice and, like, what they did, so I just want to volunteer with it. And it turned out to be the best thing I've ever done.

Researcher: I bet it was hard, too.

Courtney: Well... I don't know. It was very fulfilling... 'cause they love you...

Researcher: Yeah.

What Courtney had experienced at a rather young age was the death of her father and the deaths of several patients in Hospice. I was taken aback by both the number of deaths she had experienced and the candor with which she revealed this to me. I grappled with my response to her candor in my reflection journal:

I cannot believe that she said that to me so nonchalantly. I was thrown, but I hope I didn't let on that I was thrown. I didn't want to pity her, but I still

wanted to express empathy for what she had gone through. And that she goes back to Hospice to this day? She still works with those people who are definitely going to die? I am amazed at her strength.

My concern in the reflection journal seemed to center around the difference between my first impressions of Courtney and her actual lived experience. Courtney is a bright, happy woman who is never without a smile. She is very relaxed and comfortable; she seems unflappable. I suppose I anticipated having to do some interpersonal work with each of the participants before they revealed personal information with me, but this was not the case with Courtney. She seemed to have no reservations about sharing her feelings with me from the beginning.

Courtney, then, had some experiences that were very exceptional for a traditional college student. By the same token, however, she was, in fact, an eighteen year-old student who was experiencing some facets of life for the first time. In a later interview with Courtney, she shared that she would be getting her first job. Her new position at a local retirement community was in line with her goals of becoming a nurse and working with Hospice. Here is an excerpt from the interview in which she informed me that she needed proof of U.S. residency (I-9 documentation) for her tax forms and that she was unclear about the implications for claiming exemptions:

Researcher: What's your job? What's your new job?

Courtney: Um... I'm going to be a CNA [certified nursing assistant] at the [a local retirement community].

Researcher: Cool. Are you excited about it?

Courtney: Yeah. I start Friday. But they needed it for my tax forms, which I have never even filled out any of those... I was like "I don't know."

[Researcher laughs]

Courtney: "What do you think I should put?" [both laugh] I had no idea.

Researcher: They're [tax forms are] weird. They are very weird.

Courtney: I had never seen it before...

Researcher: What I always do... this is... still to this day, I do it. When they hand you the thing, take no exemptions.

Courtney: Yeah. That's what she [the HR representative] said.

Researcher: And they'll take the maximum amount out. Which means... they'll return money to you at the end of the year.... I would rather them give me money back than have to pay them.

Courtney: Yeah.

Filling out tax forms are mundane details to an adult, yet this was the first time Courtney had come in contact with them; in fact, this was her first time working outside of the occasional babysitting job. She had become accustomed to relying on those people in her life with more experience with such details to navigate this new terrain.

Though the experiences in Courtney's life might seem like an exception to the rule, I highlight this conversation with Courtney because I feel that it exemplifies the traditional student in first-year composition: on one hand, she is very experienced and mature in some areas of her life; on the other hand, she is completely new to some of the experiences adults consider ordinary. I do not suggest that all of the

students had deaths of close family members, but many of my participants had major life upheavals (whether positively or negatively) during their short lives. Carmen is the daughter of a military father; she had moved around the world most of her life, and she connected most with her identity in Europe. Taylor's family has ties to the Nashville music scene, so each year the family attended the Country Music Awards as guests. These life experiences had, for the most part, set up these students' educational and career goals. Courtney was pursuing health sciences, so she could ultimately work with a group like Hospice; Carmen was seeking an international studies degree; Taylor was majoring in business, so she could one day run her own music label.

In the composition classroom, students are more likely viewed as students who have little experience. That is, they seem young and full of dreams that are sometimes unrealistic to those of us who have already traveled our career paths. So, instead of designing writing tasks that support those goals, we suggest that students need to master objectives we have outlined on our syllabi. Granted, most composition instructors value student learning and attempt to design writing assignments with attention to both the skills students need to succeed in college and life as well as the interests those instructors perceive students as having. And I do not believe it is a stretch to say that some instructors find some of their assignments do not produce the lively and exciting results they had hoped. What I'm suggesting is that composition instructors (I include myself here) often design assignments and tasks based upon an *imagined* student audience, an audience which does not always match the reality. The fact is that many of the goals (both for majors and careers)

these women have are largely as a result of their experiences. Those dreams are not as abstract or whimsical as we might expect. Consistently, the participants in this study reported that first-year composition was “boring.” I propose that they, indeed, found it boring because they were not allowed to pursue the topics or types of writing relevant to their own experiences. I will highlight one additional conversation with Courtney to demonstrate my point.

At the end of our conversation about her volunteer work with Hospice, I directed my questions toward the paper written as a result of the students’ volunteer work.

Courtney: So we had to write a research paper... and so my research pro...

paper was, like... it was about Hospice, like, a part, like, the history of Hospice and then, um... controversy over Hospice... about some people, with euthanasia, and then just... different things... it was scattered.

[Later in the conversation]

Researcher: So, when you wrote your paper, did that make... okay... like,

sometimes you can write about a paper, and you’re so sick of it that you hate everything that has to do with the thing that you just wrote about.

Or, you can write a paper, and it can be... make you... know more about it. So... did you sick of it, or did you know more about it?

Courtney: Yeah... I knew more about it. The paper was... um... I hardly even

remember the paper. That wasn’t the biggest thing for me, you know.

The actual project... but... no, I mean I learned about it. Learned about Hospice, and... it was fine.

Researcher: Yeah. But the personal experience was better.

Courtney: Oh, yeah.

Researcher: Was more... had much more of an impact.

Courtney: Yeah.

Indeed, Courtney remembered very little of the writing she did in high school. What she remembered were the experiences that brought her to college, to her chosen career path. College composition (ENG 111), for her, was simply a general education requirement that she had to surmount in order to do the work that would ultimately lead to her career in nursing. Because her college composition course—unlike her high school research project—did not allow her to practice the discourse of her chosen field (both in topic and genre), she did not make the connection between composition's usefulness and her life goals.

II. WHAT MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC WRITING ARE UNFAMILIAR/FAMILIAR TO THESE WOMEN? MORE SPECIFICALLY, WHAT LITERACY PRACTICES DO WOMEN BRING WITH THEM TO THE ACADEMY?

When I originally conceived of these research questions as a part of my exploration of freshman women's experiences in first-year composition, I saw them as related. In other words, I made the (faulty) assumption that the "material conditions of academic writing" and "literacy practices" would overlap in significant ways. As I worked with my participants, however, I found that the two concepts diverged. So that I can demonstrate the process of this discovery, I will parse out these two questions. First, I will introduce Camden, the participant who first made me question the difference between the material conditions of academic writing and literacy practices. As I move through my conversations with Camden, I believe my struggle with the two concepts will become clear. Then, I will separate the two

research questions and show how Camden's experience can address each one, though in decidedly different ways than I had first imagined.

Camden is a traditional-aged African-American student from a city in southeastern North Carolina with a per capita income about \$20K below the state average. She reports that her high school "wasn't like an upper-scale high school... We [the school system] didn't have enough money to do the things we wanted to." Despite the lack of resources in her school, Camden appears to have sought out ways to develop her academic skills. For instance, she took some early college classes as transfer courses, and she also writes fiction with an online writing group. Her ultimate goal is to earn a degree in Business Administration with some focus in professional writing and marketing.

My first impression of Camden was that she was a serious student and that she was also warm, friendly, and involved in campus activities. She giggles a lot. She also struggles with her words sometimes, as if she is searching for the perfect way to convey her thoughts. Our conversations were often measured and controlled, but when we touched inadvertently on a topic that excited her, she would become downright sprightly, complete with sound effects and hand gestures. I enjoyed watching these transformations in her character because I believed that I was being allowed to access her authentic personality.

My interview questions begin with a very simple "What types of writing have you done in the past?" With very few exceptions, the participants answered my questions with their experiences in high school English, even when I prompted the participants to talk about writing in other courses. Camden, however, was one of

the exceptions. As I mention earlier, she writes fiction in her spare time. We talked a bit about the type of fiction that she writes—mostly popular-style fiction with a bit of fantasy—but I also asked about her publication venue. She has an online community of reviewers that comment on her work before she publishes it online. We spent several minutes talking about that online community which revealed several important points about her writing process—namely, that she values the peer review process and is uncharacteristically aware of audience. Camden claimed that her experience with peer review in the classroom, then, seemed lackluster primarily because her classroom peers were just learning peer review, while her online peers were skilled at the process.

Her talent for writing was not only noticed by an online writing community but also by her colleagues at the college. Each fall, there is a campus-wide activity, which is much beloved by the students. The official activity lasts for a week; it begins with a parade and culminates with an evening of contests. Each class competes against another throughout the week by a point system, and the winning class is given bragging rights. Though the official event lasts only one week, students tend to prepare for the event from the first day they arrive on campus in the fall. One event, the skit and dance performed by each class, is rather elaborate, including costumes, lighting, sets, and other theatrical necessities. I cannot overstate how much time and effort this event takes. I mention it here because Camden decided to propose an idea for the skit. Her idea was accepted, and she was the author of the class skit in 2012.

Camden seemed to be the type of student, then, that might excel in a course like first-year composition. She had practiced writing because she enjoyed it; she also sought out feedback from outside sources to improve her skills. Even with all of her writing experience, though, Camden was unclear about some of the more basic tenets of academic writing. Here is an exchange I had with Camden about writing her first synthesis paper:

Camden: Well...like... when she would... when she went over synthesis yesterday... 'cause, like, I was totally confused when she gave us the assignment... and then, when she said, it's when they incorporate someone else's thoughts...into the article, I... I understood. So... [pause] basically, you just paraphrase and quote... and all that good stuff... to increase your credibility.

Researcher: Right.

Camden: So...um... I'm cool with that [breathy laugh]... I was just totally confused. I was just puttin' random sentences, and... 'Cause that's what I thought, but, apparently, it's like... somebody *else's* thoughts, and somebody *else's* words just incorporated into your... article... so...

Researcher: As support for your...baby claim. [This is what the researcher calls a topic sentence.] Yeah.

Camden: Yeah....So I was, like, "Okay. I can do that."

Researcher: Yes, you can. You can.

Here, Camden has pinpointed a recurring theme in college writing for these women. Instructors may assume that students are well-versed in the habits and

strategies of academic writing, but they are often confused. During the class session to which Camden refers (the explanation of the synthesis essay), Camden did not raise her hand, ask any questions, or add to the discussion, even though the instructor allowed space for questions. In fact, none of the students in the class raised their hands or asked questions, which left me wondering how many other students were confused or might not have felt comfortable in the classroom environment asking a question or making a comment that they perceived as being “silly” or “dumb.”

The synthesis essay⁶ seems especially difficult for some first-semester students for several reasons. One is the reason I mention before: the synthesizing of ideas or findings rather than a reporting of one essay after another, in book report style. Another reason is the sometimes difficult subjects with which students grapple. That is, instructors like to choose readings for the synthesis that will challenge and excite students, but sometimes those readings are very personal to the students reading them—a situation that makes writing about the topic difficult. For example, one of the articles Camden chose to use for her synthesis essay was a rather negative take on women in athletics. Camden wanted to talk about this article in her own essay, but she found the language hard to craft:

Researcher: Do you know what you might want to say about this whole...

athletic... issue... I mean, it's a huge... you could pick anything.

Camden: My gosh.

⁶ Of the 6 to 8 essays required for ENG 111, students must compose one each of summary, synthesis, analysis, analysis of argument, and timed writing.

Researcher: Do you have any kind of...

Camden: Well, I know you can't put your own, like, personal opinion in there, but...[whispered] I would so want to. [both participant and researcher laugh] Like, it was making me mad... 'cause, like, I was reading it, and it was saying how men are more dominant in the whole sports field and how women shouldn't be involved...and... it's male-dominated, and women are just messing it up, and messing up the order the world and the universe...and I was just, like... I play softball... so I'm, like, come on, now...[laugh]

Researcher: I know.

Camden: I just thought it was...

Researcher: That's a sport.

Camden: Exactly. I just thought it was... [throws up hands]

Camden's response to this article was both personal and visceral. Camden is herself a female black athlete at the college. The very insulting message in the essay attacked not only her ideal versions of "female," "black," and "athlete" but also her very real day-to-day experiences as a female black athlete. Despite these strong emotions she had about the article, however, the instructor explicitly states that students write the synthesis "without introducing your own argument, opinion, or background knowledge." (A copy of the instructor's assignment sheet can be found in Appendix G.)⁷ Camden knew intellectually that she should remove her emotions

⁷ Though evidence pulled from personal experience is valued in some locations by some instructors, it appears to be more a novelty than an accepted practice—a way to "engage" students before they then move on to more "academic" writing. See my previous discussion on pages 29-30.

from this paper in order to make it successful; she also found it difficult to remove her emotions because the article touched her so personally. In short, Camden was struggling with how to disagree with someone within an accepted genre of academic discourse, the synthesis essay. Her knowledge-making activity involved several complex tasks of which, perhaps, the instructor was unaware. She was also attempting to synthesize several articles into one coherent paper, while still maintaining her objections to the material. These types of activities take time and practice to develop. In ENG 111, in which the synthesis paper is one of six required essays, the time needed to develop and practice the synthesis exercise might not be available. Once more, the synthesis task is not tested on the common final; whether or not Camden was able to develop this skill is not apparent from the data collected from the department.

As for my own responses to Camden, I had some very personal and visceral comments in my reflection journal. In our conversation about black athletes, Camden mentions a section of the article that describes lower-class students (who are typically minority students) seeing athletics as a possibility of accessing higher education. With no prior reference, I mention the military. Here is a short excerpt from that interview:

Researcher: I wonder... did they say anything, like... like you were saying

African-Americans gravitate towards sports... like, it seems to me that
the military is abnormally minority...

Camden: Hmm.

Researcher: So do you think people... did they say anything in the articles, I guess, about the military being a place to go to college?

Camden: Umm... I probably haven't gotten to that part yet.

Researcher: Okay.

Camden: But it might be...

Researcher: 'Cause that seems to me like a place where... they pay for your college, I mean, you know...

There is no other way to describe this interaction than “ungraceful.” In hindsight, I meant to make a comparison about two ways for minorities to access higher education—why we might see minority groups over-represented in such places. This is not, however, how I conducted the interview. I wrote this in my reflection journal immediately after the interview:

Why did you bring up the military!?! You just dropped it into the conversation like a bomb and then left it. You didn't connect it to anything else. So, now [Camden] has no idea why you were bringing up the military. She actually thinks the military will appear later in the article! And she was totally deferring to you, trying to appease you. Ugh. That was precisely what I didn't want to happen.

My own visceral response to this interview is useful to record because it recognizes that I don't—and possibly can't—conduct interviews in a way that is distanced and removed from the data collection process. I made a miscalculation, and I was mad at myself for doing so.

This conversation with Camden and my reaction to it demonstrate the ways in which my research question design was short-sighted. I had, myself, assumed that first-year students had very little professional writing experience outside of their schoolwork and had crafted a question that reflected that bias. By the same

token, I had underestimated the emotional and psychological responses that both Camden and I had about our own positions as female black student athlete and female researcher. As I reflected on our conversations (during, between and even after the interview process), I began to see that I was addressing two very different concerns in my research questions. Using Camden as my example case, I will address each question one at a time to show how the “material conditions of academic writing” and “literacy practices” of the participants are distinct.

WHAT MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC WRITING ARE UNFAMILIAR/FAMILIAR TO THESE WOMEN?

Material conditions can describe a host of experiences internalized over one’s lifetime. As Nancy Myers points out, “material conditions” for women can include “the positive and negative social forces at play on women, from the past, the present, and the possible future” (346). By all accounts, Camden was bringing with her a set of material conditions to academic writing that were not typical for a first-semester freshman. In our interviews, she said that she had been writing stories for two years, and she had been engaged in the online writing community for nearly a year before she entered college. Her online peers had given her praise for her stories; they had encouraged her to continue writing, even if she did not pursue it for a career. Camden was aware that her prose had some grammatical errors (specifically with semicolons and commas), but she had garnered respect and affection from her peers.

In the first-year composition classroom, however, Camden struggled with her writing. The constraints placed upon her personal experience (here, the constraints of the synthesis essay) were very different from the writing she had done before college. In her fiction writing, she had been able to draw on her personal experiences to create a fictional world. In the classroom, she was asked to remove all personal experience—to be “neutral, impartial, or unprejudiced.” The synthesis essay, then, was a practice in creating the disembodied intellect so valued by academic writing. The difficulty of this assignment for Camden was not in composing an essay; instead, it was removing her corporeal experience from the task—an act she was not used to performing.

The differences, then, between the writing Camden had distributed to her online community and the writing she had to perform for her composition class differed in several notable ways: in format, audience, content, and authority. While her fiction was loosely structured and inductive, her academic writing needed to be structured and deductive. While her fiction was composed for a popular reading audience, her academic writing needed to be written for the general “literate” audience (i.e., her instructor). While her fiction was contextual, emotional, and personal, her academic writing needed to be decontextualized, logical, and orderly. While Camden had to establish her authority in her fictional universe by creating a believable world, she had to establish her authority in her academic writing by evoking previous authorities on the subject.

What might be the most important aspect of Camden's material conditions prior to first-year composition, though, is how those conditions shaped her overall opinions about writing in general. Here is an excerpt from one of our conversations:

Researcher: Okay... so... umm... tell me what you think "writing" is.

Camden: Hmm. [pause] Writing to me would probably be, like, expressing yourself in a way that you normally couldn't vocally.

Researcher: Okay.

Camden: Ummm... for... like... [pause] As I write, I just express everything that I couldn't normally tell somebody, so, like, I write poetry.... So everything that I'm feelin' that I don't want to tell somebody... it's in that poem.

Researcher: Right.

Camden: And I'll just give it to somebody, and they can read how I'm feeling [breathy laugh] [chuckle] And then we can talk about it later. But, you know, it's just about expressing yourself and just getting what you feel needs to be said out on paper.

Camden's experience with writing before college had formed her opinion of writing as a form of self-expression. Not only did she use her writing to personally communicate emotions (as the above excerpt suggests), but she also had a large online community of peer writers that supported and reinforced that opinion. Upon arriving in the first-year composition classroom, this experience and support did not seem important. For example, the assignment sheet given to the students (Appendix G) is written in such a way that it appears to be "normal." In other words, the assignment sheet indicates "this is what a synthesis essay *is*," not "this is how I,

as your instructor, expect you to complete this task.” Once more, the assignment sheet does not indicate when a writer might choose to use the synthesis or in what contexts. Camden, in fact, says in our interview, “I know you can’t put your own, like, personal opinion in there.” Though this might be a statement particularly about the synthesis essay, in later interviews, she did ask me about putting personal opinions in other works. She seemed unaware that the synthesis essay was a particular type of essay used for particular reasons for particular cases. In her interpretation, her personal experience was somehow negated for *all* writing tasks, even though the synthesis is only one type of writing. For Camden, an experienced non-academic writer, this struggle was difficult.

Women, in particular, are socially rewarded for expressing emotion and are often chastised when they do not (Schilt and Westbrook; Denissen and Saguy; Evans; Fahs; Eagly and Wood). In academia, however, emotions are to be avoided or at least controlled. Similarly, Camden came to college with the long-held opinion that writing was an expression of self, a creative means to explore emotions—in her words, “express everything that I couldn’t normally tell somebody.” Academic writing, on the other hand, is a set of conventions valued by the disciplines, which include stating a thesis or purpose near the beginning of the work, putting the work into conversation with authorities in the subject, providing appropriate evidence to support claims, and writing the work in mechanically and grammatically correct

prose.⁸ Making this shift—from a material condition that values emotion to a material condition that does not—is startling and perhaps unsettling.

I use Camden as my example, here, because I think her exceptional writing experience can demonstrate what other students perhaps experience at differing levels and degrees. Similarly, Carmen, for example, also writes poetry in her spare time, but she does not publish it anywhere or read it aloud, so she said that she does not consider herself a “writer.” Taylor took five business classes in high school, so she had a wealth of knowledge about business proposals and projects, yet the composition classroom also posed some struggles for her. She linked her business writing directly with practical concerns—that she would use that particular writing for her career—and linked her composition writing with something impractical—she just needed to pass this class to get through general education. Juliet felt that she “should” start her own personal journal and had tried several times before college to keep one, but she struggled with her own emotional expressions: “I can never really word my feelings very well. I can think about them, and, like, I can speak them sometimes, but to put it in words...” Each of these women brings with her a set of material conditions that can support or hamper her efforts in composition, and instructors of composition courses cannot know these material conditions unless they spend time understanding and exploring these women’s previous experiences.

⁸ I am aware of Downs and Wardle’s objections to a first-year composition course as a course (or courses) that teach “a set of basic, fundamental skills that will apply in other college courses and in business and public spheres after college” (553). What I mean to suggest here is that this ENG 111 course at this institution describes a set of skills that students will learn as an outcome of the course. (See p. 101 for more detail.) I don’t mean to suggest that these values are or should be universal at all institutions.

WHAT LITERACY PRACTICES DO WOMEN BRING WITH THEM TO THE ACADEMY?

Like the phrase “material conditions,” the phrase “literacy practices” can refer to a litany of activities. Though there are some ways in which these two items might overlap, there are some distinct differences. In the context of this project, I have used (or, more accurately, arrived at) the phrase “material conditions” to mean the social, cultural, or personal contexts in which writing occurs. In the previous section, I described students’ writing outside of school to demonstrate the variety of material conditions. In contrast, I will use “literacy practices” to mean the processes by which students produce textual artifacts⁹ within a variety of material conditions.

Again, Camden’s experience here is unique. She is adept at the practices we value in first-year composition such as drafting and peer review; she values revision. In the classroom, however, her classmates did not bring with them the same values and experience. In our interviews, she says that peer review was not very helpful for her because her classmates were not versed in the task (i.e., they were unclear about what things they should be commenting upon in her papers). On the other hand, Camden indicated that she was often chosen by other students to review their papers because she was so experienced in the task. After the first paper was peer reviewed, the students were aware that Camden was strong at the task; if they were unable to get in her group during class time, they sometimes found her around campus or in the dorms to see if she would look over their papers.

⁹I am aware of and appreciate the work of the New London Group and other scholars who have called attention to literacies other than textual ones. For this project, however, I focus on textual representations.

In the classroom, instructors sometimes see the students as a group of “co-peers”¹⁰; that is, some students might be stronger than others, but they are all close enough together in learning that separating them is not necessary. In this case, however, Camden was not at the level of her peers. She was quite a bit more experienced than they at writing. I have not been privy to the conversations between Camden and her instructor (as I should not be), and so I am unsure if Camden made her instructor aware that she had so much writing experience. I think, though, that instructors who are made aware of a student’s experience might consider setting up peer review differently. For instance, students who have substantial writing experience could be made “group leaders” for the peer review groups, or experienced students might be put in a group by themselves for more complex review processes. In any case, I am arguing that, as instructors, we cannot make assumptions about the practices our students bring with them to the academy; therefore, our class plans and activities will look different from class to class, from semester to semester.

III. HOW DO WOMEN’S LIVED EXPERIENCES SHAPE THEIR STRATEGIES FOR APPROACHING ACADEMIC WRITING?

Juliet was one of the last participants to make a scheduled interview with me. She is not normally “late,” so she was worried that she had missed the opportunity to work with me. I assured her that she was welcome to join the project. She, at first, assumed that I would be asking her to take some sort of test:

¹⁰ The term “co-peers” comes from the introduction to Falchikov and Bythman’s *Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education*. Falchikov and Blythman discuss the difference between a “near-peer” and a “co-peer.” The former describes a person “such as undergraduate teaching assistants, tutors, and counselors...at a more advanced level than the learner,” while the latter describes a person “such as partners or work group members [which are] deemed to be at the same level” (1).

Researcher: All right, so this one will be pretty easy. I would like you to describe to me... your high school experience in writing. What did you do in high school...

Juliet: Okay.

Researcher: ... classes. Did you take... what did you do?

Juliet: Where do you want me to write it?

Researcher: Oh, just tell me.

Juliet: Oh, just tell you.

Researcher: Yeah. Just tell me.

Juliet is a white, upper-class student who hails from a small town in central North Carolina; the town, though small, has a per capita income around \$30K above the state average. Juliet is utterly charming and down-to-earth, but her attitudes towards authority revealed her privileged background. For example, when she felt that an administrator of a state-run program did not treat her fairly, she simply contacted a person in a higher-level administrative position for some kind of resolution. I will not claim that none of my other participants would have taken the same kind of action, but I can insist that many students without the same background as Juliet would not have seen contacting a high-level state administrator as an option for them¹¹. Her unwavering commitment to perceived social injustice for others, however, is definitely part of her charm.

¹¹ As Annette Lareau adeptly argues in *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (and Malcolm Gladwell argues less adeptly in *Outliers*), children raised in upper-class households use language to negotiate with adults, while children raised in lower-class households are more suspicious of relationships with adults. Children raised in upper-class households develop an “emerging sense of entitlement” (140), or the “ability to use language to control how [an authoritative adult, like a

As I mentioned earlier, most of the participants linked “writing” with “English,” so our conversations tended to explore how writing was used in high school English. Juliet felt that she did not write much in high school, but she did remember her senior research project with great clarity. Perhaps because the length of time devoted to the project (one year) or perhaps because she was able to pursue a topic of her choice, the senior research project for Juliet represented the coming together of a variety of assignments into the zenith of high school writing. In addition to that, the senior research project allowed Juliet to pursue a topic for which she had a passion. Here is a portion of the interview which describes Juliet’s experience with the research project:

Researcher: So... how did you choose your senior research project?

Juliet: Um... I helped volunteer with the Special Olympics... um, my junior year, and my classes... the marketing classes... some of the special needs kids would be placed in there to kind of mainstream them socially, and I would always, like, try to sit next to them and, like, help them with their stuff. And then my sophomore year... um... there was a kid in the LEA EC [Local Educational Agency for Exceptional Children] who was a senior, and... I’m not sure what it was that he had... I don’t think it was autism... but, um, he... everyone knew him. I mean, he was super sweet, and, so, we... me and a couple girls, we took him around the school to, like, his friends and his teachers and took his picture with them, and we put it in,

doctor] perceives him” (140). I argue that Juliet, unlike Camden or Courtney, has developed a language of authority largely because of her upper-class upbringing.

like, a book for him. And wrote their names by it. And he still texts me every once in a while. So, I just kind of... and then I would hear... um... and then I kind of... I... I got interested in it when I went on the Special Olympics trip, and one of the teachers was, like, really impatient with the kids and was kind of ugly to them, and that kind of made me mad.

For Juliet and others, the research project served as an important tool to explore a subject that they wanted to know more about and, many times, wanted to explore as a career option. Later in the same interview with Juliet, I asked about the relationship between her work with special needs children and her career:

Researcher: So, um, did that... change your life path? Are you going to do something with that now?

Juliet: Um... I... I thought, like... when I first toured [the college] that I would... I still want to work within that program [the Autism Program], but I don't think... I don't think I want to make a career with... um... special needs children or adults. Um... I think... I really like the counseling side of things.

Indeed, Juliet did ultimately decide on a career path in psychology. Despite the limited amount of writing Juliet did for her research project (six pages), the project did provide her with perhaps the first experience as writing for a purpose other than to fulfill a course task.

I will say that Juliet, more than any other participant, found some pleasure from completing her writing tasks, though that pleasure was often associated with a high grade and not successful communication of an idea. For instance, Juliet

received a 93 on her first paper for English 111, yet she was disappointed that she lost points for formatting. In the first interview after her first paper was returned, we went over her citations for her second paper line by line. Here are my reflections of that interview:

I have to say that that was one of the most boring interviews I have ever had. Not really because of [Juliet] but because of her need to understand why she didn't receive a perfect score on her paper. She is, indeed, a talented writer, but I think her obsession with formatting speaks to a larger issue in composition—and maybe writing in general. I think many (if not all) instructors can read a paper and determine its grade holistically—even if they can't always explain the exact reasons for that particular grade. I think the problem arises when instructors try to explain the reasons. Often (even on my own papers), I will make a list of “flaws” in the paper to explain the grade. This is usually a bulleted list. Then, when the student reads the comments, she interprets all of the items equally—that is, the lack of thesis is just as important as the misplaced citation. Whereas instructors see this list as a hierarchy, students may perceive it as a set of equivalents/peers.

Both Juliet's need to improve her grade for subsequent papers and my reflections in my journal indicate that, despite numerous studies that indicate that direct grammar instruction is not helpful (Hillocks “At Last”; Hillocks “Research”; Perl; Roen, Pantoja, Yena, Miller, and Waggoner; Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald; Scherff and Piazza), there still seems to be a focus on mechanics (if not grammar) in writing instruction and assessment, perhaps because mechanics are finite and objective and are, therefore, easier to articulate in continuous improvement. Instructors grading writing might find the explanations of why a piece of writing is at a certain level difficult to articulate. Students interpreting those explanations might find them difficult to tackle.

Juliet, however, did ultimately find ways to write that reduced her anxiety. Here is an excerpt from another interview about composing the first draft:

Researcher: Do you feel like college is different in that way? Do you feel like you're having to write a lot more than you used to in high school?

Juliet: Yeah. Yeah. But I think the big... like... when, like, I hear that we have to write something... just hearing that you have an *essay*, I feel like, is what scares you...

Researcher: [laugh] Okay.

Juliet: ...but then, like... what's like all this stuff... this big thing on your shoulders, but, like, once you start writing it, it's not really that bad to me. Um... but, like, knowing that, like... 'cause we're writing this paper in English... and it's three to five pages, and... I... but, like, I kept on worrying about it, but I started it last night, and I did, like, over half of it, so it's kind of... lifted off...

What is interesting about Juliet's experience is that she was able to reinvent her own experience with writing. That is, she moved from a novice who found the process mysterious and threatening to a practicing writer who was immersed in the exercise.

I chose Juliet to discuss this research question because she represents, for me, the kind of student who has historically been considered "college material." That is not to say that she is necessarily an exception to the participant group; rather, on the spectrum from successful to unsuccessful of admitted students, she would be on the side of "going to be successful." I would argue that Juliet's lived experiences directly affect her ability to be successful, both academically and socially. Most notably, she comes from a very supportive family environment.

During her work with special student populations, she felt justified in contacting a North Carolina representative, and her father helped her craft her message. Her voice, experience, and authority have been nurtured by her parents for most of her life. It is because of this nurturing that I believe she is able to take advantage of the support systems in college. For example, she used the Learning Center, the Health Center, Academic and Career Planning, and other resources (including me) to help her negotiate her first year of college. Once more, she was involved in several student clubs and activities. Her involvement in academic and social life—not specifically her getting an A in ENG 111—is what will make her a successful college student. That is, her childhood support system gave her an authority that will later support her efforts to get good grades; good grades will then reinforce that authority even more; she will then continue to get good grades in a cycle of reinforcement.

Comparing Juliet's experiences with the experiences of Camden and Courtney might provide some further insights into the academic writing practices of these women. Camden comes from a small, economically repressed area of the state. Though, as I mentioned earlier, she had sought out opportunities to write, she did not seek out those opportunities in the same ways that Juliet did. In fact, Camden did not know about the support services on campus, and, as a result, she had not used them. Though she did write a skit for her class, she did not become involved in other clubs—even the creative writing one. Camden seemed to divide “academic” writing from her experience with “creative” writing, as if the two could not coexist.

Courtney, on the other hand, was a legacy student. Though she occasionally participated in campus activities, she usually relied on her connections with family to guide her through academics. In fact, she had her cousin help her with math homework, and she had another cousin help her with an art class. Never did she make an appointment at the Learning Center or Academic and Career Planning. Though she ultimately wanted to pursue a degree in nursing, she did not know that this college has a pre-health professions advisor until I told her. From her lackluster enthusiasm during our discussions of academics, it seemed as if Courtney did not value “academia” for its own sake; instead, she saw college as a sanctioned path for work in her chosen field.

When these three women’s experiences are placed together, it is clear that their perceptions of academic writing are largely shaped by their lived experiences; that is, these women bring to the first-year composition class a number of assumptions about how writing is “done” in college—some of those assumptions are correct, and some are misguided. What is perhaps most important in the composition classroom, though, is the fact that these assumptions by nature are tacit. All three of these women were in the same section of ENG 111, and none of them asked questions about the assignments they were given in class. Juliet had spoken with her instructor outside of class, but Camden and Courtney had not. Juliet, very supported by her parents and active in the campus resources community, perhaps felt justified in approaching her instructor, felt a sense of privilege that Camden and Courtney did not.

As an instructor of composition, I feel a connection with these students' instructor. From my perspective as instructor, I would have seen Camden and Courtney in class not responding to my questions and even making acceptable grades. I would have also met Juliet in my office as she asked me to clarify my critiques of her paper. What I might have taken away from this exchange is that Juliet is a strong and successful student, while Camden and Courtney were conventional, unexceptional students that would pass without much fanfare. What I would miss, however, is Camden's considerable writing expertise and Courtney's emotional maturity. In order to know the depths of the stories we miss, we instructors have to engage in conversations with all of our students, listening to their experiences, to uncover their unique experiences and talents which could be applied to academic writing tasks, and, as researchers and instructors, we need to learn how to leverage these experiences.

IV. HOW DOES THE FORMAL INSTRUCTION OF ACADEMIC WRITING RESHAPE THESE WOMEN'S LITERACY PRACTICES, AND HOW DOES IT RESHAPE THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES?

The composition program at this institution is a required two-semester sequence that is ideally taken sequentially. In the most recent semester, the first semester of composition served right at 200 students—nearly half of the freshman class. If I cannot make the assumption that first-year writing in some form exists at most U.S. higher education institutions, then I can at least assert that first-year composition is fully entrenched in the academic culture. Despite this fact, however, participants in my study seemed to view first-year composition as an unnecessary barrier to their academic pursuits. Emma sums up the prevailing attitude nicely:

Researcher: Do you enjoy the class?

Emma: I had serious reservations about being in this class. The first few days were, like... he is just very old school. But he's also a really sweet man. But what are you going to do? You've got to take it.

I have to admit that this general attitude of composition as a requirement with no linkage to further success in college or life made me sad, but I did not chastise the students in any way, nor did I try to convince them of composition's value during the interviews. I like to think I was, at least to some degree, successful.

Emma had taken some AP courses in high school, and in those courses, she was able to practice what most students think of as "academic writing." That is, the courses included the reading of literature and the writing of essays, most likely essays that reflected the types of writing done during AP tests. Here is an excerpt from an interview in which she discusses her relationship to grades after I had asked her about the differences in high school courses and college courses:

Emma: Well, math-wise, I think they're the same. Because my Calculus teacher here did basically the same thing... well, not the *same* thing, but the same concepts, and the way she did her class was the same as my stats teacher in high school.

Researcher: So, like, practice problems? Things like that?

Emma: Yeah. And went over homework to see where you went wrong. English is *a lot* different.

Researcher: Okay... how so?

Emma: Okay... so I was taking AP English junior & senior year, and all we did was read and write based off of the readings. Well, we do that in his

class... but ... not the same way. Like... like, we would read a book a week in my AP Lit class, and we would write an essay on the book. Then, we would discuss the book... the characters, the plots, all that stuff. I liked it better. I think it's harder in college because I... this past essay was the lowest grade I've *ever* made on a paper.

Researcher: What was the paper about... because I came in kind of, like, after you guys did it, so...

Emma: Ummm... the paper was about... what was it... Deborah Tannen wrote this article about how women and men are different in the way we apologize... all that stuff... and we had to pick three... um, topics I guess? So... I think I did "apologies," "arguments," and something else... I don't remember... and you discuss it, but through, um... a relationship you've observed. So either your parents, or you and someone else, your best friend and someone else, you and your best friend kind of thing.

Researcher: Right. And, so, did he... explain to you why you made ... well, tell me what "a low grade" is to you.

Emma: A low grade is anything but an A.

Researcher: Okay. I just had to make sure that, like, ... because sometimes a low grade might be a 69 or a low grade might be an 80...

Emma: I've never failed anything in my life.

Researcher: Okay. All right... so, did he explain to you what you could have done to make it... ?

Emma: Umm... on the paper, he wrote “good organization” and marked out one thing that says “need to be re-worded,” and then put one thing that says “parallelism.” ... I didn’t know what that was before, until he explained it....

I suggested that Emma visit her instructor for clarification of her grade, and she agreed to email him for an appointment. (Her class schedule did not allow her to visit his office hours.) She was unsure if the instructor would drop a grade, but she said if he did, “Then, I’m dropping this one because I’ve never made a C in my life.” The literacy practices that Emma had mastered in high school were not translating into successful performance in college-level composition.

For her next paper, Emma had already begun to alter her literacy practices based upon her knowledge of the instructor. Here is an excerpt from an interview in which Emma describes the assignment and her choice of topic:

Researcher: Okay. So the article that you read was about inanimate objects, right?

Emma: Yes, ma’am.

Researcher: And then you had to... pick an inanimate object...

Emma: Okay. He gave us a list of three things that we could pick from. I picked, um, how a set of objects conspire against you. And, then, there were other options... I don’t remember what they were. But this one [option] was, like, similar to what he [the author] did. I thought that, since we had to imitate his [the author’s] style, might as well do the one that was closest to the way he [the author] wrote.

Researcher: Okay. So that's why you picked it... it's just like...

Emma: Whichever one I thought would be easier for me because I already knew
I wasn't going to like this assignment.

[both laugh]

Researcher: Now, do you think you might already have preconceived notions
that you weren't going to like it... that you didn't like it because...

Emma: I have a really... dry humor. It doesn't take much to make me laugh.
Umm... I like reading funny books... I like reading funny books a lot. So...
when I read it [the article], I didn't know it was supposed to be funny at
first... like, I never read the little summaries that they give you because it
gives it away...

Researcher: Right.

Emma: I read it after. So, I read it [the article], and I start laughing to myself,
and I'm, like, I bet I'm the only one laughing at this. And then I went back
[to the summary] and was, like, good. It's supposed to be humorous.
Because I laugh at the little corny jokes, you know?

At least for Emma, the grading process in college English was not the only
problem with her being successful in the course. Emma also seemed to struggle
with the assignments themselves. The instructor appeared to be crafting an
assignment in which the students would both explore the academic moves a
professional author makes and also engage in some humor. This apparent attempt
by the instructor to engage the students, however, did not make Emma very
comfortable:

Researcher: Did he give you an assignment sheet?

Emma: He gave us a rubric, and I always sum up rubrics, so I basically sum it up. [Goes through her bag to find her summary of the rubric]¹²

Researcher: Okay. Can I make a copy of it?

Emma: Yeah. You can have it.

Researcher: [vocalic]

Emma: I'm not using it. I hated this paper.

Researcher: Oh, why did you hate this paper?

Emma: Because it's not, like, the way I write.

Researcher: Okay.

Emma: I'm more of a... I mean, I'm a funny person... at least I like to think I am, but I don't know how to write funny. [laugh] It's just not me.

Researcher: How did you write in high school?

Emma: Um... I've never done papers where I had to imitate the style, and that... all he... the papers we've done so far is we are basically imitating the style of the author. Well, I feel like I'm plagiarizing, so I feel bad doing it.

Researcher: Okay.

Emma: And in high school, all my papers were... you read a book... you analyze. I'm good at that! I mean, those I can do.

Researcher: Are you funny when you do those?

¹² Emma's rubric summary appears in Appendix H.

Emma: No. My English teacher... she was kind of mean. We called her “Dead-wards” instead of Edwards. She’s so... she was monotone. It was horrible.

Researcher: Wow. Dead-wards. That’s a good one.

Emma: Yeah, I know.

This experience with the second paper for Emma was uncomfortable, even though her instructor seemed legitimately concerned with creating an interesting assignment. I will say, however, that Emma did meet with her instructor. She decided to drop the first paper (the instructor drops the lowest paper grade) and glean some added help from him for her next paper. While she earned a 73 on the first paper, she earned a 93 on the second. I asked her if her initial reservations about taking the class had subsided. She said that she didn’t mind staying in the course because she “had figured him out.” In other words, Emma had found a way to adapt her previous literacy practice to meet the expectations of her instructor.

Emma is able to alter her literacy practices, but she also faces some material conditions that challenge her as well. Emma is a white, upper-class student from a small city in central North Carolina with a per capita income nearly \$10K below the state average. Though her hometown is a relatively middle-class area, I classify Emma as upper-class because her father is a physician in the town. She clearly had financial resources available to her that far exceed the resources available to other participants, and there were several occasions during our meetings in which she demonstrated the financial benefits she enjoyed from her parents. Emma has strong family ties—she reports that her mother is her best friend—and she wanted to stay

in central North Carolina to maintain those ties. Emma has designs on becoming a physician.

Emma, like most students who attend college, is negotiating unfamiliar terrain, so she is trying to understand it. As she demonstrates so aptly in our interviews, she sees college is an infrastructure of rules, policies, and procedures. In order to negotiate the college, she has to understand this infrastructure. During our meetings, Emma has perhaps asked more than any other participant about specific rules—about AP credit, about registration, about graduate school applications. She sees composition as another infrastructure that must be managed, and she does so quite well. In other words, she approaches her writing tasks with the specific instructor in mind: What does he expect? What does he like? What impresses him?

I don't think Emma is remarkable in this approach. (See my discussion in the next section to see other participants asking similar questions for similar ends.) With a typical course load of five courses, students are efficient in this regard. They are not learning how to "become" a part of five different communities; instead, they are negotiating a particular instructor of a particular class who may be a singular representative of a discipline. Students are, I believe, aware of this fact. For example, Marilyn Monroe was in the same section of ENG 111 as Emma. She had the same paper assignments and also struggled with the instructor's response to her first paper:

Researcher: So... how did you do on the first one [paper]?

Marilyn Monroe: The first one, I made a 75.

Researcher: Okay.

Marilyn Monroe: And, from what I understand... he told us before that grammar, he was going to grade a little bit, but it wasn't ... what he was really focusing on... he was focusing on the organization and the thesis and the title and stuff. Well, I got a 75 because he wrote that I had a "cute" title instead of a... like, I guess a legit one, but even though it kind of related, and he said my thesis was weak. Which I understand getting points off for that... a weak thesis, I mean, that's understandable. And I had some grammatical errors, but I don't think it was...

Researcher: So you were going to talk to him, right?

Marilyn Monroe: I did talk to him.

Researcher: Okay. So what did he tell you?

Marilyn Monroe: He told me that he drops the lowest paper grade and that once during the semester, I can go to the Learning Center and get it, like, revised and then re-turn it in for ten points higher. But that one wouldn't be 'cause it was... maybe... it was either a 70 or a 75... I didn't figure it was worth it. I mean, 'cause you can get up to ten points, so ...

Researcher: Right.

Marilyn Monroe: ...if I revised, and I didn't even get ... I feel like that's wasting ... when next time... I could have an 85 or 90... and get that a lot higher.

Like Emma, Marilyn Monroe was negotiating not clear communication but the instructor's rules and policies. Though Emma learned fairly quickly how to revise her literacy practices and get a higher grade on her second paper, Marilyn Monroe made a similar grade on her second paper as her first. Marilyn Monroe's

struggle (above) seems to be more with the material conditions of the classroom and the instructor's assignments than with her own literacy practices. In other words, she is trying to understand this instructor in this course; she sees the instructor himself as the barrier to her success, not her literacy practices.

In the composition classroom, the concern with "generalized academic discourse" is a long-standing debate. (See the discussion of transfer beginning of page 160 in chapter five.) Whether or not we espouse first-year composition as an introduction to "college writing," students seem to understand, at least intuitively, that they are contending, not with a discipline, but with an individual instructor. Though we may design writing tasks for a variety of audiences, the ultimate judge of a student's performance is her instructor. What Emma does in our interviews is admit that openly. Though some students might not feel comfortable saying they are catering to an instructor outright, the necessity of meeting the particular needs of a particular instructor is clear in their responses. I might suggest, here, that instructors of composition—despite their efforts to create assignments for a variety of audiences in a variety of forms—confess their awareness of the limited audience (i.e., that the instructor is the ultimate recorder of grades) in the first week of class. Then, perhaps a discussion could begin which moves rhetorical awareness of audience (for most students in ENG 111, the variety of instructors students have) from its tacit position.

V. HOW DO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THESE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS INFORM AND/OR REVISE LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE ACADEMY?

I think it would be irresponsible of me to suggest that there is an unequivocal link between the way these participants interacted with first-year composition and

a change in the way composition is taught at the college. The relationship between these women and the English Department is more subtle than suggesting a direct correlation. I do think, though, that these women did have an effect on composition, however subtle and nuanced that effect might be. Instead of focusing on one participant's experience, then, I am going to write through a sequence of events. This section, then, represents a chronicle of an entire observation cycle: a class observation, an interview with Taylor, an interview with Carmen, a reflection journal, a class observation (same instructor, different day), an interview with Marilyn Monroe, and a reflection journal. By detailing this process chronologically, I hope to demonstrate how these women engaged with, pushed against, and ultimately coexisted with first-year composition. After the chronology, I will highlight some of the conditions within this chronicle that represent areas for potential transformation for composition.

CLASS OBSERVATION (SECTION 1), SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

The weather is unseasonably cool—almost cold. Nineteen students are present (eighteen present at first; one had her bookbag in a chair but didn't appear until 10 minutes after the class began).

Students are already working, and I feel uncharacteristically late; I coordinate my watch with the class clock; my watch is four minutes slower than the class clock, so I change my watch.

Students are working on a grammar handout, an editing a paragraph exercise. I do not have a copy of the handout (reminder: get one after class), but from my perspective, the handout is very long. There appear to be three paragraphs on the front side of one page—the font looks 10-point or smaller. [A copy of the editing exercise appears in Appendix I.]

As students finish, they open up laptops and begin to do various things—some legitimate, some not.

The instructor has been working on his own laptop for the entire activity; he stares into it intently, but it is unclear what he is doing exactly; he picks up an exercise sheet, closes laptop, and looks to be doing the sheet himself.

One woman near me pulls her hair around, plays with it, pulls it to the right side, around front.

Instructor reads each sentence, stopping to ask “Any problems with that?” or “Any problems in that area?”; he also remarks that they should “really be able to recognize these things” and “If commas aren’t second nature to you by now, you should be *living* in the Learning Center.”

One student near the side has leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes. She does not look asleep, however, because she opens her eyes on occasion. She moves only to make a notation and then returns (sometimes with her head on the wall and sometimes with her head on the desk).

Another student has a phone out; she thumbs through screens occasionally, but she does look up and has answered a question (correctly) once.

Marilyn Monroe is in this section; she sits near the front, almost directly in front of the instructor. She sits up in her desk and is following along on the worksheet; she answers numerous questions correctly (even one about possessives in front of gerunds) and asks a few.

The student who came in 10 minutes late leaves again (for 6 minutes); when she returns, she is completely lost.

Instructor asks “any questions?” when he finishes going over the worksheet. No one answers. He says, “Or are you too overwhelmed to ask any?” He then instructs them to take out their Bedford.¹³

The assignment sheet and rubric for their next paper (a proposal) was emailed to them; he wants them to find articles about/by/referring to [Deborah] Tannen, what they plan to research (about communication/miscommunication) for their research papers. Two people who have conflicting ideas (e.g. women & bosses; mother & daughter; sister & sister). [A copy of the assignment sheet and rubric for the proposal paper appears in Appendix J.]

In the Bedford, class looks specifically at pg 615 for formatting of titles and parenthetical citations; at pg 620 for formatting of works cited.

¹³ All English composition courses require the same handbook for grammar and citation: *The Bedford Handbook*, 8th ed, by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, Bedford/St. Martin's.

Instructor insists that they will not be graded on the particulars of MLA in the proposal (in the final paper, yes, but not this early one).

One student asks what the topic of the paper is, and the instructor says, “The rubric that you got last night.” The student holds up the rubric and says that she is still not certain of the assignment. He says, “This is a proposal for what you’re doing for your final paper.” The student clarifies that they are not supposed to do the paper, only write about what they propose to do. Instructor says, “Yeah.” He says that they can look around for what other people [scholars, reporters, bloggers] had to say on the subject.

One student asks if the works cited page counts in the page count; yes, it does.

One student asks why they have to have a works cited at all, if they are just proposing what they might do. Instructor begins to answer, but class time is over, so students leave, collecting their graded papers on the way out the door.

INTERVIEW WITH TAYLOR, SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

Researcher: Okay. I will start at the beginning. All right. So... first of all, in class today... um... you went over a ...very long... paragraph exercise. I actually got a copy of it in the first class [researcher observed two sections of the same instructor]...

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Researcher: So, I saw it. So that was a pretty long... exercise... and... how do you think you felt you did on that? [The in-class assignment was to pick out all the grammar errors in a single-page reading.]

Taylor: I think I did pretty well. There were... maybe, like... five or six that I didn’t get. But...

Researcher: But there were, like, forty or something...

Taylor: There were, yeah...

Researcher: ...a huge... number...

Taylor: It was crazy. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. So, um... yeah... are you... do those kinds of paragraphs help you... figure out... what it is you need to study more... or...?

Taylor: Yeah. They do.

Researcher: Yeah?

Taylor: They're kinda long... and boring, but...

Researcher: Yeah. Umm... have you gone to the Learning Center at all? He keeps... [The rest of the sentence is that the instructor has referred to the Learning Center multiple times during class for help with grammar.]

Taylor: I haven't, but I think for this essay... the next one that's due, I'll probably go.

[Later in the conversation]

Researcher: If you were also Queen of the World, how would the class go... so that you would be... think it ... like, "Oh, sweet. I get to go to English now."

Taylor: Uhhh... [pause] that's a hard... because I really... I don't know. I've never really liked English, but my... I think if the teacher is more... like... positive and upbeat about what we're doing, then just... talking and... just them talking... I think maybe if the class is more interactive where it was like a PowerPoint with... stuff that didn't really... that kind of applied to English but then not, like, 100% English all the time...

Researcher: Well... grammar.

Taylor: Grammar, yeah.

Researcher: Because “English” is a big topic. But so far, you guys have been primarily grammar, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Researcher: Um, so, the book that he [instructor] has ... well, I guess there are two. There’s the Tannen book and the... what is it? Forty essays or something? [*40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology* by Jane E. Aaron and Ellen Kuhl Repetto]

Taylor: 40 Essays.

Researcher: Yeah. Um... he has... you reading out of those books, but—as far as I can tell just from my limited view—is that you haven’t talked about them [the books] in class. Correct?

Taylor: Yeah. We don’t talk about them.

Researcher: Do you... feel the need to talk about the stuff that you read to process it that way?

Taylor: Yeah, I think so. I think that helps.

Researcher: Okay.

Taylor: Especially if we go over it and then we just have a quiz on it, sometimes I didn’t really understand 100% what it was on, so then the quizzes are... worse off because we didn’t really go over it.

INTERVIEW WITH CARMEN, SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

Researcher: Now I haven’t seen um... you guys talk about any of the essays that you read in the book...

Carmen: Yeah, we don't really talk about that. We really just go over grammar all the time. Most of the times... like, I have a very short attention span, so it's kind of hard for me to focus in the class... but most of the commas, like, when we did the worksheets, I did pretty good on those. For the most part.

Researcher: So, do you remember... like this one... this one that I just got [searches desk for the worksheet]... this one is so *tiny*. I mean, when he gave this to me...

Carmen: Oh, yeah! [laughs]

Researcher: ... I thought, oh my god. That's so little.

Carmen: That's the one we did yesterday.

Researcher: Yeah. This is the... whew! This is the one with the Jeep... or Karl Schmidt. Yeah.

Carmen: And the clown-faced guy...

Researcher: And the circus clown, yeah. So, like... it was so tiny... I hope that... I think he was just trying to save paper is what I think ... the issue was. But, wow. I was, like, "Holy cow."

Carmen: That's what I thought! I was, like, "I'm so glad I wore my glasses today!"

[both laugh]

Researcher: Were you able to do it okay?

Carmen: Yeah. I was perfectly fine. The only thing that's hard for me is I don't carry a red pen... I should probably. Especially in that class when we go

over them... um... I missed, like, little small mistakes like the capitalization... because when you glance over it, you don't... it's, like, hard to fine... tooth-comb it. I don't know if that's a word.

Researcher: Sure it is. It can be a word.

Carmen: I make words up all the time.

[both laugh]

Researcher: That's wonderful!

Carmen: But it was kind of hard to go through... just like the simple things. I know there was one up here [points to the worksheet]... what was it? It was one of the words up here. City buses. Yeah.

Researcher: City buses. Yes.

Carmen: I missed that one completely because I don't think about that.

Researcher: I know. There's a city. Yeah... so I was trying to, you know, hold this out [extends paper out from eyes to read] and be, like... [both laugh]. Well, I'm older, but... I have... I have an orange pen that I carry all the time...

Carmen: That is so neat!

Researcher: It's less severe to me than red. I think I just have an aversion to red, also. Red pens. Not red. But, um... just because it [the orange pen] seems lighter... sometimes I'll grade in green. That's a little less *red* ...

Carmen: That's true.

Researcher: I always have my trusty orange pen with me.

Carmen: Or blue. Just anything.

Researcher: Yeah, blue. Or purple.

Carmen: Actually, I don't really like red pens that much either, but it's, like, you use red pens for stuff. I have different colored pens for all kinds of stuff.

Researcher: That's wonderful! You should always have different colored pens.

Carmen: That's why, like, when I did mine, I try to do it in pencil and in pen, but it didn't really work out that well because it was so small, you couldn't really tell the difference.

Researcher: I think that, um... you know, the exam actually doesn't have these kinds of things on it. I mean, the final exam.¹⁴

Carmen: Yeah.

Researcher: I can't tell you what his midterm will look like, but... it [the final] actually doesn't look like this. Um... it's more... sentence-combining kind of things. And then... there'll be a paragraph that may be... maybe this long [approximately 6 lines] that... it's either... I can't remember... you either have to change it from singular to plural or from plural to singular. Like, the first word will be singular, and they'll want you to change it to plural or vice versa. So... it's a *little bit* like this [the paragraph worksheet]. This trains you really well to go over your own papers...

Carmen: Yeah.

¹⁴ A note of reminder might be useful here. I as mention in chapter one, in the fall of 2011, the English Department began to pilot a new "common final" (instead of competency test). The participants in this study are part of the second round of this new structure. Instead of having a competency test and a separate final, the new "common final" is delivered to all students during the final exam period. To date, the English faculty feel that the common final is a better way than the competency test to gauge students' performance in writing, and it appears that the common final will be accepted as the norm.

Researcher: Um... so... I always just like to tell people that, you know, this is a useful exercise, but it's not your exam as well.

Carmen: Um, is it going to be, like, a lot of the semi-colons and different things? Like, I know in the beginning of class, we were trying to do, like, sentence-combining... stuff like that. Is that going to be on the exam?

Researcher: That's exactly what it is.

Carmen: Okay.

Researcher: It is sentence-combining. And, they will say, "Combine these two sentences with a participle." Or "combine with a..." whatever. And, so... there are, literally, like two pages of those.

REFLECTION JOURNAL, SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

I am mortified that [this instructor] is giving out old versions of the comp test as practice for these students. I can't tell if he honestly thinks these exercises are useful to the students, or if he just has a lot of them stored up, so he's using them. I know my feelings about this issue were obvious to the participants (or at least I felt like my emotions were all over my face). I was trying not to express my distain for this paragraph, but I know that it came through. OMG! It was so small. Why not chop off the last paragraph and make the thing bigger? With more space to correct? And what on earth does this assignment have to do with the class? Well, I found out that he gives a midterm... which looks exactly like the comp test. So, despite the department's unified decision to do away with the comp test, he is still using it. How do I address this with the students? I can't tell them that it's not useful because it is

on some level. I mean, it's important to be able to edit and correct your own writing. But the common final—read: what the department has decided is valuable to have learned from the course—is an entirely different set of skills. And I haven't even mentioned how learning grammar in isolation—outside of the context of, say, a paper—isn't useful. They haven't discussed their articles or the papers in any way. I have to talk to the Director of Comp about this. But I'm not sure what to say. I have to get control of my anger here. To be fair, he is an adjunct, so it's entirely possible that he wasn't involved in the months of planning and arguing and voting to do away with the comp test. Maybe he wasn't at the meetings. It's entirely possible that he doesn't know the history of how hard it was to change it [the comp test]. I have to approach him as a person who is genuinely concerned about students because I am. And I know he does care about students.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION (SECTION 3, SAME INSTRUCTOR), SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

The weather is warm but not humid. Many students have on shorts and flip-flops.

Class begins with the instructor showing a brief re-cap of the *Huffington Post* Presidential Poll.

Next, the instructor shows a PowerPoint slide of academic titles [in scholarly journals]. (This particular title has to do with sea anemones.) Here, he demonstrates how, though the words and ideas are complex, the students can still gather what is being talked about in the paper based upon their knowledge of parts of speech.

The academic title discussion lasts about ten minutes; then the instructor hands out an exercise in apostrophes. [A copy of the apostrophe exercise appears in Appendix K.] The instructor takes out today's newspaper to read while the students work because, "This is a cushy job." I think he was trying to be funny, but the students don't laugh. During the apostrophes exercise, he pulls up a web site of high school photos of famous people. We all laugh at the photos. He

gives them five extra minutes to work on the worksheet because “he has distracted them.” One student near me says, “That’s the most fun we’ve ever had.”

The instructor goes through the answers line by line [instead of relying on students to supply the answers] because we are running short on time.

The instructor speaks directly to me [asks a question about the Learning Center, to which I nod]; I am now completely aware of my presence, as are the students. I was kind of shocked that he spoke to me directly, but I’m not sure it was a bad thing; I *am* the elephant in the room.

The instructor then moves from the apostrophes worksheet to the next portion of class: practice for the final exam worksheet. The worksheet is two pages. The first page is an editing a paragraph exercise, and the second is a best of three exercise. [A copy of the practice final worksheet appears in Appendix L.] The instructor gives the class about ten minutes to complete the worksheet.

He stops them at ten minutes and goes over the answers line-by-line, pointing out that commas go inside quotation marks, and writing is different than speaking.

INTERVIEW WITH MARILYN MONROE, SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

Researcher: Okay. So, do tell...

Marilyn Monroe: Okay. So... Thur... Tuesday, I got my paper. And, the first paper I got a 75. And the second paper, I felt so much more confident; my sentence structure was better. I was, like, excited to see what I got. I got a 76.

Researcher: Hmm.

Marilyn Monroe: So... I was pretty mad on Tuesday, so I didn’t go talk to him on Tuesday... I waited ‘til Thursday.

Researcher: That’s probably a good idea.

Marilyn Monroe: And, then, after class [on Thursday], I just walked up to him, and I said, um, you know, “After a C grade the first time, I went to the

Learning Center; we went over my paper, looked at my sentence structure, looked at my thesis.” I said, “I’ve been doing worksheets and practice on my own.” I said, “And I feel like I really have grown, and I just wanted to understand why I only showed one point improvement in my paper grade.” And he just went through and picked out every little thing, and he said, “So, really you haven’t grown that much.” [Researcher doesn’t say anything but wrinkles her brow.] And I was just, like... “Well, okay, well what do I... what do you want... what do you like in papers because obviously, this isn’t it. And I need a good grade.” I was like, “I need you to tell me what you’re looking for.”

Researcher: Okay. What did he tell you?

Marilyn Monroe: He didn’t really say exactly... he said, “This and then more because I grade harder on the papers as we go.” And I was just, like, “Okay.” But then he said, “You can redo this paper, and actually take my suggestions to heart and bring back... maybe at a B.” And he said, “Does that make you feel any better?” I just walked off. I was so mad. But it was just upsetting...

Researcher: Yeah.

Marilyn Monroe: ... because I felt that this paper was good.

Researcher: Hmm-mm.

Marilyn Monroe: And my sentence structure... like when, um, me and the tutor went over it, she said it was a good paper. She said it had everything he

was asking for. She said my thesis was better. And I just... I felt like it deserved more than...

Researcher: What were the differences in the comments between paper one and paper two?

Marilyn Monroe: Here are my two papers. [Retrieves papers from folder in bookbag.] This one [paper two], he said "Not bad." And then 76. So... [Researcher reads papers and comments.]

[Later in the conversation...]

Marilyn Monroe: So I know it's got some things wrong, but I don't know... and he told me, he said that really my grade should have been a letter grade worse. And I just don't feel that it's that bad of a paper. I mean, it's definitely not, like, A+ material, but... I thought it was... better than... that.

Researcher: So, are you going to re-write this one or not?

Marilyn Monroe: We only get to re-write one paper in the semester. He drops the lowest... paper...

Researcher: So that would be that one [paper one].

Marilyn Monroe: Yeah... that's gone.

Researcher: That's gone.

Marilyn Monroe: But we get *up to* ten points is what he said.

Researcher: Right.

Marilyn Monroe: But what if he doesn't like what I've done the second time? And I only get two points higher, then I've wasted that chance to get

higher points, and maybe on the next paper I'm going to need it more, so I'm not sure... I have to have it done by midterm, though. So I don't know.

Researcher: It is... a tough call. I mean, I will... will help you in however you want....

Marilyn Monroe: Okay.

Researcher: ... me to help you. Um... Because I don't think... I mean, what the tutor told you isn't *wrong* ... it's just he [the instructor], uh, is, um... There's like, kind of, grammar that matters to people... you know, if you don't make it clear, then people can't understand what you're talking about... and then there's, like, "academic grammar," which is high, sort of... high brow, whatever you call it.

Marilyn Monroe: Yeah.

Researcher: And, so, that's kind of what he's grading on... is the... absolute Standard American.

Marilyn Monroe: Okay.

Researcher: And, um, a lot of people don't even know... I mean, a lot of people wouldn't know... to put "vague" [instructor's comment] for "mess up" [student's phrase]... Or "trite" [instructor's comment]. He said "trite" a couple of times.

Marilyn Monroe: Yeah, I didn't even know what that meant.

Researcher: It means "worn out"... "overused."

Marilyn Monroe: Oh, really?

REFLECTION JOURNAL, SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

I don't know what to do about [Marilyn Monroe]. Her paper was not strong; I'll be honest. But it's not that her writing is weak... it's that the instructor seems to be unable or unwilling to coach her or even articulate what is wrong with the paper. I'm struggling here. On one hand, I see his point. Her language is very choppy, and there are some relatively serious grammar/mechanics errors, like dangling participles. On the other hand, I see her point. He sends everyone to the Learning Center as if that will fix everything. According to the student's account, he didn't offer to meet with this student outside of class to help her; he just told her to "take his advice to heart." I'm not even sure what that's supposed to mean. Marilyn Monroe is very aggressive in the way that she approaches situations, and so I can imagine a situation in which she was aggressive, and the instructor felt defensive. Ultimately, though, I have to say that I am perplexed by this exchange. The class has never discussed the articles or how to organize an essay. I have never seen a discussion about designing a thesis statement, though I am willing to admit that he may have gone over that early in the semester, before I was a regular attendee. I also have to refrain from comparing his course to mine; I think that many instructors teach differently to reach the same outcomes. I'm just absolutely torn. I am sitting here in my office with a live human being who is clearly upset, but I can only offer to help her achieve the goals of this instructor's course. I can't tell her he's a bad teacher (I don't actually believe that), and I can't "take sides" with her because that doesn't help.

NOTE: I spoke confidentially with the Director of Composition. I expressed some concerns about this instructor's teaching methods—namely that he only teaches from PowerPoints and only about grammar. She said that she had actually noticed herself that his methods weren't what she had hoped for. (Her office is directly across the hallway from the classroom, so she has heard him teach.) I'm not sure where this will go, but I'm hoping something will come of it.

LOCATIONS FOR POSSIBLE TRANSFORMATIONS OF COMPOSITION

The most obvious way that these participants affected composition at this particular institution is through their participation in this dissertation—that is, through me. I recognize that I represent, to them, a very powerful figure in the institution as Director of the Learning Center and a teaching faculty member in English. In many ways, they are not wrong, but I doubt that they understand the limits of a non-tenure track position or even exactly what consequences of being

called “non-tenure track” are. Even with those limits, however, I have the power to act on their behalf, as I demonstrated by speaking with the Director of Composition. Once more, I served as a peer observer for one of the instructors. This evaluation gets noted in the instructor’s annual report, and, though the actual observation is kept between instructor and reviewer, I do have the power to make suggestions to this instructor based upon my knowledge of her classroom and her students.

The effects these participants had on me as an instructor, as a faculty member, and as an active voter in the English department, are not minor, but I think these women had other, more subtle influences on the first-semester composition course. Certainly, they were changed by their engagement with the course, but they, too, were able to challenge the discourse of composition.

Before I begin, however, I would like to offer an account in retrospect. That is, my initial foray into this project began with Ada, a student whom I thought had more to tell us about composition than the numbers that appeared in our spreadsheet of totals about the comp test. Even though the English Department has revised its stance on the comp test, it still collects the information about student testing on the common final in a spreadsheet. The problems that I initially identified, then, are still appropriate for conversations about composition. To illustrate this example, I would like to comment upon the institutionally-recorded performance of these students in ENG 111.

In the departmental records, students’ grades are recorded in a spreadsheet. The columns of the spreadsheet represent the students’ scores on the grammar

portion of the placement test, the grammar score on the common final, the scores¹⁵ for the essay portion of the common final, and the final letter grade for the course. The students' performance throughout the course (e.g., if they were steadily improving) is not recorded. Instead, students are reduced to this limited set of numbers. This spreadsheet represents what I believe to be a very shallow reading of the women in those courses. For example, all but one of the participants in this study earned a C or better and would move forward into the next course in the sequence of composition.¹⁶ In addition to that, all of the participants increased their score from the placement to the grammar exam by twenty or more points (a measure the English Department values). By all of the measures outlined by the English Department, these participants are fairly unremarkable. That is, they appeared to have achieved the objectives of the course without incident. From the standpoint of the department, these students have demonstrated that the course content has "naturally" led to competent argumentation and more grammatically correct prose. I propose, instead, that these women have, through a long process of negotiation in ENG 111, learned how to operate in the sanctioned discourse; their "success" on the assessment task does not reflect a learned ability to communicate clearly but rather does reflect the "successful" performance of the ideal writer conceived by their individual instructors and/or the department at large.

¹⁵ Student essays are read by two departmental scorers, and the average score is recorded as the student's "common exam essay score."

¹⁶ Though all of the participants passed ENG 111, students in that course must earn a C or better to advance into the ENG 200, the second course in the sequence. One participant in my study earned a D and, therefore, had to repeat ENG 111.

In order to explore how these participants pushed against the constraints of first-year composition, I should first return to the theoretical underpinnings of this research project, those outlined by Heidegger and Butler. First, Heidegger proposes that “detached contemplation [is] a privative modification of everyday involvement. He seems to be saying that the detached, meaning-giving, knowing subject that is at the center of Husserlian phenomenology must be replaced by an embodied, meaning-giving, *doing* subject” (Dreyfus 47). Thus, Heidegger suggests that objects under investigation—for example, written texts produced by students in first-year composition class—can only be understood by those with the lived experience to give it meaning within a specific context. Bartholomae calls these meanings a “commonplace,” or “a culturally or institutionally authorized concept or statement that carries with it its own necessary elaboration” (7). As students in a first-year composition class have yet to learn these commonplaces, they cannot make these generalized statements. They tend, instead, to mimic “the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community” (Bartholomae 11). Meaning, according to Heidegger, comes from *doing*; doing, according to Bartholomae, comes from sustained imitation.

To stop there, however, would be to paint a very dystopian portrait of composition: a set of bodily enactments that produce a homogeneous class of student drones. To stop there would also paint a portrait that is inaccurate. Students interact with a variety of courses and disciplines; composition is not the

only site of discourse performance. Once more, students arrive in the classroom with an already-formed set of lived experiences; they are not blank slates unto which we inscribe meaning. Judith Butler's interpretation, coupled with Heidegger's, provides the second level of explanation to what happens in the first-year composition classroom, an explanation that includes a source for transformation.

Though our bodies might be limited or constrained by certain commonplaces, bodies have, according to Butler, their own source of power: "That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and (b) that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities" ("Performance Acts" 521). In other words, as a composition student begins to understand the "correct" or "accepted" ways of *doing* composition in higher education, she begins to select from that palette the ways in which she will create her own performance—to take on the accepted discourse or to refuse it. To Butler, "there is an agency which is understood as the process of rendering such possibilities determinate" ("Performance Acts" 521). For women at an all-women's college, these possibilities might represent a more restrictive way to view discourse; that is, inside an androcentric institution, women's ways of knowing and being might be considered less acceptable. On the other hand, Butler's description of a palette might offer a more expansive view of performance. If women at an all-women's college were to select from a palette, they might be able to choose from androcentric discourse as

well as a feminized discourse. Depending upon the circumstance, women might have more ways of “rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities” if they are choosing from a variety of palettes.

In the above chronology of my interview process, I believe that I find evidence of these women both successfully and unsuccessfully choosing from among the various acceptable forms of composition in order to create their own performances. Carmen believes that using a red pen will mimic the performance of an instructor on a worksheet; Marilyn Monroe focuses on her sentence structure because she believes that is what will make her paper acceptable to her instructor. These participants were trying to “carry off the bluff” as Bartholomae says until they learned the acceptable ways of communicating with the instructor in a language that he sanctioned. But they do more than just mimic. They elicit help from their friends; they go to the Learning Center; they talk with their instructor; they volunteered to participate in a research study. They are hardly passive recipients of knowledge. Their activities (even when those activities are merely to earn a higher grade) indicate that they do not just accept the instructor’s response blindly, without reflection. Though they see their instructor as a synecdoche for the English Department or even academic writing in general, they are holding conversations with him, negotiating what is acceptable. They are learning what boundaries are acceptable to challenge with a given instructor, learning what potential resources are available to them, and learning the methods by which they can advocate for themselves. They see themselves as actors in their own futures.

Of course, this study has an extra level of complication. In above chronology, the instructor in question is a male adjunct instructor, above retirement age, who is teaching composition at an all-women's college. Though I don't pretend to dismiss all of the complications these women experienced by evoking this instructor's age and gender, I do think those elements play a role. The instructor's version of composition comes from an objectivist approach, before the discussions of process or performance or discourse communities. His version of composition includes, almost exclusively, grammatical and mechanical correctness. An example of his grading might be useful here. In the assignment, students are to select a set of objects and describe how those objects conspire against students. (Emma's rubric summary, Appendix H, is a summary of this assignment.) The following sample is from Marilyn Monroe's paper, with the instructor's comments:

Some inanimate objects that students have and need never actually work. The mechanical pencil is the first in this category. The mechanical pencil is necessary when you are writing fast, and the eraser is beneficial when making a few mistakes. In the moments when you need a reliable pencil: they prove not to be. Every time the pencil touches the paper, the lead snaps, every single time. It appears the mechanical pencil finds tormenting the student an enjoyable game. Another item that fits in the category of objects that do not work is the pen. Pens, like pencils, mess up as well. When students need to take notes they pick up their pens to write information down. But, instead of seeing a fluid-like ink, nothing appears on the page. The pen is actually full of ink, but is getting more enjoyment out of watching the student scribble madly trying to get the ink to flow.

Handwritten annotations:
 - "get" circled above "making a few mistakes."
 - "redundant" written above "every single time."
 - "vague" written above "mess up as well."
 - "vague - make cancel with example" written on the right margin.

Figure 2. Marilyn Monroe's graded paper 2.

Other than one comment on the right-hand side (“Vague—make concrete with example”), all other grade notations highlight mechanical and stylistic correctness. Certainly, this is a “final” paper, so the instructor might assume that students have turned in the best and most polished version of their paper. My conversations with the students and my observations of the classroom, however, reveal that the class did not discuss the assignments in question, nor did they have peer review sessions or opportunities for guided revision. For reasons that are not particularly clear to me, the instructor appears to think that the content of the course (the readings, the assignments, the rubrics) are self-evident, while the mechanics and grammar rules are to be taught. In other words, what constitutes “teaching” in composition to this instructor is a set of skills that, once mastered, will produce clear, decisive prose (i.e., clear thinking). Not only is his method current-traditional (which has proven unfruitful), but the teaching in this scenario is akin to what Janet Emig calls “magical thinking.”

Presuming that he did, in fact, receive formal training in the teaching of composition (either in his graduate career or as a TA or new instructor), he probably learned about composition in the 1970s, before the tumultuous discussions about teaching grammar in the 1980s; this instructor is also male. His promotion through the ranks of academia (i.e., first with a bachelor’s degree, then with a Master’s degree, finally as a professor), then, might appear to him to be quite natural. As Miriam Brody says in *Manly Writing*, “To write well in Western culture is to write like a man. Advising boys, and more recently girls too, how to write, men have for centuries imposed images of their best selves on good writing: selves that

are productive, coherent, virtuous, and heroic; writing that is plain, forceful, and true” (3). In the above graded example (Figure 1), this approach is clear. In the entire paper (one and half pages), the instructor uses “vague” three times, “trite” two times, and “redundant” and “ambiguous” once each. His insistence upon “plain, forceful, and true” language is both clear in what he chooses to mark and in the terms that he uses to grade. In other words, “vague,” “trite,” “redundant,” and “ambiguous” are slights in academic writing because academic writing is androcentric, thus not vague, trite, redundant, or ambiguous. In addition to that, the term “vague,” for example, only has meaning in this particular context. What is “vague” to this instructor might be a commonplace in another context.

If we return to Butler’s idea that performance has agency, a way to choose from a set of possibilities, what is noticeable is that these students’ palettes have become increasingly smaller by virtue of their being women. In other words, the possibilities from which they may choose to perform composition “successfully” is based upon a strictly positivistic, androcentric view of academic writing.

What phenomenology can offer to composition, I think, can address some of the concerns of a “limited palette”—for women, for adult learners, for minority students, for non-native speakers, and other under-represented groups. Instead of locating the “problem” of less-than-successful performance in composition on preparedness (or lack thereof), we can look at each student as a valid source of information about her own experience. Each student in our classrooms has a story to tell, and we owe it to her as a member of our academic culture to help her become

a productive member of it. We can do so by engaging in phenomenology not only as a research method but also as a habit of mind.

In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of this research project. I believe that this study can highlight ways in which this new-found information about students' lived experience—though not a conclusive description of all students' experience—can affect the ways in which we assess and judge student performance. Certainly, this project could have implications for writing instructors in the classroom, but it could also influence writing program administration in a variety of forms, from learning assistance coordinators to trainers, administrators, and assessors of contingent faculty in composition programs. Once more, this project could reach outside the composition community to writing instructors in other disciplines, such as those who teach writing intensive threads. But influencing the communities of writing programs is not the only way in which this project could be useful. The reporting of data (written similarly to case studies) could be read and inspected by students who are negotiating their own experiences while enrolled in first-year composition. A review of comparable life experiences could alleviate the isolation some students feel as they negotiate new, unfamiliar academic writing tasks.

CHAPTER 5:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PHENOMENOLOGY IN COMPOSITION

This research project was inspired by the life experiences of Ada, a first-year composition student. It is appropriate, then, that the project ends with her as well. Ada's prior life experiences—namely, as a non-native speaker of English, as an adult returning student, as a new mother, and as a survivor of a grueling medical procedure—played a role in her ability to clear the hurdles created by the English Department's assessment task, namely the competency test. I was able to argue that certain exceptions be allowed for her, but the only reason that I was able to successfully argue on her behalf is because I understood her personal experiences. Without our sustained and open communication, Ada would have become a casualty of objective assessment practices.

Her story, so vivid and immediate, caused me to wonder if other students might be having similar (if less life-threatening) struggles with the assessments we, as instructors of English composition and representatives of the institutional power structure, had created to judge their performance. I chose phenomenology as the best method by which to explore the first-person experiences students bring with them to the institution and the first-person experiences students undergo while at the institution because this methodology best captures what I myself could not already know by reviewing the department spreadsheets about English 111. That is, phenomenology allows participants and the researcher to engage in conversations as close to the lived experience as possible, while still allowing the

researcher to revisit the data as a distanced observer. Phenomenology as a method, however, is fraught with some confusion. The term “phenomenology” is often used as a synonym for any first-person description, but the method, used as an accepted research procedure, can be useful in discovering the experiences of humans (in this case, women in a first-semester composition course) as they live it. In other words, the method is not simply a description; it has certain features that lend it credence as a proper methodology. Some of those features include honoring the authority and expertise of the person experiencing the phenomenon and acknowledging that person’s local, cultural, familial, and socio-economic situatedness. In order to secure some standard terminology and structure for this particular project, I had to sift through some of the major phenomenological theories, settling upon a methodology that draws from Heidegger and Butler (and, by extension, Beauvior and Merleau-Ponty). A method like this one does not aspire to empirical methods, so it seemed to address both my methodological and feminist concerns.

I then returned to the women in first-year composition to explore their first-person descriptions of their movement from high school writing into college composition. Through a sustained set of interviews coupled with classroom observations and reflection journals, I attempted to understand these students’ experiences. By reporting my findings using the women’s answers to my questions, I hoped to uncover their voices, their concerns in a way that revealed the experiences as the women lived them.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the implications of this research project. I believe that this study can highlight ways in which this new-found

information about students' lived experience—though not a conclusive description of all students' experience—can affect the ways in which we connect with students in a variety of contexts. In particular, I believe that phenomenological thinking can be important for writing instructors, writing program administrators, instructors of writing outside of composition, and the students themselves. In the following sections, I first outline phenomenological thinking; then, I place phenomenological thinking in conversations with the aforementioned constituencies.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL THINKING

As composition instructors, researchers and faculty begin to place student experience first in designs of writing instruction, a new kind of ontology develops. I call this belief system “phenomenological thinking,” and the concept is similar to what Robert Sokolowski terms in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* the “phenomenological attitude” (47). From this ontological perspective, “[w]e do not change our intentionalities, we keep them as they are, but we contemplate them” (Sokolowski 48). Though Sokolowski’s “attitude” captures much of the spirit of phenomenological thinking, I choose to use the term “thinking” to suggest that there is more to the belief system than an outlook or mindset. While “attitude” suggests a viewpoint, “thinking” suggests an action. Indeed, phenomenological thinking asks us to always be on guard to question our assumptions about teaching, writing, the students in our classrooms, the backgrounds students bring, the experiences they currently have, the ways in which our assessments put constraints on student experience, and a host of other tacit beliefs.

What Sokolowski points out, and I would like to echo, is that we do not have to give up our beliefs to question them. Phenomenological thinking is not a type of

thinking that involves usurping our belief systems with those of our students. Instead, phenomenological thinking prevents us from resting on the laurels of an exciting assignment, a program enhancement, or a training module that worked well in one or two semesters. The “canned” lecture or presentation cannot coexist with phenomenological thinking. As each new cohort of students arrives on campus, the questioning begins anew.

If my description of phenomenological thinking sounds familiar to the relatively recent phenomena of reflective practice, there are reasons for those similarities. Reflective practice stems from existentialism, a branch of philosophy that has its genesis in the same philosophical root as phenomenology (Dallos and Stedmon; Thompson and Pascal; Jasper). In fact, as I have argued earlier, existentialism and phenomenology have many similarities (Wrathall and Dreyfus). There are, however, some differences between reflective practice and phenomenological thinking that arise from their philosophical approaches.

Reflective practice and phenomenological thinking both take into account the contextual locations of individuals and also value “intentionality,” or the focus of one’s attention to a given phenomenon. Reflective practice, however, has developed into a kind of heuristic (largely because of reflective practitioners’ need to justify their claims to authenticity to a larger audience) to reflect upon a specific item, such as a pedagogical project or lesson plan (Hartford and MacRuairc; Jay and Johnson; Clarke). That is, in reflective practice, a professional focuses attention on a specific

item, works through the heuristic,¹ and alters the practice according to her new understanding of that item. Phenomenological thinking, on the other hand, is not a methodology but an ontology; phenomenological thinking might lead to reflective practice but not necessarily. Phenomenological thinking is the precursor to a practice like reflective practice, but not because it is superior. It is a precursor because the professional or scholar must first accept the ontology before she can investigate the practice.

Another way in which reflective practice differs from phenomenological thinking is toward the types of items intentionality is directed. As is evident in its name, reflective practice focuses on practice, the doing of the profession in order to improve upon that practice. Phenomenological thinking, on the other hand, focuses on the individuals for which “practice” might be directed. This subtle difference in focus leads to another difference in outcomes. In reflective practice, professionals engage in a critical reflection of their own experiences and contexts, which has caused some critics of reflective practice to critique it as “a vehicle for self-disclosure” (Halliday 597). Some critics of the practice have questioned its authenticity (Clark, A), and others have found its heuristics too unstructured to provide true critical reflection (Jay and Johnson; Thompson and Pascal; Harford and MacRuaric). What I believe to be problematic for most outside observers to reflective practice is the inability to “see” a professional’s critical reflection. In other words, the critiques leveled at reflective practice—critiques not entirely without

¹ Though I use the phrase “the heuristic,” I do not mean to imply that there is only one. Depending upon the disciplinary leanings of the professional, the heuristic could vary (Dallos and Stedmon; Thompson and Pascal; Jasper; Hartford and MacRuaric; Jay and Johnson; Clarke).

merit (Halliday)—are those that arise from an individual reflecting on her own individuality. That is, reflective practice, like Williams' "Phenomenology of Error" and Royster and Kirsch's critical imagination, relies upon a single person meditating in isolation. Phenomenological thinking, as I have described it, engages thinking with others; it asks for student voices, colleague voices; it takes the meditation outside of the mind of one individual for examination by others.

Of course, phenomenological thinking is difficult, as it remains at odds with our "natural" state of being—a sort of worldview that allows us to speak and act precisely *without* thinking. Especially for already overwhelmed faculty members, adjuncts who may teach at several institutions, and students (both graduate and undergraduate) who are managing their coursework along with jobs, internships, and clubs, having to stop and question our assumptions seems like an insurmountable task.

I would argue, however, that phenomenological thinking provides us more advantages in the long term than we might imagine for its short-term consequences. Student success in college (which, I recognize, is defined in multiple ways) is important for our enrollments, retention and graduation rates, as well as our feelings of success as instructors and program administrators. Yet there are more reasons to consider student success the primary reason for engaging in academic work; specifically, students will inherit the legacies in the future of our disciplines. In other words, faculty in a variety of subject areas are interested in creating critical, responsible, and innovative members of the disciplinary community. The students we welcome into our majors are those who will carry on the work of the discipline.

For our disciplines to thrive and grow, we need to train students to be the creators of divergent works. I will repeat Sadler's definition of divergent works here, as a reminder of the discussion in chapter two:

[Divergent tasks] are intended to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate sophisticated cognitive abilities, integration of knowledge, complex problem solving, critical opinion, lateral thinking and innovative action. (160)

In other words, innovation comes from the combination of knowledge and experience we bring with us to new situations; divergent works must also arise from that unique location. Phenomenological thinking, with its focus on the unique experiences of individuals, might therefore provide some ways to encourage the creation of divergent works, even if it seems, at first, to be difficult.

I believe, however, that composition can have a distinctive role in the promotion and use of phenomenological thinking. Not only does composition scholarship highlight the ways in which novices move into a new writing community, but there is evidence to suggest that composition, particularly first-year composition, can move students forward in cognitive development, as I will explain in the next section.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL THINKING IN COMPOSITION

Composition has long recognized that novice writers moving into a new writing situation, or as Thomas Kent suggests "elaborations such as discourse community, interpretive community, speech community, and disciplinary community" (425), struggle with the new language until they can master it (Anson and Forsberg; Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman; Bizzell; Bremner; Caffarella and

Barnett; McCarthy; Perl; Rose; Winsor). Though this struggle with new writing situations is accepted knowledge in the composition community, there is further evidence to suggest that students are not only struggling with the writing task but might also be struggling with what Butler (via Beauvior) calls “becoming,” or finding their own identities within the specific contexts of their academic and social communities.

Karen Spear and Gretchen Flesher as well as Sarah Henderson have found that the entry-level composition course might affect students’ cognitive development. Because they must reconsider the limitations of their previous views of thinking about writing--which has largely been a complacent view--students might be able to progress developmentally. Although there is no evidence for a causal relationship, students who participated in some type of entry-level composition course seemed to view writing as a recursive process, not a terminal one. Also, Spear and Flesher note that AP students, upon entering college, typically viewed writing as “narrowly constricted, mechanistic, and formula-ridden, to the extent that the very considerable personal writing that several practiced on their own was often not even considered writing” (48). The students in Spear and Flesher’s study learned to re-think writing while in the supportive environment of a composition class.

Not only might students develop cognitively, but they might also be developing their own identities (outside of the academic identity). Lesley Gourlay reports that “the transition into the new university environment inherently and ‘normally’ involves an emotional process of change which may be destabilizing and

challenging in terms of student sense of identity” (183). Gourlay argues that “[t]he experience of academic writing and the constitution of new identities may also be seen to be linked” (183). Citing Davies and Harre, Gourlay suggests that “identity [is] a repertoire developed via participation in specific discourses” (183). The act of “becoming” for first-semester composition students, then, might involve negotiating discourses, but, more important, it involves negotiating identities. This negotiation certainly occurs between different discourses at the institution, but it also occurs between the student’s former (“comfortable”) identity and the new institutional ones. For example, Courtney has designs upon becoming a nurse, but she also has to negotiate her family legacy at the institution. Though the institution does not have a nursing degree, Courtney still has familial resources and support during her undergraduate education, so she must decide between her desired degree and a family legacy at a particular institution, or she must negotiate a path that somehow integrates these paths. Similarly, Emma spent most of her high school years being home-schooled. She must negotiate the new demands of college-level work, but she must also contend with new social expectations and opportunities that she may not have experienced before.

TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT OF COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS

Not only can phenomenological thinking provide some guidance in the classroom for composition instructors, it might also provide some direction for writing program administrators, particularly those who hire, train and assess contingent instructors. In many cases, institutions hire adjuncts to teach first-year

composition courses; still other institutions have graduate students teaching that course. As a result, institutions often structure the course (or courses) around a set of common artifacts: the types of essays assigned; the kinds of topics that will be covered (e.g., grammar or a library unit); a syllabus template; a common final or portfolio project. At least at this one institution, these artifacts are often created by faculty (often tenured or tenure-track) who may have once taught or do occasionally teach the first-year composition course but rarely teach it regularly. Once more, these artifacts often serve as the only training or guidance that composition instructors receive. While common artifacts are useful in the sense that they provide the department head or dean a way to monitor the classrooms which are taught by instructors with a wide variety of backgrounds and training, the common artifacts are not, necessarily, the most useful way to teach writing to students (Hillocks "At Last"; Hillocks "Research"; Perl; Roen, Pantoja, Yena, Miller, and Waggoner; Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald; Scherff and Piazza). In fact, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer claim that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing" (qtd. in Hartwell 105).

A better way to approach the common experiences students should have in a first-year composition sequence is to equip instructors with the training and formative evaluation needed to meet common objectives. That is, the focus of first-year composition should be on the writer rather than the writing. One way to accomplish this goal is through phenomenological thinking. For example, after a

group of students turns in a formal assignment, the instructor could take some class time for an informal phenomenological analysis with the students. What worked well? What did not? What parts of the assignment were unclear? What did you have that you needed? What did you *not* have that you needed? What could have made this process more well-defined? By asking the students about their experiences with assignments, instructors can both make adjustments to the very next assignment and alter the original assignment for future semesters. A similar phenomenological analysis could be done after grading. What comments were most useful? Which ones were confusing? How do you plan to use these comments for your next paper?

Once more, if composition instructors take this information to other instructors of composition, a productive discussion could ensue. Perhaps time designated at departmental or programmatic meetings could be reserved for discussions of pedagogy. If an instructor finds that students had difficulty with an assignment, she could easily draw on the experience of other members of the department for proposed changes and enhancements. In a communal setting such as a departmental meeting, other instructors might understand how their own courses compare to the larger cohort of composition faculty. Do my students make similar comments? Do my students make different ones? Are there broader themes that exist in this cohort of students? In this way—by valuing the students' experiences as valid and exploring possibilities that were previously unknown—phenomenological thinking can provide instructors of composition ways to address the variety of student needs in the classroom. Not only might this address ways in

which composition instructors might better understand student needs, but it might also stimulate conversations about first-year composition at this institution as well as writing with other departments and programs around the institution. That is, while composition faculty serve on committees (e.g., Academic Council, Faculty Senate, Undergraduate Research), they can pass along their phenomenological thinking organically across campus.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL THINKING OUTSIDE COMPOSITION

Certainly, the above recommendations about training contingent faculty could well be applied, with minor revision, to other disciplines outside of English or writing studies. At many institutions, there are writing intensive courses across the campus; the faculty instructors of these courses might very well benefit from phenomenological thinking. I admit that there are many faculty who would welcome a chance to enhance their teaching and connection with students, but I also recognize that there are at least two long-established forces that would prohibit an easy and seamless adaptation of phenomenological thinking campus-wide: the idea that composition (i.e., first-year writing) is a service course to the rest of the institution and the accepted practice of using general education to support higher-level courses.

COMPOSITION AS A SERVICE COURSE

Composition is, to many, both a service to other aims of the institution as well as a discipline in its own right. Jane E. Hindman perhaps describes composition's dual role best:

...while it may indeed be the case that composition has no founding theory per se, we seem at the very least to have a founding faith, a self-professed creed: producing and consuming writing theory...improves (if not confers) one's capacity not just to theorize about but also teach composition well. This faith sustains our expertise and our discipline as not simply a 'service' requiring no theoretical grounding or academic rigor; nor is it an abstraction disconnected from the social realities of writing bodies. Clearly, rhetoric and composition studies is 'about' the marriage of theory and practice. It has to be (96).

These dual objectives mean compositionists have to balance pressures from external stakeholders, like corporations, lawmakers, and businesses or like faculty in related English programs, faculty in other departments, and college administrators. At the same time, they have to recognize their own desires to be recognized as members of a scholarly field, to command authority and resources at the institution, and to contribute to the growing body of work in their disciplines. Once more, these pressures do not appear to allow space for the daily work of preparing course plans and working with living, breathing students in the classrooms (Horner; Fontaine and Hunter; Lee, M.; Enos; Popkin) . Though I would hardly suggest ignoring or trivializing these pressures, training and mentoring composition faculty with phenomenological thinking may provide a method by which to cope with these centripetal forces.

By all accounts, students who feel their efforts are valued by the teacher and the institution (through the reward system of grades) are successful students. Lin, McKeachie and Kim suggest that students who place a mild (rather than large) importance on external factors (like grades) but who also had high internal motivation were more likely to earn the highest grades. Skaalvik and Skaalvik found that a learning goal structure—one that “emphasizes understanding, recognizes

student effort and improvement, and considers mistakes to be part of the learning process”—effects all parts of a student’s ability to adapt and adjust to college (6). That is, students whose own learning is emphasized over standardized performance are more motivated to achieve, more likely to seek help from academic resources, and are more likely to be retained and graduate from college. If we revisit Marilyn Monroe’s difficulty in understanding her teacher’s comments on a written composition, a de-emphasis on learning rather than grading begins to reveal itself. For example, when Marilyn Monroe visited her instructor during his office hours, he did not explain the meaning of “vague” or “trite.” Instead, he reminded her that the lowest paper grade would be dropped and that she could rewrite the essay for a potentially higher grade. Though it is true that instructors feel pressure from students to alter grades (more likely to higher ones), I believe it is incumbent on the instructor to focus on learning rather than grading.

In addition to focusing on learning rather than grading, instructors feel pressure to have their students perform writing tasks at a certain “collegiate” level; this urgency often results in a set of performance measures, but performance measures are not what produces college-level writing. What produces college-level writing is putting the students at the center of the experience. Some recent pedagogical designs, such as Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT), have offered some ways to put the students first. One such technique is to ask the students for a “misconception/preconception” check before the day’s lesson begins. This allows the instructor to gauge the students’ understanding before she begins the lesson, and she may alter that lesson given the information she learns. For example,

Camden's instructor might have used the "misconception/preconception" check before her explanation of the synthesis essay. As a result of that check, the instructor might have noticed some disconnects between Camden's understanding of integrating sources. Another CAT technique is to use the "minute paper" at the end of class for students to detail what they learned. This strategy would have been useful for Carmen after the instructor explained the proposal paper. If the "minute paper" was used, the instructor might have clarified the assignment, which was difficult for several of the participants in his section.

Putting students at the center of the experience in the writing classroom seems to contradict the prevailing understanding of writing: "Writing...is not a discrete clearly definable skill learned once and for all....writing is seldom the product of isolated individuals but rather and seldom obviously, the outcome...of interactions that involve other people and other texts. Writing practices are closely linked to their sociocultural context..." (Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré 9-10). In other words, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, students are entering new discourse communities (or any of Kent's other descriptions of this move). The assumption might be that students need to be acclimated to the new community's norms and mores. This assumption, however, would be rather reductive. Wholly-formed student A does not move into static community B; instead, she takes with her a complex set of interacting (and sometimes contradictory) experiences into a community that is itself evolving and changing. Her very entrance into that community alters it, however slightly (e.g., Ken Hyland, Preface). Butler's

performative space seems to echo here; students accept some norms and reject others, but they do this through their own individual lenses of experience.

The recent influx of scholarship surrounding the transfer of writing knowledge helps demonstrate my point. In 1990, Michael Carter explored the idea of “expertise,” which forecasts some of the discussion around transfer. Carter argues that the tension between cognitivists and social constructivists is an unhelpful one: “[N]either the general nor the local perspective alone provides a complete picture of the complexity of writing” (266). That is, the cognitivist view of focusing on an individual and the social constructivist view of focusing on the systems in which a writer enters are both limited in their scope; writing is, in fact, “an interaction of both social and cognitive dimensions” (Carter 267). In a more recent study, Elizabeth Wardle echoes Carter’s analysis of writing complexity. Citing David Guile and Michael Young, Wardle suggests that “the learning of the activity system and the learning of an individual are intertwined” (68). Similarly, Prior says that “Texts and moments of inscription are no more autonomous than the spray thrown up by the white water in a river, and like that spray, literate acts today are far downstream from their sociohistoric origins” (58). In other words, there are two areas of concern for scholars studying writing transfer: the individual student and the communities which she will enter (Bazerman; Prior and Shipka; Russell).

Though large, longitudinal studies can provide a representation of how writing transfer occurs across time or space, those types of studies are limited. As Rebecca Nowacek suggests, “The trade-off for temporal breadth is hermeneutical depth.... We cannot better understand students’ experience of transfer without a

detail-rich context within which to make visible their experiences and connections” (3). In the framework of transfer, then, the study of individuals is as important as the study of the systems and communities these individuals will enter.

As new higher-education students are also undergoing cognitive and identity changes as well as experimenting with academic discourse communities, I propose that putting students at the center of the writing classroom with phenomenological thinking offers this “detail-rich context” as a complement to the study of longitudinal trends. We should, therefore, not consider composition as a service to upper-level English courses, to other disciplinary writing, or even to the institution at large; composition should be a service to the students in the classroom—to their goals, their interests, their development as writers. Because each student brings with her to the classroom her own set of lived experiences, her experience of transfer, of cognitive development, of identity formation will be unique. Phenomenological thinking might help instructors of writing—in any discipline—uncover both the limits and the possibilities each student brings to her knowledge of writing by engaging students as their own authorities of their experience. In other words, phenomenological thinking requires that instructors ask the students for their feedback about assignments and assessments. For example, using a CAT technique, the instructor receives feedback about the student difficulties with an assignment. Instead of becoming defensive, the instructor values the student experience as authentic. The problem with the assignment may be in the communication of it, the design of the assignment sheet as a document, or even in the ways students have engaged with the material or vocabulary before. In any

case, phenomenological thinking puts the student voice as an authority and allows the instructor to address concerns directly in conversations with the students.

GENERAL EDUCATION AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM

In many institutions, general education (i.e., those courses usually offered at the 100- or 200-levels) is commonly used as a support system for higher-level courses. What I mean to say is that many degree programs offer general education courses, open to students in any major, with large enrollments to offset the lower enrollments in upper-level courses (and also to contribute to the mission of the institution). As a result of this practice, many general education courses are enrolled with anywhere from fifty to two hundred students (or even larger). I would also like to make the observation (however stereotypical) that most of the mass-enrolled courses in higher education appear to be those courses that value rational objectivity. In chemistry, psychology, or math, for example, the information taught in lower-level courses is predominantly perceived to be factual at the undergraduate level; that is, students can meet the goals of the course by taking objective tests, sometimes in the form of multiple-choice tests on Scantron sheets. If, in fact, I can make such a claim about largely-enrolled courses, phenomenological thinking in this context seems not only overwhelming but downright impossible.

Though scholars have suggested that these mass-enrolled courses are not ideal in an educational setting (Cuseo; Kokkelenberg, Dillon, and Christy), tackling the infrastructure of general education is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, I would like to propose how phenomenological thinking might be used in such

courses and disciplines—in their current iterations—to assist in the development of innovative and critical contributors to our disciplinary futures.

To discuss some of the ways in which phenomenological thinking might contribute to other disciplines, particularly those with mass-enrollments, I would like to return to Wrathall and Dreyfus' concerns of a phenomenologist:

1. A heightened awareness of the non-rational dimensions of human existence, including habits, non-conscious practices, moods, and passions.
2. A focus on the degree to which the world is cut to the measure of our intellect, and a willingness to consider the possibility that our concepts and categories fail to capture the world as it presents itself to us in experience.
3. A belief that what it is to be human cannot be reduced to any set of features about us (whether biological, sociological, anthropological, or logical). To be human is to transcend facticity. (5)

I call attention, once again, that Wrathall and Dreyfus define phenomenology with an “awareness,” a “willingness,” a “belief.” Phenomenological thinking does not require that every instructor meet with every student for six or more weeks to discuss that student's life experiences. Instead, phenomenological thinking asks that scholars are aware and willing to consider the socio-historic influences at work on themselves and the students. For example, an instructor of a mass-enrolled course might choose to reflect upon her own biases of the classroom and discipline

(though she may not do this as formally as in a reflection journal). If a particular class seems to do poorly on a test, she might ask the students what particular features of that test were difficult and why. What is important about phenomenological thinking in this context is the way it makes students the authorities of their own experiences, advocates for their own learning. In addition, phenomenological thinking asks the instructor to consider alternatives that she might not have considered before. In this way, faculty can develop the metacognitive awareness of themselves and their students in order to assure their disciplinary legacies.²

This perspective sounds idealistic, and it probably is. Phenomenological thinking is counter-intuitive and must be sustained across time. It requires a recalibration of the ways in which we approach assigning, grading, and reporting of “successful writing.” Simply put, phenomenological thinking is difficult for those already committed to its use; it is doubly so for those unfamiliar with the process. Phenomenology’s strength, though, is its ability to disrupt what is familiar, to propose an alternative perspective—namely, that of students. Student voices, so often silenced in the tasks given to them to demonstrate their ability to perform at a standardized or normalized level, should be part of the conversation about writing.

For students like Ada and her peers, the first-semester (or first year) of college is a daunting one. Not only are they taking on unfamiliar tasks, but they are

² I recognize that all of the students in a mass-enrolled course might not be intended majors for a particular discipline, and that is part of my point. By mentoring students in a general education course in the habits of the discipline, an instructor is both recruiting potential majors as well as limiting potential majors to those students who have a genuine passion and interest in the field.

also developing new identities in concert with the identities they have already developed. Once more, they are contending with a variety of languages and habits that make up the courses in which they are enrolled. Though, in many ways, students are learning to advocate for themselves for the first time, it is incumbent upon us as faculty, as administrators to offer them the chance to do so.

APPENDIX A: AN EXAMPLE OF THE COMPETENCY TEST IN ENGLISH

A TEST OF COMPETENCY IN GRAMMAR AND PROOFREADING

Fall 2010

- I. Correct all errors in capitalization, punctuation, agreement, and pronoun case.

Do not change tense or wording.

This Fall Alice Munro, a Canadian author has published a novel called Open Secrets. A review we just read appealed to my friend and I; I think you will agree that it sounds like an interesting choice, that would suit our book club. Since Ms. Munro is sixty-four years old; her Novel will probably sell well among middle-aged women they may see themselves in the plight of it's three main characters Lydia, Rose, and Flo. Each of these women are painfully aware of not fitting societies definition of "successful," in fact, they call themselves pushy, and pride themselves on not being like Harriet Nelson a homemaker on television. As the story progresses each of these heroines confront serious problems; failed marriages, breast cancer, depression and even suicide. For a while, neither the women nor the old bag lady, who becomes their friend, are willing to accept that bad things happen to good people. They are not happy with the people they have become, however; they are unsure how to change. A problem many people face.

This book review, as well as a positive response from Oprah, have convinced my friend and I to try it there's plenty of reasons to think it will give us lots to discuss. I hope that my telling you about it will catch your interest, it's a work that

looks honestly at womens' problems. Every woman I've talked to about it, said that this novel made them think.

- I. Circle the letter of the best choice in each trio of sentences.
1. A. Word-processed papers are easy to rewrite, and they are easy to read, but not typing them.
B. Word-processed papers are easy to rewrite, and reading them is easy, but not to type them.
C. Word-processed papers are not easy to type, but they are easy to read and rewrite.
 2. A. When learning a new program, you may find the instructions really confusing.
B. When learning a new program, the instructions can be real confusing.
C. When learning a new program, you may find the instructions real confusing.
 3. A. One program gave me lots of trouble when I tried to scan a photo into the middle of a document that was ridiculously hard to learn.
B. One program that was ridiculously hard to learn gave me lots of trouble when I tried to scan a photo into the middle of the document.
C. One program gave me lots of trouble that was ridiculously hard to learn when I tried to scan a photo into the middle of the document.
 4. A. I had been working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen goes blank.
B. I had been working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen went blank.
C. I was working for an hour when, all of a sudden, the screen goes blank.

5. A. I did my best to remain calm, to think clearly, and to recover the document.
B. I did my best to remain calm, to think clearly, and was trying to recover the document.
C. I did my best, remaining calm, thinking clearly, and to recover the document.
6. A. Vanishing into thin air, I begged the lab assistant to bring back my paper.
B. I begged the lab assistant to bring my paper back to me, which had vanished into thin air.
C. When my paper vanished into thin air, I begged the lab assistant to bring it back to me.
7. A. I guess one should not let your fear of computers get the best of you.
B. I guess one should not let her fear of computers get the best of her.
C. I guess you should not let your fear of computers get the best of one.
8. A. Everyone else will have to make up their own mind about word processing, but I think it's valuable.
B. Everyone else will have to make up their own minds about word processing, but I think it's valuable.
C. Other students will have to make up their own minds about word processing, but I think it's valuable.
9. A. If I learn to type really good, maybe I can get a good summer job.
B. If I learn to type really well, maybe I can get a good summer job.
C. If I learn to type real good, maybe I can get a good summer job.
10. A. My sister learned to use a computer at UNC, which helped her get a summer job.

- B. Because she had learned to use a computer at UNC, my sister found it easier to get a summer job.
- C. My sister learned to use a computer at UNC; this helped her get a summer job.
11. A. In the computer manual, it says that it's important to save one's document before editing.
- B. In the computer manual, it says one should save a document before you begin editing.
- C. The computer manual says you should save your document before you begin editing.
12. A. You may find word-processing useful not only for your final copy but also for you drafts.
- B. You may find word processing useful for not only your final copy, but also for your drafts.
- C. You may find word processing useful not only for your final copy but also your drafts.
- II. Read the following passage from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker. Then write on one of the questions about the reading.

In the late 1920s my mother ran away from home to marry my father. Marriage, if not running away, was expected of seventeen-year-old girls. By the time she was twenty, she had two children and was pregnant with a third. Five children later, I was born. And this is how I came to know my mother: a large, soft, loving-

eyed woman who was rarely impatient in our home. Her quick, violent temper was on view only a few times a year, when she battled with the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest to her that her children did not need to go to school.

She made all the clothes we wore, even my brothers' overalls. She made all our towels and sheets. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts to cover our beds.

During the "working" day, she labored beside—not behind—my father in the fields. Her day began before sunup, and did not end until late at night. There was never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own thoughts; never a time free from interruption—by work or the noisy inquiries of her many children. And yet, it is to my mother—all our mothers who were not famous—that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in unlikely places to this day.

But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or care about feeding the creative spirit?

The answer is so simple that many of us have spent years discovering it. We have looked high, when we should have looked high—and low.

Like Mem, a character in the novel *The Third Life of Granger Copland*, my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. And not just your typical straggly country stand of zinnias either. She planted ambitious gardens—and still does—with over fifty varieties of plants that bloom profusely from early March until late November. Before she left home for the fields, she

watered her flowers, chopped up the grass, and laid out new beds. When she returned from the fields she might divide clumps of bulbs, dig a cold pit, uproot and replant roses, or prune branches from her taller bushes or trees—until night came and it was too dark to see.

Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms—sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spire, delphiniums, verbena, and on and on.

And I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden—a garden so brilliant with colors, so original in design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia... and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art.

Answer one of the questions below, supporting your essay with examples from the passage above.

1. What obstacles prevented Alice Walker's mother from becoming a conventional artist, such as a painter, writer, or pianist?
2. What kind of woman did Walker at first consider her mother to be, and what new perspectives does Walker now have about her?
3. What rewards did gardening bring Alice Walker's mother?

APPENDIX B: COMMON FINAL PRACTICE EXAM

SENTENCE COMBINING: Combine choppy or repetitive sentences using the following techniques. In each section, you will be asked to use specific techniques as you combine each group into a single sentence that includes all the information provided.

I. Use **COORDINATION** to combine the following choppy or repetitive sentences into a **single sentence** that includes **all the information** provided. Choose from the following techniques as requested.

- semicolon
- comma plus coordinating conjunction
- pairing parallel elements (examples: *either/or, neither/nor, both/and, not only/but also*)
- combining parallel elements in a list

1. The legendary island of Atlantis has fascinated people for centuries.
Atlantis probably never existed.
use simple coordination

2. The people of Atlantis were apparently ambitious.
The people of Atlantis were apparently warlike.
use paired coordination (such as either/or, neither/nor, both/and, not only/but also)

3. The people of Atlantis were successful in subduing some areas.
They became wealthy.
use any logical coordination method listed above

4. The people of Atlantis became proud.
The people of Atlantis became wicked.
They became overly confident in themselves.
use any logical coordination method listed above (in the bulleted list)

II. Use the requested **SUBORDINATION** techniques to combine the following choppy or repetitive sentences into a **single sentence** that includes **all the information** provided. Use the following techniques as requested.

- create a relative clause using a relative pronoun (*who, which, or that*)
- create a dependent clause using a subordinator such as *because, although,* or any logical choice

5. The people of Atlantis attacked Athens.
Athens was a great military power.
use a relative pronoun (who, which, or that)

6. Athens was strong.
Athens had many allies.
use a subordinator such as "because, although, when," etc.

III. Eliminate repetition in the following sets of sentences by **CONDENSING CLAUSES TO PHRASES** as you combine the following choppy or repetitive sentences into a **single sentence** that includes **all the information** provided. Use the following techniques as requested.

- appositives
- participles

7. Athens quickly defeated Atlantis.
Atlantis was a smaller nation with less military might.
use an appositive (phrase that modifies a noun)

8. The story of Atlantis first appears in two stories written by Plato.
The story of Atlantis has not been verified.
use a participle (modifier formed from a verb)

IV. Eliminate repetition in the following sets of sentences by **USING MULTIPLE TECHNIQUES** to combine the following choppy or repetitive sentences into a **single sentence** that includes **all the information** provided. Use at least one independent clause and one dependent clause for each problem, drawing on other techniques as you see fit.

9. The story of Atlantis is probably a myth.
Many people are fascinated by the story.
Some people still look for Atlantis.
use at least one independent clause and one dependent clause
10. Some writers have tried to link the legend of Atlantis to real places.
Some people suggest that Atlantis was located near the Canary Islands.
Some people suggest that Atlantis was part of America.
No evidence has been found to link these places with Atlantis.
use at least one independent clause and one dependent clause
11. The legendary Atlantis existed over 9,000 years ago.
Atlantis was an island.
Atlantis disappeared.
Some claim that Atlantis sunk after an earthquake.
Some claim that Atlantis was destroyed by a meteorite.
include at least one independent clause and one dependent clause
12. Others suggest that Atlantis was destroyed by a volcanic eruption.
A volcanic eruption similarly destroyed an island in the Mediterranean.
Some say that Atlantis was destroyed by tidal waves.
The Minoan civilization on Crete was similarly destroyed by a tidal wave.
include at least one independent clause and one dependent clause

V. Change the following paragraph as directed below. You may either write out the new paragraph or make your changes between the lines. Make all the necessary changes to make the paragraph consistent and correct when it refers to **a single conspiracy theorist's experience** with the end of a year. For example, change "typical conspiracy theorists" to "a typical conspiracy theorist" and "Conspiracy theorists" to "A conspiracy theorist." Change **verbs** and **pronouns** to singular as needed, and correct errors in **apostrophes** and **capitalization**.

As New Year's Eve approaches, typical conspiracy theorists begin to renew their claims about UFOs, Atlantis, and doomsday prophecy's. Conspiracy theorists seem to think that such folklore is covered up by either the Government or powerful corporations. Either the interviews on the web or the attention from the media feed conspiracy theorists' drive to create more mania around their projects. Though their tales of conspiratorial intrigue is fascinating as fiction, those tale's have yet to be proven as fact.

APPENDIX C: RUBRIC FOR THE COMMON FINAL ESSAY

READER 1 _____ READER 2 _____ Student ID _____

Grade: Level 4 Level 3 Level 2 Level 1

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW	HIGHLY COMPETENT	COMPETENT	DEVELOPING	MARGINAL or NOT COMPETENT
CONTENT				
STRUCTURE				
USE OF SOURCES				
GRAMMAR & MECHANICS				

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	HIGHLY COMPETENT	COMPE-TENT	DEVELOP-ING	MARGINAL or NOT COMPETENT
CONTENT				
Clearly meets the assignment				
Presents a clear and defensible thesis				
Provides adequate, logical support for claims				
Accurately represents information from the essay				
Selects appropriate examples/evidence from the essay				
STRUCTURE				
Includes introduction and conclusion				
Presents clear thesis statement & topic sentences				
Orders points logically				
Constructs unified ¶s				
Includes effective transitions				
USE OF SOURCE MATERIAL				
Paraphrases correctly: no plagiarism				
Uses quotations effectively				
Attributes correctly				
Cites correctly (MLA in-text format)				
GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS				
Avoids serious mechanical errors				
Demonstrates grammatical fluency				
Uses clear and effective style				

Definition of Ratings

4 Highly competent	The writer formulates a substantive and original thesis that clearly and fully addresses the prompt, and she develops her argument with well-chosen, logically organized, and well-developed points that represent the text fairly and accurately. The writer uses source material correctly and strategically and displays fluency in standard written English.
3 Competent	The writer presents a clear thesis that addresses the prompt. Her organization is logical, and she supports her points with appropriate, correctly cited material from the text. However, the piece may be less fully developed and the analysis less original or illuminating than a Level 4 essay. The writing may contain some errors in standard edited English, but the errors do not compromise readability.

2 Developing	The writer addresses the prompt with understanding, although there may be minor confusion about some points in the text. The writer presents a thesis, organizes her ideas, and attempts to integrate source material to support her claims. However, some of these tasks have not been completed effectively. The documentation may be inconsistent or incomplete. The writing may contain some errors in standard edited English, but the errors do not seriously or consistently compromise readability.
1 Marginal OR Not competent Note: Plagiarism will warrant a “not competent” score	The essay is seriously inadequate in one or more of the four assessed elements (content, structure, use of sources, grammar & mechanics). The writer may not clearly address the prompt or may misunderstand or misrepresent the essay; organization may be illogical or rudimentary; use of sources may be weak or inappropriate; textual evidence may be improperly documented. Errors in standard edited English may seriously compromise readability. Marginal = deficiency in 1 area; Not competent = deficiency in 2 areas

APPENDIX D: WRITING PRACTICES OF NOVICE WOMEN STUDENTS, FACULTY RESEARCH INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

This proposed study investigates the writing practices of freshman women students and is being conducted by Carmen Christopher, English faculty at [institution] and PhD candidate in English at Old Dominion University. You are being invited to grant your consent for observations of your section(s) of English 111 "Principles of Writing." Please read this form and ask questions before deciding whether or not to participate in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore how the writing practices of freshman women might affect their writing success in academic settings.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you agree to allow the researcher to observe the agreed-upon section(s) of ENG 111 for six to eight weeks in the spring 2012 semester (during one unit of study). Note that this is not in any way an observation of you as an instructor; instead, it is an observation of the space—what does the architectural space look like? How do students orient themselves in the room? How do students interact with one another? How can the classroom atmosphere best be described? How dynamic is the communication between students? Throughout this study, your name will not be associated with the data collection at all—your section of ENG 111 will be given a name, such as the "blue" section—but the researcher will be willing to share a summary of her observations with you. The researcher may ask for copies of assignment sheets or rubrics associated with that particular unit of study.

In addition to observing your class space, it may also be necessary for the researcher to read and review already-graded papers, which will include your comments, during the interviews with students. Reading your comments on papers and other assignments is, again, not an evaluation of your instruction or grading practices. This research study focuses on the students' experiences of events (such as earning a grade on an essay), so your comments reveal at what point the student has arrived on the road to developing her academic voice. While the student's grade on a particular essay may be discussed in the interviews, grades are not the primary vehicle for data collection and will not be used out of context to make generalizations about faculty or curricula.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has minimal risks. The researcher will take the least obtrusive seat in the class (at the back or side of the room) and will not interject any comments into the class space. Though students may feel the extra presence in the room for the first or second class session, they will likely become used to the researcher and pay her little attention.

The benefits of participation could be that you choose to review the final summary of observations from the researcher, and you might decide to alter your pedagogy based upon what you read. You might also invite the researcher to serve as a peer reviewer for your annual report. In any case, the researcher's job for this study is to pose as little disruption to your classroom as possible.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that could identify you will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable.

The researcher will keep all documents (both hard copy and electronic), transcripts, and audio files in a password protected computer and in a locked file cabinet in 120 Jones Hall, where only the researcher and her advisor will have access while the dissertation is written. The data will be fully analyzed by May 2013, and any reports or documents with identifying information will be erased or destroyed. In the event that subsequent publications arise from this research, your identity will remain secure.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with [the institution] in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships, and no further data will be collected.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher, Carmen Christopher, at [email address] or [phone number]. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Dr. Kevin DePew [email address], will be happy to answer them.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time and no further data will be collected.

I consent to allow the researcher to observe my classroom during one unit of study.

Signature of Faculty Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Adapted from St. Catherine University at <http://minerva.stkate.edu/IRB.nsf/pages/consent>

APPENDIX E: WRITING PRACTICES OF FRESHMAN WOMEN STUDENTS, RESEARCH INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the embodied practices of novice women students. This study is being conducted by Carmen Christopher, English faculty at [institution] and PhD candidate in English at Old Dominion University. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are enrolled in English 111 “Principles of Writing,” and you volunteered for the study. Please read this form and ask questions before deciding whether or not to participate in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore how the writing practices of freshman women might affect their writing success in college.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with Ms. Christopher once per week for about six to eight weeks in the spring 2012 semester (during one unit of study, or until a paper is due). During these meetings, Ms. Christopher will ask you about your writing practices—where you write, how you choose a topic, what hurdles or successes you experience. She will also ask for photocopies of all documents, including a syllabus for the course, the writing assignment sheet, rubric, peer reviews, instructor comments, and drafts. (The documents can be provided in electronic form or in hard copy; the researcher assumes any photocopying charges incurred.) The researcher will prompt the discussion with questions about your writing and revision choices. Each of the meetings will be recorded and transcribed, and you will be able to review the transcripts for accuracy or to eliminate any information that you wish to exclude. These meetings attempt to gauge your success in adapting to academic writing tasks—including how your personal life enhances or constrains your writing. The interviews will last about forty-five minutes and will occur during times that are conducive with your schedule.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has minimal risks. First, you will likely be asked to reveal personal information, some of which may be uncomfortable. For instance, if you prefer to write in a particular chair because of an earlier spinal injury, the researcher will ask you to explain this to her. Second, you will likely have to examine your writing processes in ways unfamiliar to you. Of course, you have the option of declining to answer any question that feels unduly uncomfortable, and you may choose to end the interview (or, indeed, your participation) at any time. If the interviews uncover a concern for you that you do not feel equipped to handle, the Counseling Center is available for you. The Counseling Center is located at [address].

The benefits to participation can be many. By talking about your writing practices, you may find ways to succeed, not only in this course, but also in other courses that include writing. In addition, you may also find ways to change the current institutional climate or culture to better support women’s transition to college-level writing. One avenue you have for support and change is the Student Government Association (SGA). Information about SGA can be found on their Web site [web address] or by contacting the SGA office in [address] or at [phone number].

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that could identify you will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable. For example, if you are a student who is majoring in accounting but is also minoring in Spanish and math, your identity may be deciphered at a small school like this one. In such a case, not only will your name be changed, but only your major (e.g., accounting) will be identified. If you have children, their names and specific ages will not be disclosed. For instance, you may be identified as a mother who has two children under the age of eight.

The researcher will keep all documents, transcripts, and audio files in a password protected computer and in a locked file cabinet in [address], where only the researcher and her advisor will have access while the dissertation is written. The data will be fully analyzed by May 2013, and any reports or documents with identifying information will be erased or destroyed. In the event that subsequent publications arise from this research, your identity will remain secure.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with [institution] in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships, and no further data will be collected.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher, Carmen Christopher, at [email address] or [phone number]. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Dr. Kevin DePew [email address], will be happy to answer them.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time and no further data will be collected.

I consent to participate in the study and to being audiotaped during the meetings with the researcher.

Signature of Student Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Adapted from St. Catherine University at <http://minerva.stkate.edu/IRB.nsf/pages/consent>

APPENDIX F: OUTLINE OF INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

Securing consent from instructors to observe the classroom (individual meetings): This spring, I will be collecting data for my dissertation. For the project, I need a small pool of student volunteers—and the faculty that teach the sections of ENG 111 from which those students come. First, I would like to ask the instructors of 111 to allow me about five minutes at the beginning of a class time to explain the parameters of the study, explain risks and benefits, and pass out consent forms to interested parties. (See section two “Introduction in the classroom” for complete details.)

Second, my project includes observing the class space in which the study participants are engaged. In other words, I will need to observe your class during a “unit” of study (or until a paper or project is due). Note that this is not in any way an observation of you as an instructor; instead, it is an observation of the space— what does the architectural space look like? How do students orient themselves in the room? How do students interact with one another? How can the classroom atmosphere best be described? How dynamic is the communication between students? Throughout this study, your name will not be associated with the data collection at all—your section of ENG 111 will be given a name, such as the “blue” section—but the researcher will be willing to share a summary of her observations with you. The researcher may ask for copies of assignment sheets or rubrics associated with that particular unit of study.

In addition to observing your class space, it may also be necessary for the researcher to read and review already-graded papers, which will include your comments, during the interviews with students. Reading your comments on papers and other assignments is, again, not an evaluation of your instruction or grading practices. This research study focuses on the students' experiences of events (such as earning a grade on an essay), so your comments reveal at what point the student has arrived on the road to developing her academic voice. While the student's grade on a particular essay may be discussed in the interviews, grades are not the primary vehicle for data collection and will not be used out of context to make generalizations about faculty or curricula.

Offering of consent form.

Introduction in the classroom (5 minutes): This study is being conducted by Carmen Christopher, English faculty at [institution] and PhD candidate in English at Old Dominion University. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are enrolled in English 111 "Principles of Writing." The purpose of this study is to explore how freshman women write in college. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with the researcher once a week for about six to eight weeks.

What will the study consist of? I will meet with students weekly during a single unit of study (e.g. approximately six to eight weeks) for forty-five minutes each session. During these interviews, I want to know what you do while you write: how do you choose a topic? What types of topics do you usually choose? Why? How do you begin writing? Do you prewrite? Do you discuss the project with

another student? Where do you write? In your room, in the library, or in your apartment? Why do you write there? (For a more detailed explanation, see “The first interview” below.)

Risks: There are minimal risks to participating in this project, but you should know all of them before you consent to participating in the research. First, you will be making a time commitment with me, and I know many of you are very busy. Keep in mind that we will have to meet each week. Second, we may encounter personal information that you weren’t expecting to share. For instance, if I ask “Where do you sit when you write?” you may say that you go home to Cary to write. Of course, I will ask why, and you may say that you had a terrible car accident when you were 17. As a result of that accident, you have spinal injuries that make sitting in traditional desks painful. At home, you have an ergonomic chair and desk that help you remain comfortable while you write. I had no idea that we would delve into such personal information, but that personal information tells me something important about you: You have tremendous time constraints on you that other students may not have. You have to plan ahead, have your assignments early, and may have to schedule classes throughout the day to keep from sitting in a desk for more than an hour at a time.

At any time, you can decline to answer my questions, but your answers are completely confidential. I will need to record our conversations, so I can pay absolute attention to you while we are talking and review the material later. I will, however, keep all electronic files, paperwork, and notes inside a locked cabinet in

my office. You will also be given a pseudonym, and I will destroy all identifying information after the data is analyzed (no later than May 2013).

Benefits: There are benefits to participants in the study. First, I am a composition scholar, and I've been teaching writing for many years. Once more, I am the director of the Learning Center who works primarily with writing tutors. Chances are, if you have a question about your writing assignment, I can help you with those questions or at least refer you to someone who can. Second, you get to spend forty-five minutes each week talking about yourself, your struggles, your successes, and your concerns about writing. I want to know how *you* feel. There are no right or wrong answers, and any one student's opinion is just as valid and correct as any other's. You can do no wrong.

I will pass out consent forms to interested parties and leave some extras with your instructor. I predict I will need three participants for the study, but I will allow for up to five. Please review the consent form and return it as soon as possible to [address], or you may scan the form and email it to [email address].

The first interview:

- I. Ask for and explain any questions about the interview process.
- II. What types of writing have you done in the past?
- III. How successful have you been at writing for school?
- IV. Do you write outside of school? If so, what types of writing to you do?
- V. Have you been successful writing in college so far? Please explain.

- VI. What types of comments have you been receiving from your instructor of ENG 111? Do you think the comments have been fair and reasonable? Why or why not?
- VII. What is the project you are working on now? I will ask for photocopies of any assignment sheets, graphic organizers, or rubrics for the specific project.
- VIII. What type of essay are you writing? How relevant do you think this essay is to the writing you will do after this class—like in your major or profession?
- IX. At what point are you in the writing process?
- X. If at the planning stage, what topic(s) are you considering? Which topic looks the most promising? Why?
- A. If the answer is “a topic seemed ‘easier’ or ‘better’ than another,” what do you mean by “easier”/“better”—Are you already familiar with the topic? Have you written on this topic before? Do you have experience with this topic in your life or in other classes?
- B. If the answer is “I wanted to know more about the topic,” what interests you about this topic? Did the topic spark an interest in you during class? Did something outside of class spark your interest? What do you hope to learn about the topic?
- XI. If at the prewriting stage, what seems to be going well with this essay? What challenges are you experiencing? When you think about writing a full draft of this essay, what “speedbumps” will you encounter? How have you managed speedbumps in the past? Did that/those method(s) work for you? Where did you learn these strategies?

XII. If at the drafting stage, can I see your draft? What are the parameters of the assignment? How does your essay match up with the parameters? What grade are you trying to achieve? What do you have left to do before you turn in this essay? What are the steps you would take between now and the due date to earn your expected grade?

Reflection:

Once the interview reaches forty-five minutes, I will remind the student of our next appointment, and excuse her. The remaining fifteen minutes I will use for reflection.

I will ask the following questions of myself:

- I. What were your own emotional responses to the student's answers to your questions? How does being an active and contributing member of academia shape your emotional responses?
- II. What values are providing an interpretive lens for you right now? If you were to put yourself in the student's place, what values would shape your own answers? What other values might be shaping the student's response?

Second and subsequent interviews:

The researcher will email copies of the typed transcripts to the participants before each meeting to expedite the interview. Before the interview, I will highlight areas of the transcript that might be worth exploring more fully, that might need additional or specific descriptions, or that were unclear in the recording. All interviews after the first will thus begin with a review of the previous interview's

transcript. The entire transcript will be available for the student's review; the highlighted areas only provide a focus and structure to the conversation.

After the transcript review, the interview will move forward much like the first interview, with questions about the specific step in the writing process at which the student has arrived (i.e., planning, prewriting, drafting, revision). I will ask for permission to photocopy (or copy onto disk) any drafts or notes the student has made since our last meeting.

Though the interview process is not prescribed by phenomenology, there are several topics that I hope to cover by the end of the series of interviews:

- How the topic is chosen
- What types of topics are chosen
- Where and when the writer chooses to write
- What challenges and successes the student faces while writing
 - What constraints on time does the student experience?
 - What constraints on space?
 - Other constraints?
 - What does the student count as "success" (e.g., a grade of C? a compliment from the instructor?)?
 - What level of success has the student felt in ENG 111?
- What writing tasks seem familiar or unfamiliar to the student
 - What writing tasks has the student completed in the past?
 - What writing tasks has she completed while in ENG 111?

- What types of writing does she expect to do in her major and career?

APPENDIX G: ASSIGNMENT SHEET FOR CAMDEN'S SYNTHESIS ESSAY

English 111
Synthesis

Length: 3-5 pages

Sources: 2 (Two articles from Chapter 2 in *Body and Culture*)

Format: MLA Style, TNR 12, Double-spaced

Purpose: To compare what multiple sources have to say about a single topic.

Assignment: Scan/Read the articles in Chapter 2: Sports and Difference in *Body and Culture* by Gregory Lyons. Choose TWO of the articles, and write an objective synthesis of the two articles that you choose.

Steps for synthesizing:

1. Break down each source: identify the topic and key ideas or themes related to that topic.
2. Categorize the information about each theme on a grid: identify relationships among the pieces of information you've gathered.
3. Use the grid to make an outline: decide on an order in which to present the combined information.
4. Draft your synthesis, beginning with an introductory statement.
5. Document your sources using the appropriate **citations**.

A **synthesis** combines information gathered from two or more sources into a coherent whole. In the case of an **objective synthesis**, you should do this without introducing your own argument, opinion, or background knowledge. The goal is not to present your ideas, but to *re-present* the ideas of others. To understand the synthesis assignment, you should understand each term in its title.

- **Synthesis** comes from the Greek word *sunthinenai*, meaning "to put together." So, a synthesis is something "put together": a combination, mixture, or blend. If it helps, think of other words that use the same root: synthesizer, photosynthesis, synthetic compound, etc.
- **Objective** means neutral, impartial, or unprejudiced. If you are "objective," you are not influenced by emotion or personal bias.

Style concerns: The expectation is that you can write well, revise carefully, and proofread closely. Reminder: do not use the word "you" or any form of it in this summary; additionally, you would greatly benefit by avoiding first person (I, we, our), unless the first person would make for a strong hook. Your goal is to write in the academic third person.

Submission: Submit through Blackboard.

APPENDIX H: EMMA'S RUBRIC SUMMARY FOR PAPER TWO

DUE 9/18

* Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later. ~ Og Mandino

2nd Essay Planning

9/15

Topic: How a set of objects conspire against you and carefully adapt Russell Baker's methods.

Goals/ Requirements: } - imitate Baker's style
 } - Serious word choice

- 1st two paragraphs in Baker = my thesis
- Clear transitions throughout paper
- good personification
- title should be longer & more explanatory
- * HUMOROUS *

Keep in mind:

- How Baker states he will divide up topics
- Note how Baker explains basis for division
- Baker's conclusion ⇒ try to imitate

Grading

- Thesis: explicit, forecasts shown / prove
- At least 2 1/2 pages
- Body paragraphs have: topic sentence that points backwards & forwards
- Rich sentence structure
- concrete examples
- vivid description

Conclusion:

APPENDIX I: EDITING A PARAGRAPH EXERCISE, SECTIONS 1 AND 3

ENG-111-0
9-25-12
Sections
1+3

Correct all errors in capitalization, punctuation, agreement, and pronoun case. Do not change tense or wording

Over the past three Winters, I have provided transportator to work for emergency workers, my two four-wheel-drive vehicles get a lot of use and one of them is beginning to have mechanical problems. My Land Rover which I bought new in 1970 is in very good condition but my Ford Ranger is not as dependable, as it once was. The Ranger s' transmission is getting jerky, however; this problem doesn't make the truck less safe so I will put off having the vehicle repaired. My neighbor Karl Schmidt who works in Durham is a firefighter. Because the Schmidt's house is so close to mine the Schmidts' children always played with mine but now they are grown. When an Ice storm occurs, Karls Jeep sometimes won't start, and the City Busses don't go to Durham. For Karls co-workers and he, getting to work in emergency situations is critical, lives depend on them. Neither Karl nor his co-workers is close enough to work that they can walk, however they all have alternate sources of transpcrtation. As a result of them having emergency backup both the firefighters and their chief has never missed work due to a storm; luckily for the citizens of Durham!

The first thing, that I noticed, about Karl, was his fiery red hair, and his bald spot which made him look like the Bozo the Circus Clown. I had not seen him before so I thought he was visiting my best friend Richard Davis. Karl was raking the yard and before I thought about what I was doing I asked Karl how much he would charge, for raking my lawn. Because his red hair, and his outgoing personality makes him stand out, everyone has their funny story about Karl. Karl's wife who has been married to him for twenty years has many stories, however Karl's co-workers have dozens. Although, some stories aren't fit for childrens' ears. Karl's playful nature, along with his comical hair, make him a natural comedian for the ente'tainment of his co-workers and we neighbors.

Surely the main reason its so hard to resist joking about Karl is the fact that he, as well as his children, like to be the center of attention. Sometimes Karl will make strange faces. Hoping to get a laugh from his kids when they are drinking their milk, or when a situation becomes too serious. Nelther him being the center of attent on nor his position in the community have made him egotistical, however he is a compulsive performer. Simply because he likes to initiate laughter, and to bring joy to others, who are around him. Although you may try to ignore his silliness; he doesn't desist from his merry-making. At the Firemens picnics, Karl is always selected to head up the entertainment, he is the natural choice. Despite the laughter Karl causes, both him and his friends are serious about the importance of their profession. The safety, and well-being of the community. Both his co-workers and us neighbors are always glad to see him.

APPENDIX J: RUBRIC FOR PROPOSAL PAPER, SECTIONS 1 AND 3

Sections 1+3
9-25-12

English 111 Essay 3: Proposal Paper

Instructions: In an essay of at least 750 words, describe the research topic you will pursue for your final paper—the review of the literature on a topic involving sources of conflict in conversations. The sources for this paper—but not for the final paper—may be very informal ones, e.g, www sources and magazines. Your purpose is to select a topic, describe the research that is available on that topic, and explain what you would like to learn from your research on that topic. You should quote heavily from the sources you use.

You might begin by looking online for the various areas of (mis)communication that Deborah Tannen, or others researchers, have discussed and then examine some of the summaries or abstracts of her writings. You will find that Tannen discusses a wide variety of communicational issues, usually related to gender differences. There is a great deal of material available on conversation issues.

In your proposal, provide a few quotations from each of the sources you look at, and also explain in detail what you currently believe concerning the issue. For instance, you might believe that women should (or should not) adopt men's styles of speaking in the workplace. Or you might contrast mothers' and fathers' differing styles of communicating with their sons or daughters. You might look at the serious consequences of communicational misunderstandings that arise in dating situations and recommend ways of negotiating new understandings between the sexes. If your interests are more cutting-edged, you could look at gay/lesbian styles of communication or children's conversational styles and how they change as children pass through various developmental ages.

Rubric

1. Minimum length: four pages, double-spaced—provided the topic is very narrow—more for a broader topic.
2. Clear organization: Clearly stated thesis, topics of the body paragraphs clearly forecasted in the thesis paragraph, topic sentences for each body paragraph that point backward to previous information and forward to the information to be discussed in the current paragraph, and clear transitions that connect paragraph-to-paragraph and sentence-to-sentence.
3. Accurately documented MLA-style parenthetical citation of all sources, whether directly or indirectly quoted. Quotations accurately are smoothly introduced. The best quotes are blended seamlessly with your own words.
4. Grammar, punctuation, and clear wording: correct use of commas, semicolons, and other major devices; no run-ons, comma splices, or other sentence-boundary errors; evidence of careful revision for clear, easy-to-follow phrasing. Polish this essay: Writing is re-writing.

APPENDIX K: APOSTROPHES WORKSHEET, SECTIONS 1 AND 3

ENG-111 sect. 1+3
9-27-12

Name: (last) _____ section: _____

1. Put in necessary apostrophes. Be sure to make your marks large enough to be seen.

2. Circle any unnecessary apostrophe or apostrophe and s.

1. The most troublesome figures to write clearly are 5s and 7s.
2. Please put Marys books on her desk.
3. Its no use to complain. Anybodys guess is as good as anybody else's.
4. The executor will sell my mother's and father's house.
5. The dog is in it's house, but the dogs bed is under the porch.
6. Whos there? a mans voice called. "I wont open the door till Im certain you aren't a thief."
7. Whose hat is on the table?
8. The childrens games are fun.
9. The professors are ready to teach, but the scheduling officer has not assigned the professors schedules.
10. We are reading Charles Dickens novels.
11. Many students attitudes have changed.
12. Is this coat mine or yours?
13. The childrens needs are not being met.
14. I hate Elon peoples conceit.
15. An untrustworthy person cannot keep others secrets.
16. Communists use other countries money.
17. This is Russias case.
18. Cold weather is the carpenters worst enemy. They get little done in February.
19. Carolinas offence reminds you of a kids game.
20. My friends parents are a poor excuse for parents.
21. He has to have his parents consent.
22. I don't like the head mistress' face.
23. The Brooks' house needs painting.
24. I don't like my bosses' rules.
25. I disagree with the office' policy.

APPENDIX L: PRACTICE FOR FINAL EXAM, SECTIONS 1 AND 3

ENG-111 sect. 1+3

Final Examination 1 9-27-12

Eng111compEditing Practice

Name: (last) _____, _____ section: _____

English 111 Final Examination Practice Editing

Part I:

Instructions: Without re-wording the sentences substantially, repair errors in this essay. Ignore spelling and verb tense.

My favorite play Othello tells the story of an african general who driven by jealousy murders his wife. Although it's author Shakespeare wrote in the sixteenth century when politics was a hot topic. His interest is mainly in character and morals. His most important character Iago loosely follows the model of an italian political writer. Modern readers of "Othello," however, will understand that politics does play a role in the play. Each of the male character's are motivated by political ambition, however they are unaware of their motivation. Othellos jealousy arises when he is led to believe that his wife is acting against societies expectations. Sadly both Othello and Desdemona are being duped by the evil Iago, however neither of them is aware of the deception.

At the beginning of the play Othello and Desdemona elope, and there's two characters who are angered by there marriage. When Desdemonas' father learns of the marriage he is extremely angry with his daughter, however trustworthy she has been in the past. The other character, who is upset by the elopement, is Roderigo who is obsessed with Desdemona, however she doesn't even know he exists. Their's little evidence that Desdemona's love for Othello is anything, but innocent. Although, the two marry without there families' permission. Desdemona's father, in fact admires Othello, until Iago influences the old man with his lies. The father then comes to distrust both she and Othello.

After him being sent to Cyprus to fight the Turks, Othello is influenced by Iago, and led by him to suspect Desdemona of adultery. Even those people, who observe Othellos' erratic behavior, never suspect that Iago is dishonest. The married couple, as well as the other main characters, continue to see Iago as extremely moral.

Final Examination 2

Last Name _____, first _____ section _____

Part 2

1.
 - A. Attending class every day, the subject is much easier to understand.
 - B. Attending class every day, she found the subject easier to understand.
 - C. Attending class every day, it's obvious that the course is easier to understand.
2.
 - A. The literature is hard to read, hard to analyze, and it's also hard to translate.
 - B. The literature is hard to read and analyze, and translation is also hard.
 - C. The literature is hard to read, hard to analyze, and hard to translate.
3.
 - A. You may find the handbook helpful for plays as well as for documenting poetry.
 - B. You may find the handbook helpful for documenting plays and also when you document poetry.
 - C. You may find the handbook helpful for documenting plays and also for documenting poetry.
4.
 - A. When reading Chaucer, it can be difficult to translate the Middle English.
 - B. When reading Chaucer, translating the Middle English can be difficult.
 - C. When reading Chaucer, you may find it difficult to translate the Middle English.
5.
 - A. Students should either attend tutorial sessions, or doing the homework carefully is also helpful.
 - B. Students should attend either tutorial sessions, or else do the homework carefully.
 - C. Students should either attend tutorial sessions or do the homework carefully.
6.
 - A. After I studied hard for over an hour, the book becomes almost impossible to understand.
 - B. After I studied hard for over an hour, the book became hard to read.
 - C. After studying hard for over an hour, the book became hard to read.
7.
 - A. When I returned from the movie, my cat disappeared from the room, and this concerned me.
 - B. When I returned from the movie, my cat disappeared, which concerned me.
 - C. I became concerned when my cat disappeared from the room after I returned from the movie.
8.
 - A. When preparing for an exam, you should get enough sleep the night before, and also don't forget to eat a light breakfast.
 - B. eat a light breakfast.
 - C. When preparing for an exam, you should get enough sleep the night before and also eat a light breakfast.
When preparing for an exam, you should get enough sleep, and also one should eat a light breakfast.
9.
 - A. When a boy or girl first begins to date, they are likely to be nervous.
 - B. When a boy or girl first begins to date, one is likely to be nervous.
 - C. When you first begin to date, you are likely to be nervous.
10.
 - A. Students who play tennis really good will have no trouble hitting a racquetball.
 - B. Students who play tennis real well will have no trouble hitting a racquetball.
 - C. Students who play tennis really well will have no trouble hitting a racquetball.
11.
 - A. Sandra had excelled at trigonometry in high school, which helped her to catch on to calculus quickly.
 - B. Sandra had excelled in trigonometry in high school; this helped her to catch on to calculus quickly.
 - C. Having excelled in trigonometry in high school, Sandra caught on to calculus quickly.
12.
 - A. In Shakespeare's Othello, he tells the story of a great general who is deceived by a jealous assistant.
 - B. jealous assistant.
 - C. In Shakespeare's Othello, it tells the story of a great general who is deceived by a jealous assistant.
In Othello, Shakespeare tells the story of a great general who is deceived by a jealous assistant.

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